

When-Not-If Dangers

2-08-26 / Mark McCartin

James 1:1-18

I. Trials of Various Kinds Testing of Your Faith (1:12)

James 1:2 *Dear brothers and sisters when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy* [NLT]

"Joy is not pleasure, a mere sensation, but a pervasive and constant sense of well-being. Hope in the goodness of God is joy's indispensable support." ~ **Dallas Willard**

II. Temptation (Jas 1:13-18)

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

1. No One is Exempt. To be tempted is not sin.

1 Cor 10:13 *"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity."*

Heb 4:15 Jesus *"...in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

"You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair" ~ **Martin Luther**

2. God is Never the Source.

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:

1. Temptation Begins with My Desires

Jas 1:14-15 *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then 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

"Lusts / Cravings / passions of the flesh" (epithumia)
= strong / supercharged / disordered / excessive...desires

Good and healthy desires get supercharged by:

a. Our "Flesh / sinful nature".

Gal 5:17 desires of flesh / sinful nature, are in conflict with the Spirit

b. The collective brokenness of the cultures 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. Ways of Escape (1 Cor 10:1, 12-14)

1. Avoid Where They're Casting Lures

Rom 13:13-14 *... But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

Jas 1:21a *Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent...*

2. Memorize and Meditate on Scripture

Jas 1:21b *...and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

Psa 119:9-11 *How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word... ¹¹ I have treasured Your word in my heart, So that I may not sin against You.*

3. Run Forrest Run

1 Cor 10:14 *Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.*

Gen 39:12

2 Tim 2:22a *So flee youthful passions...*

4. Community and Accountability

2 Tim 2:22b ... *and pursue righteousness, faith, love...and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

Pro 27:17

5. Transform your Desires

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...*

1 Pet 2:11 *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*

Psa 37:4 *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

V. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows **Jas 1:16-17**

Counter-formational 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. (Rom 12:2)

1. It goes against our default instincts

Most pray quickly, distracted, and when we're feeling desperate, and a need 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?
- (Ps 26:2; 34:5; 139:23-24; 43:5; 51:6; 119:36-37)

Counter-formational 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-formational 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-formational 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-formational 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-formational prayer is one way God retrains our loves before desire gives birth to sin.