

God's Gifts
James 1:16-18
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Teaching Notes

The last few weeks we have spent time talking about trials and temptations.

The trials and temptations are inevitable and that's why the biblical building code is so important.

**If you want your life to be steadfast & strong in the face of the trials and temptations of life...
...follow the biblical building code!**

Overcoming trials helps our faith mature and develop.
Enduring temptations reveals the quality and focus of our faith.

We are tempted by our desires.
Desires grow and entice us to conceive and birth sin.
Since we all have desires, our desires must be submitted to the Lord.

Then we ended with these verses...and this is where we will start.
16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. **17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

How can we differentiate what is a good desire or a bad one?
Good desires come from God.

Don't let the world, your flesh or the devil lie to you...
...Not all desires are good or come from good givers.

Some desires look good, but there is a hook under that bait.

1. God's gifts don't have a hook.
Things that are baited have an ulterior motive.
Someone wants to get you.

The bait's purpose is not blessing but taking.
It wants to hook you, to use you, to take from you.

But a gift is different.

A gift has no strings attached.

A gift has no hook underneath.

A gift is unconditional, it is for you to enjoy.

As Christmas is around the corner...we are thinking about gifts.

If you get a gift with some sort of requirement, it isn't a gift.

- Your mom buys you a vacuum cleaner.
- Your dad gives you a car cleaning set.
- Your aunt gives you a membership to eharmony.

When you are little...even clothes are not a gift.

2. God's gifts are gracious.

He would love you to use it, but if you don't, He doesn't take it back...His gifts are unconditional and unmerited.

The gifts of the Spirit.

The talents in life.

The opportunities we have.

Romans 11:29: The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

God has graciously given us many gifts.

Think of how many gifts we have that we never use!

The word gift is actually "charis" the Greek word for grace.

God unconditionally, graciously gives.

God is not going to make sure that He gives you the value of what you gave Him last year.

God is not worried that people might not give back to Him.

He just gives because He is a gracious giver.

He is a joyful giver.

The next description James gives us is...good and perfect.

If it is good, if it is perfect it is from God.

What does good and perfect really mean?

First, they are both an outflow of God's character.

3. God's gifts relate to God's character.

If an athletic trainer gives you a gift, you know it is going to be healthy because your trainer is healthy.

It would not make sense for your trainer to give you a gift from Krispy Kreme.

If your USC fan of a friend gives you tickets to a game it is probably not going to be for UCLA.

Gifts that don't line up with someone's character just seem off.

God is good and so what He gives is good.

God is the originator of good.

Good means it is beneficial, excellent, and honorable.

Things are good because God says they are because He is the originator of good.

He knows what is truly beneficial, excellent, and honorable because that is who He is.

You may buy a some sort of technology as a gift.

But you don't know anything about technology.

You don't know if it is good or junk.

In life, God is the expert on good and He gives what is good.

What about this word **perfect**?

We know God is perfect.

It refers to what is complete and not lacking anything.

A perfect gift is just right, it hits the mark.

There is an interesting contrast here.

Sin literally means missing the mark.

Sin is incomplete, it's missing something, it's not hitting the target.

Sin looks like life, but it actually doesn't deliver.

But what God gives is perfect...

...it is useful and it hits the mark.

What comes from God is good and perfect.

He knows what is beneficial for us.

He knows what is complete and right for us.

When a gift is just right...the size, the color, the need...it's perfect.

Sometimes people know you better than you know yourself.

You can't figure out the gift until later, and then you are like this is amazing!

There are also those gifts that you will enjoy better when you grow up.

Remember those gifts that didn't seem like gifts...

- Your mom buys you a vacuum cleaner.
- Your dad gives you a car cleaning set.
- Your aunt gives you a membership to eharmony.
...even those clothes.

When you are more mature some of the things you thought were not a gift, you find were actually just what you needed for a good life.

Next James describes God as:

“Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”

God is the originator of enlightenment, truth and revelation.

....And He doesn't change.

...There is no variation or shadow of turning...

4. God's gifts can be trusted.

They are always good and perfect because God doesn't change.

This word **turning** relates to the turning of the heavenly bodies.

The moon rotates around the earth and changes...

... with the circumstance and seasons...

...We are like the moon.

But God is like the sun.

God is always bright, always shining, always pure.

You don't get grumpy God or tired God or good mood God.

His gifts don't change in quality with the economy or his mood or your performance.

If it comes from God it is good.

If it is good it comes from God.

If it comes from God it is perfect.

If it is perfect it comes from God

And then within this goodness and perfection and gracious giving...He gave us life...

When we are talking about the good and perfect gift, we are not just talking about the stuff we get from our Father.

...We are not just saying, wow, boy, He gives the good stuff!

The good and perfect gift that comes from God is also our life.

18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

In our trial and temptation infested life...

...don't forget— your life is your most important gift from God.

5. God's greatest gift is your life.

People say, I hate my life or my life is no good.

Your life is a gift from God, & God gives good and perfect gifts

Sin and the world impact your life...

...but your life and every life is given by God and has value and eternal power to know Him and make Him known.

We are all created to know God and be able to help others know Him. This is an eternal gift!

James further describes the purpose of this gift of life...

18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

He desired to give you life.

- Just like our sinful desires when conceived bring death.
- His good and perfect desire conceived to bring us life.

...And the life He gives has the potential to give life to others.

This verse also reminds us that we are born again by His will and by the word of His truth.

We respond to His word, His call.

Without Him, we are dead in our sin.

He is the One that gives us life.

Then James tells us we are His "first fruits".

What is a first fruit?

There is a literal and spiritual element to this idea.

Literally, it is the fruit that comes first from the harvest.

It is a sample of what is coming.

When you and I are saved...

...we are given life to demonstrate to the world what is coming.

...We represent the kingdom of God that is coming!

What an amazing opportunity and responsibility!

Spiritually, the OT speaks of the offering of first fruits.

- First fruits were an offering given to the Lord.
- They were holy and set apart for Him.
- They were to represent and remind the people of God's faithfulness.

The rest of this chapter and even the book is built on this idea:

...We are His first fruits, let us represent His good fruit.

This is the "why" for the rest of James' direction.

This is the truth for the rest of his application.

Your life matters because God gave it to you.

And you are His first fruit to show others what life looks like.

How you live, how you speak, how you treat people...

These are all examples of the kind of fruit we are.

People judge the rest of the harvest on the first fruits.

We are His examples for the future.

We are holy and set apart for Him and His service.

We are the products of His faithfulness.

So here are a few good first fruit questions to ask yourself:

- How can the people that know you, know God's goodness?
- How can people know that you are holy and set apart for Him?
- How are people reminded of God's faithfulness in your life?

The big picture is this:

We are tempted to believe the lies of the world and the devil that we should follow our own desires no matter what God's word says...that life is all about us.

We forget that we were created by a good God with a perfect plan for our lives that involves more than just ourselves.

He wants to bless us with His good gifts so that we can represent Him and bless others for Him and bring them to Him.

But, we are tempted by the selfish bait and...

...we forget the deadly hook.

And sometimes instead of representing who God is...

...we just reflect who we are.

...But even in those moments...

...God doesn't change...

...He is still good and perfect and will give us...

...whatever good and perfect gift he can...

... for where we have put ourselves.

And even in that, some will see His goodness and glorify Him.

James will give us good and perfect directions...

...for living a life of worthy of God's first fruits

Discussion Questions:

What do you think of when we talk about unconditional giving?

Have you ever doubted the goodness of a gift? Do you ever doubt the goodness of God's gifts? Why or why not?

How can it help us to understand that God's gifts relate to His character of goodness and perfection? What other aspects of His character are seen in His gifts?

What might lead someone to think God has changed? Does God change? Why or why not?

What are ways you can tell if someone believes life is the greatest gift? Are there things you can think of to demonstrate how your life is a gift from God?