



## INTRODUCTION

Influenza claims the lives of thousands of Americans each year with the majority being over the age of 65. “Flu season” in the United States can begin as early as October and run as late as May. Many get an annual “flu shot” to reduce the risk of being infected with the virus. But even receiving the vaccination does not guarantee immunity. The virus has a way of spreading in various strains. There are, however, some preventative measures that should be heeded by all. First, try to avoid contact with those who are infected. Second, wash your thoroughly and often to remove germs. Third, get plenty of sleep, be physically active, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

In our spiritual life, we sometimes have the false notion that Christian’s are immune to temptation. But temptation knows no limits. It respects no title. It plays no favorites. And there is no spiritual vaccination that completely inoculates us to the threat. We certainly don’t live in a sterile environment, but rather our society is one that is toxic with temptation and saturated with sin. Since there is no spiritual vaccine, no “get out of temptation free” card, no alternate route to avoid the traps along the trail, how do we overcome temptation?

Like the CDC, Scripture gives us some similar preventative measures to avoid spiritual infection and corruption. We must avoid contact with sin (Rom. 12:2; II Tim. 2:22) while regularly cleanse our minds and hearts through the “washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26). We must rest in the Lord (Ps. 37:7), exercise ourselves unto godliness (I Tim. 4:7), and nourish ourselves on the God’s Word (I Pet. 2:2).

In six short verses, James presents the truth about temptation in a straightforward manner. For the believer, properly dealing with temptation is a matter of life and death. Life is given to those who endure trials (1:12). Death comes to those who readily give in to temptation (1:15). Rather than skim the surface, James will probe deeply to help us understand three truths about temptation.

### I. The Source of Temptation (vv.13-14)

Where do temptations come from? The word “temptation” is used in two ways within the first chapter of James. We have seen the tests and trials that God brings into a believer’s life are to strengthen and stretch his faith (vv.2-12).

Now he turns his attention to temptations (solicitations to sin). But what is the connection between trials and temptations? Trials are external, temptations are internal. Trials come from God with a design to help us stand, grow, and mature. Temptations come from Satan using our flesh with a purpose to harm us, to cause us to stumble, and be miserable. However, we must understand that testing on the outside may become temptations on the inside.

There are countless excuses given when yielding to temptation, “The devil made me do it”, “I couldn’t help it”, “I’m only human”, “Everybody’s doing it”, “Nobody’s perfect”, “It wasn’t my fault”, “God made me this way”. No one wants to take personal responsibility for their sin. Instead we claim to be helpless victims of our environment or circumstances. Playing the blame game always makes you a loser. It started in the Garden of Eden. God rightly blamed Adam. Adam wrongly blamed both God and Eve. Eve blamed the serpent, and the serpent didn’t have a leg to stand on. When we give into temptation, we don’t have a leg to stand on either. Why? Because...

### A. Temptations do not come from our Father (v.13)

God will test us but He does not tempt us. His testing is always for our good, He does not tempt people for evil. He does not whisper evil thoughts into our minds and hearts to lure us into sin. Temptations do not come from our Father. Now understand that it is not a sin to be tempted, it is a sin to give into temptation. Jesus Himself was tempted by Satan (Mt. 4), yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

#### 1. God cannot be tempted with evil

The reason God cannot be tempted with evil is because He is perfectly whole and holy. To be completely whole means that there is nothing that He needs or desires, so He cannot be tempted. For God, there is no itch the devil can scratch. To be perfectly holy means He is completely separate, set apart, and untainted by sin. Therefore, because God cannot be tempted with evil, He cannot be the author of temptation.

#### 2. God does not tempt with evil

God does not wish evil, and He does not cause evil. He may test believers in order to strengthen their faith, but He never tries to induce sin that would destroy faith. When we face temptation, God cannot be blamed. He is not the source of temptation.

## **B. Temptations come from our flesh (v.14)**

James reveals the true source of solicitation to evil, it is our own sinful nature. The term “lust” is a general term for a strong desire (not always sexual). Temptations come from within. Sin is an inside job! Our hearts are “desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). Mark 7:21-23 says, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”

God has given us good desires like hunger, thirst, rest, even intimacy and sexuality (Heb. 13:4). But Satan wants to pervert those good desires into bad ones like gluttony, drunkenness, slothfulness, immorality and adultery. Wrong desires are those that are selfishly and seductively out of control. Our desires must be our servants not our masters. Hunger is not evil, but gluttony is sin. Thirst is not evil, but drunkenness is a sin. Sleep is wonderful, but laziness is shameful. Sex is God’s gift when fulfilled within marriage; but when use wrongly, it becomes immorality. James uses two colorful word pictures to illustrate how we are tempted.

### **1. Our flesh is entrapped**

The phrase “drawn away” carries the idea of baiting a trap. Like loading and setting a mouse trap with delicious peanut butter. The rodent is ensnared and destroyed. So it is with our fleshly desires that cause us to be drawn away from living for God.

Illustration: Farmer walking down the road carrying a basket filled with pods of beans. He would purposeful drop some on the ground as he walked. Following him was a herd of swine which were gobbling up the beans. Someone said, “That’s a funny way to feed your pigs”. The farmer said, “I am not feeding them. This is the way I take them to the slaughterhouse”.

### **2. Our flesh is enticed**

Another word picture is presented. “Enticed” is a fisherman’s term meaning to bait a hook. Both hunters and fishermen use bait to attract and catch their prey. The bait keeps us from seeing the hook that leads to demise. Often through a mixture of curiosity, rationalization, and persuasion we find ourselves strangely attracted to that which we should know is detrimental to our spiritual life.

The devil fishes with three primary lures. First John 2:16 warns of the “lust of the flesh” (desire to do), the “lust of the eyes” (desire to have), and the

“pride of life” (the desire to be). And like an expert fisherman, Satan will tailor make your lure to get you to bite.

Transition: Truth number one about temptation, they do not come from God. We are tempted through our own wicked heart and sinful lusts. The match is lit in our hearts, and Satan simply fuels the fire. To overcome temptation, we must recognize the true source of it. But there is a second truth that will equip us to defeat temptation.

## **II. The Sequence of Temptation (v.15)**

We typically think of sin as a single act, but God views it as a sequential process. Temptation that leads to sin is a consistent process and one to be warned of. Like a snowball rolling downhill, sin grows more and more destructive the further we let it have its way.

With precision, James describes the anatomy of sin, the process of destruction. The word “conceived” literally points to the conception of a child. Between the alluring outward bait and the inward wrong desire, temptation is a recipe for disaster. A cycle is set in motion that, if allowed to run its course, results in a sinful act and serious consequences. We must be aware of the sequence of temptation so that we can stop the death cycle of sin in our lives. It begins with a wicked desire.

### **A. A wicked desire (lust)**

When James says, “lust hath conceived”, he is picturing the stages and process of childbirth. A human child is conceived through the union of a father and mother. Sin is conceived through the union of attraction and lust. The father of sin is outward attraction. The mother of sin is inward lust. When these two come together, there is a conception. Lust conceives and produces the next stage in the sequence of temptation – sin.

### **B. A willful disobedience (sin)**

The word “sin” (*hamartian*) used here is the most comprehensive term in the NT for moral wickedness. This sin is an act of the will, a willful disobedience and violation of God’s Law. Temptation progresses from deception to desire to disobedience. It develops from emotion, to intellect, to volition. No longer is it just entertaining the wrong desire in the mind, but acting upon the desire with the body. What was conceived internally is now born out externally. It is important to understand that Christian living is a matter of the will, not feeling. All sin is the result of yielding to wrong, lustful desires.

### C. A woeful death (death)

James finished verse 15 by stating, “sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”. The word “finished” means to be complete, or full-grown. Here we see the final stage of temptation. For temptation ultimately gives birth to a still born (death). We can vividly see the stages of temptation in Genesis 3 (Eve & Adam). Eve “saw the fruit” that it was good to eat (a wicked, wrong desire). She believed the lie of Satan and along with Adam directly and willfully disobeyed God’s command. The consequence was immediate spiritual death (separation from God), and eventual physical death.

Be aware of the sequence of sin. It goes through conception (thought), birth (deed), growth (habit), and ultimately death (destiny). Don’t look at the bait look at the fate (Rom. 6:23). Sin first fascinates and then it assassinates. The devil will show you the thrill but not the kill. The end result of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Ralph Waldo Emerson is credited with saying, “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an action and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny”.

When James speaks of “death”, he is not primarily referring to physical or even eternal death. In Jewish thinking, death was often seen more as a trajectory rather than a destination. To be “dead” was often used to describe a poor quality of life rather than the cessation of being. Jewish people (like James’s audience) saw people as either traveling the path of life (walking with Christ) or the path of death (walking in the flesh). Which path are you on today, the way of life or death? Where is the course of your life heading?

Transition: When we find ourselves headed down that pathway of temptation leading to destruction, we must recognize the source of temptation. Our fleshly desires are in control of our lives at that point. We need to understand the sequence of temptation, and stop the downward spiral and cycle of sin. The question is how? Often we acknowledge our weaknesses yet feel helpless and powerless to overcome them. James gives us a final truth about temptation that provides help and hope.

### III. The Solution to Temptation (vv.16-18)

Can we avoid the slippery slope of sin and stand victorious against temptation? The answer, by God’s grace, is yes! Any temptation can be resisted. God is not the cause of temptation, but He provides the solution. To reverse sin’s destiny of destruction in our life, we must develop godly character; to develop godly character, we must establish godly habits; to establish godly habits, we must practice godly deeds; to practice godly deeds, we must think godly thoughts; to think godly thoughts, we must meditate on God’s Holy Word (Ps. 119:11). The battle begins in our mind and heart. Because the process of temptation begins in the mind, we must force ourselves to face the facts, to apply the truth, and

to review the consequences of our lustful actions in advance. We must think right so we can live right! We do this by:

#### A. Recognizing Satan’s goal (v.16)

We must recognize that Satan’s goal is to deceive us and ultimately destroy us. No temptation appears as a temptation. They come in disguise. Satan sells us his wares through false advertising. The devil has plans to sabotage your life. He has dug his pit and works to lure you down the wrong path so you will fall in. James commands, “do not err” (literally - stop being deceived!). Don’t allow yourself to be lead astray by the Evil One.

Application: When you are overwhelmed by problems, what do you think about? What do you read? What do you watch? Who do you listen to? What do you dwell on? We must constantly evaluate our thoughts to avoid being led astray. What kind of seeds have you been sowing into the soil of your heart and mind? Are you slowly poisoning your mind and setting yourself up for failure?

Transition: One of Satan’s biggest tricks is to get us to believe that God is holding out on us. That He doesn’t really love and care for us. Our adversary wants us to question God’s goodness. Satan would fill our hearts with hatred toward God, but he will also settle for forgetfulness of God. Therefore, to overcome temptation, we must remember God’s goodness.

#### B. Remembering God’s goodness (v.17-18)

James knows that practical faith must be rooted in true beliefs. So he reveals the source of victory over temptation – God! Weirsbach writes, “The goodness of God is a great barrier against yielding to temptations”. Remember that Satan is a liar, and God is a giver. God’s gifts are always better than Satan’s bargains. Satan cannot create good, he is an evil counterfeit.

To overcome temptation, we must set up some internal “fire walls”. Don’t allow corrupted thoughts in. “Keep your heart (mind) with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). Once we doubt the goodness of God, we will be attracted to Satan’s offer. But when we are properly meditating on the character and Word of God, victory is sure. James makes several statements for our consideration on the goodness of God.

##### 1. God’s goodness to us is unchanging (“no variability”)

God is always good, and every good thing in this world comes from God. Since God is always good, it is impossible for Him to change (immutable). He cannot change for the worse because He is holy. He cannot change for the better

because He is perfect. We can rest assured that God will always desire our best. He does not give good things today and bad things tomorrow. One area that does not change about God is His giving nature. It is constant and consistent. God not only gives us good gifts, but as “the Father of lights”, He gives us the ability to see and enjoy them.

## 2. God’s goodness to us is unending (“cometh down”)

Even the way God gives is always good. His disposition and desire in giving is always good. What God gives and how God gives is always good. “Cometh down” means that it keeps coming down. Like a never ending rain cloud. Sometimes it pours and sometimes it sprinkles, but it keeps giving. God is not only the source of good gifts, but He is the very source of the giving impulse. John tells us that “God is love” and to love inevitably means to give. God gave His very best by sending His only Son to redeem us (Jn. 3:16). Through Christ, the goodness of God will never cease to be poured out upon us.

## 3. God’s goodness to us is undeserving (“of His own will begat he us”)

James has used birth to picture a desire that leads to death. Now, he will use it to explain how we can enjoy victory over temptation. When he writes, “of his own will begat he us” (v.18), James speaks of our new birth in Christ. We must understand that you cannot spiritually birth yourself any more than you can physically birth yourself. Just as human birth requires two parents, so does spiritual birth. We are born again through the Word of God (I Pet. 1:23) and the Spirit of God (Jn. 3:6). The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to make us children of God by faith in the Son of God. When we place our faith in Christ, it is God who performed the miracle of new birth (regeneration) in us. This gift is received through the grace of God. He has shown us undeserved, unmerited favor in saving us.

Not only were we born (saved) by the Spirit and the Word, but we grow (sanctified) through the Spirit and the Word. That same motherly word that gave birth to us will also nurture and protect us, giving us all we need to grow. Ours is the finest birth possible for we are called the “first fruits of his creatures”. In the OT, believers brought their best to worship God (first fruits). James is saying that of all the creatures God has in the universe, Christians are the very highest and finest! Why? Because through the new birth, we share God’s nature. Our higher birth requires a higher life.

Illustration: A Sunday school child explained the matter in simple terms. “Two men live in my heart: the old Adam and Jesus. When temptation knocks at the door, somebody has to answer. If I let Adam answer, I will sin; so I send Jesus to answer. He always wins!”

Application: When temptation comes knocking in your life, who is answering the door, the flesh or the Spirit? Victory can be experienced through thinking right and doing right by God’s grace. Are you treasuring God’s Word in your heart? Do you merely dabble in Scripture now and then, or do you immerse yourself in its purifying, refreshing waters? Reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on God’s Word will help you to stand strong in the moment of temptation.

## Conclusion

There is a remedy for sinful temptation. Christ, who has saved us from our sin and sees us through our sorrow, is the answer. We must not excuse ourselves and put the blame elsewhere. That will only leave us as vulnerable as before. Rather, we must recognize our sin-prone heart, and then we must heed God’s Word. By this means, God will bring us forth into new life where sin does not rule unbridled, and where glorious life, not death, is the prospect. Real faith escapes temptation.