

When-Not-If Trials

James 1:
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2-01-26

James 1:2 *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,*

I. Rethinking trials [Benefits]

- 1. They serve to test / prove / expose / reveal.** (Jas 1:3; Mat 15:18-19; Pro 4:23)
- 2. They can help us grow spiritually.** (Jas 1:3-4)

II. The danger associated with a trial [Temptation]. (Jas 1:12-13)

2. Temptation: an enticement designed to get you to participate in your own self-destruction.

1. Never blame it on God.

Jas 1:13 *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;*

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." — A.W. Tozer

III. The Anatomy of Temptation:

Jas 1:14-15 *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

"I have more trouble with D. L. Moody than with any man I know." D.L. Moody

1. Desires (epithumia) = strong / supercharged / disordered / inflated...desires

2. Good desires get supercharged by:

- By our "Flesh / sinful nature".
- By the collective brokenness of the culture of the world.

1 Jo 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or the things in the world... 16 For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life--is not from the Father but is from the world. ("I want to feel good." "If I had that, I'd be satisfied." "I need to matter.")*

Rom 12:1-2 *I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy...Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...*

IV. Counter-formatational prayer (John Mark Comer)

“What you give your attention to is what you give your life to.”

Our desires are constantly being trained. Many Christians live out of the same emotional reflexes as everyone else. “Conformed”, anxious, hurried, reactive, driven by desires and fear like the culture.

1. It goes against our default instincts

Most pray quickly, distracted, when we’re desperate, to regain control

CFP: slows you down, exposes false desires, confronts inner narratives, interrupts autopilot living

It is prayer that says: “I don’t trust my instincts—I want to be reshaped.” It creates space to say: “Something is pulling me—what is it?”

That pause is often the “escape” Paul describes (1 Cor 10:13).

2. Retrains desire toward God. (1 John 2:15-16)

CFP asks:

- What am I wanting right now?
- Where did that desire come from?
- Is it leading me toward love or away from it?

Counter-formatational prayer doesn’t suppress desire; it names it honestly:

- “I want comfort...control...approval...escape.”

This is crucial: Unnamed desires quietly conceive. Named desires lose their secrecy.

Prayer brings desire into the light before it gives birth to sin.

3. It tells the truth about reality

- truth about God / truth about yourself / truth about the world

2 Cor 10:5 *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

James 1 is not saying desire itself is evil—only unruly desire.

Heb 12:1 ...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

Counter-formatational prayer asks:

- “Is this desire aligned with love of God and neighbor?”
- “What am I loving more than God right now?”

This is how prayer becomes re-formation, not mere resistance. You’re not just saying “no” to sin. You’re training your heart to want something better.

Counter-formatational prayer names:

- Lies you’re believing
- Scripts you’re living by
- Identities you’ve borrowed from culture

And then replaces them with Jesus’ vision of reality.

Counter-formatational prayer is prayer that resists the cultural forces shaping our desires and re-forms us into people who live, love, and trust like Jesus.

Temptation forms us by training our desires, and counter-formatational prayer is one way God retrains our loves before desire gives birth to sin.

Reflect / Discuss

1. Read James 1:12–15, what words or images stand out to you in how temptation works inside a person?
2. Paul says temptation is “common to humanity” (read 1 Cor 10:13). Why do you think temptation often feels isolating instead?
3. James moves from talking about enduring trials (vs12) right into “When tempted...” (vs. 13). What is the connection between the two?
4. James says temptation begins with desire. What desires tend to surface most strongly for you when you’re tired, stressed, alone, mistreated...?
5. James describes desire “conceiving” sin. What do you think that moment of conception looks like in real life?
6. Which phrase do you resonate with most during temptation:
“I deserve this,” “I need relief,” “I want control,” or “I just don’t care right now”?
7. Can you recall a time when sin felt almost inevitable—but looking back, there actually was a moment where you could have paused? (1 Cor10:13)
8. Looking over the “Counter-Formational Prayer” in your notes. What would it look like for you to pause and pray Counter-Formational Prayers in the face of the trials and temptations you are currently facing?
9. Which of these questions would be hardest—but most helpful—for you to pray honestly?
 - What am I really wanting right now?
 - What do I think this will give me?
 - Do I trust God with this desire?
10. James connects resisting temptation to being “blessed” and enduring. How might small, unseen moments of prayer shape long-term faithfulness?
11. Read Hebrews 12:1-3. It points us to Jesus as the One who endured. How does looking to Jesus change the way you think about temptation?
12. How might faithfulness in small moments of temptation shape your long-term spiritual endurance?

Temptation doesn’t win because desire is strong—it wins when desire goes unexamined.
“God, help me notice desire before it decides for me.”