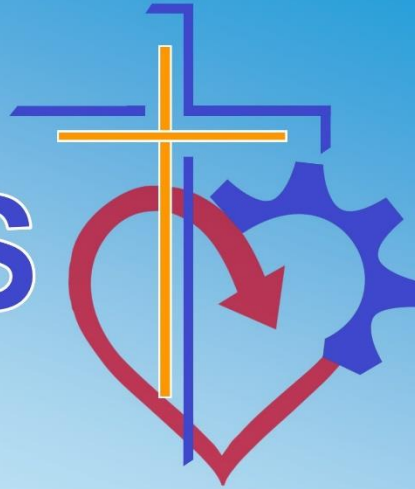


faith WORKS

The Book of James

-DEVOTIONAL PODCAST-



God Is Not the Cause of Temptation but the Source of Every Good

James 1:12-18 *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.*

Some of us really enjoy suspense movies. Someone or something is lurking around every corner. Time is running out and an unexpected plot twist turns everything upside down. Such films give us an adrenaline rush by activating our fight or flight response. Now that kind of thrill can be fun for 90 minutes but to live your whole life with that kind of stress would be utterly exhausting. With all the temptations that constantly bombard us—to lie and lust, to overindulge or be overwhelmed, temptations of body and mind—the life of faith can feel more like shellshock, like living in a warzone, where we are always wondering, "What's coming next?" Where we can barely catch our breath before the next temptation appears.

Where do we find the strength to fight on? James says, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial (in the Greek language this is the same word for "temptation"), because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised those who love him." In other words, when it seems like you can't take another moment, can't last another second in the fight against temptation, remember the crown of salvation that is coming! Jesus, our champion, has won the victory over Satan, sin, and temptation and has promised you eternal life--where you will enjoy full freedom from sin and perfect bliss and rest. In view of that endless day, God gives us the strength to keep on fighting temptation today!

But all this talk of temptation makes us wonder, "Where does it come from?" Some would like to lay the blame at God's door, but the apostle unequivocally states that God is not and cannot be the cause of temptation because "he is not tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone." Here we cannot allow our reason to lead us down a false path. It seems reasonable that because God does not stop all temptation in our lives that then he is somehow a contributing cause. But that would be like saying that because a parent doesn't stop their child from making every bad decision, that then they are the cause of that decision.

James exposes the foul root of temptation: it's the sinful nature within us! Like a child toying with a puppy by holding out a treat only to yank it away at the last second, it is our own evil desires that torture us with

temptation. I admit that for all the countless times I've been tempted and fallen into sin, in not even ONE instance was anyone holding a gun to my head and saying, "Commit this sin, or say you're prayers!" Instead it was my corrupt heart that seized hold of the situation and twisted it towards selfishness and evil, hoping to gain some illicit pleasure or personal advantage. Here's an obvious example: you're visiting a wealthy friend and there's a stray \$100 bill lying on the coffee table, and you think to yourself, "They've got so much money that \$100 bills are lying around! They won't even notice if it's gone! Besides, I need the money for groceries." Neither your friend, nor that \$100 have done anything. It's all a spiritual battle in your mind, but no amount of mental wrangling could justify your theft. You'd be guilty because you chose to steal it. Over and over again our evil desires give birth to sinful words and actions, and whether our evil is uncovered here or not, God sees, and all our sins deserve the same punishment of eternal death. Sin corrupts all we do and so warps our spiritual perception that we would dare entertain the impossible: that God is somehow responsible for our temptation and sin!

Instead, the opposite is true—our Father in heaven is the source of every good! He is unchanging in his identity and in his grace toward us. If God were not perfectly consistent in his mercy and kindness towards humanity, we would all be swept away. If he ever slacked on providing for us or took a break from protecting us, we would be destitute and dead. Whatever good God shows us, he does so that we may be his instruments of good. Whereas the evil desires in us give birth to sin and death, God's Word of truth gives us spiritual rebirth. By the Spirit's renewal of our attitudes and actions we are the firstfruits. We are here and now the first faint beginnings of the perfected creation to come fully in the new heavens and the new earth.



Reflection Questions:

1.) Today's devotion encouraged us to use the eternal life that Jesus has won for us as "ammunition" in the fight against temptation. What other word and truths of Scripture empower you to resist the pull of the devil, world, and your flesh?

2.) Take 5 minutes to list the many ways the Lord has shown you steadfast goodness. Include these in a prayer of thanksgiving.



Prayer: Lord God, you have made me new through your word of truth. Guard my heart so that I may not sin against you or turn your good gifts towards selfish ends. When temptations come, give me the strength to fight by setting my sight on the perfect life of heaven where I will glorify you forever. Amen.