

## **James: Faith That Works – Part 2**

### **What God Gives - And What Sin Takes – James 1:13-18**

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – January 18, 2025

#### **Introduction:**

- From our passage last week, James taught us how to think about trials, the pressures that come at us from the outside, hardships and difficulties, and opposition and obstacles. James told us that God uses trials to mature us, to deepen us, to make us complete, that we are to view our trials through the lens of eternity as we continue to trust in the Lord who loves us and always has our best interest in heart.
- James is also a pastor who knows the human heart. He knows that pressure rarely stays external. External hardship often exposes who we really are. Trials don't just test our faith; they expose our desires, our reality, and what we truly think, believe, and trust. When that happens, the struggle shifts. It's no longer just about what's happening *to us*. It becomes about what's happening *inside us*, which ultimately matters most.
- That's where James takes us next. If trials are the pressure that tests faith, temptation is the pull that reveals *who and what we trust*. And James wants us to respond to temptation in a way that reflects *real faith*, faith that works.
- If you were with us last week, I want to remind you of our summary sentence and the theme for this series:

**Real faith doesn't just believe the truth—it lives the truth.**

- We are looking to put our faith into practice, and James helps us to know how we are to think as Christians and how we are to act accordingly. Let's open our Bibles together, as we turn again to James and consider the truth about dealing with temptation from our next section, James 1:13-18 (page 1043).

#### **James 1:13-18 NIV**

**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 person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire 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 and sisters. 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.**

#### **Refuse to Blame God When Temptation Arises**

#### **James 1:13 NIV**

**When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.**

- James begins with a firm, necessary correction. Trials and temptations, by the way, are not the same thing. Trials come from outside us and test our faith, whereas temptation targets our desires within.

- Most Christians would never say out loud, “God made me sin.” But James knows how easily we slide into subtler versions of that same belief, which are actually more sinister because they are quietly deceptive. We think things like, *God put me in this situation, so it is His fault*, or *If God really wanted me to resist, He would've helped more*. We begin to subtly shift responsibility away from ourselves and quietly toward God.
- James addresses and stops that thinking immediately. God cannot be tempted by evil, and God does not tempt anyone with evil. That is not who He is. When we begin to blame God, even subtly, we actually have a distorted understanding of who He is. And once God becomes someone we blame, He will no longer be someone we trust, which is a serious issue that erodes faith.
- A God you blame is a God you will not trust. And a God you do not trust is a God you will not run to for help. James knows that perseverance depends on trust. So he tells us plainly: refuse to blame God when temptation arises. And temptation will come. James says “when tempted.” Everyone is tempted at one time or another and in one way or another, and often the temptation is tailored just for us. We need help from God to overcome and understand what is happening. The devil and this world want to deceive you about who God is, tempt you into denying your faith, and hook and ensnare you with sin.
- So James helps us by telling us to recognize how unruly desire becomes deadly.

### **Recognize How Unruly Desire Becomes Deadly**

- After focusing on how trials test us from the outside, he reminds us about God’s nature and then turns the spotlight towards our hearts so we can understand how temptation baits us from inner desires.

#### **James 1:14 NIV**

**But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.**

- Temptation is personal. Each person is tempted by their own desire. James is not saying that desire itself is always sinful. Desire becomes dangerous when it rules us, becomes the one in charge, is no longer submitted to God but begins to pull us, govern us, and set the direction of our will.
- James describes a progression that starts with our desires and leads to death.

#### **James 1:15 NIV**

**Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.**

- Nothing sudden. Nothing explosive. Just desire left unchecked, and then one thing leads to another, and continues to roll downhill and snowball in our lives until it takes us down with it.
- James uses fishing language, being “lured and enticed.” The bait looks good. The hook is hidden. Fish don’t bite hooks; they bite what looks like life. Temptation works the same way. It promises satisfaction, relief, fulfillment, but it never advertises the ending. It just hooks us in and then drags us where it wants us to go.
- James is warning us that unmanaged desires, or better yet, unsubmitted desires to the lordship of Christ, always move somewhere. **Desire indulged becomes sin tolerated.** Sin tolerated grows. And sin, when

allowed to mature, leads to death—relational and emotional, spiritual, and even sometimes physical death—because in all these ways we can become cold and unresponsive.

- Faith that works learns to recognize this progression early, considers the progression and cost of sin, and looks for the “hook.” Faith doesn’t wait until sin has fully grown. It asks deeper questions sooner. Not just “Where does this lead?” But the deeper question of “what am I desiring?” Faith asks these types of questions so that we can ultimately face the reality of our hearts, ask God for His help, mercy, and grace, and the help that He provides by His Spirit and also in our faith family through transparent relationships with each other.
- Now, after showing us how sin works, James returns to refocusing our attention on a right understanding of who God is and what God gives, in contrast to what sin is and what sin takes us.

## **Reject False Thoughts About God’s Intentions**

**James 1:16 NIV**

**Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.**

- This is a pastoral warning, not a rebuke. James knows that temptation always comes wrapped in deception, and that deception always distorts our view of God.
- Every temptation is ultimately formed around a core of a subtle lie about the character of God. At the core of temptation is a seed that says that God is withholding something good. There is a seed that says God is indifferent to our struggle. That God’s commands are restrictive rather than life-giving. Remember Adam and Eve in the garden?
- Sin does not begin with outright rebellion; it begins with believing a lie about the goodness and glory of God.
- When we begin to think that God is less good than our desires, the battle has already shifted in the wrong direction. James calls us to reject that lie decisively. Faith that works doesn’t just resist sinful actions; it resists distorted thoughts about God’s heart and character. This is what makes sin so utterly sinful. James then brings us back to remember the true character of God.

## **Anchor Your Trust in the Unchanging Giver**

**James 1:17 NIV**

**Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.**

- James now contrasts deception with truth. Temptation says, “God is holding out on you.” James says, “God is generous to you, and the truth is that every good and perfect gift comes from *Him*.” God is not holding out on you, never has, never will, never changes.
- James is re-centering us theologically on the bedrock truth on which everything rests. The answer to temptation is *not to focus on not sinning, but to focus on God’s goodness*. When we are deceived about who God is, temptation gains strength. When we remember His unchanging character and the truth of who He is, temptation is exposed as a cheap and weak counterfeit.
- Trusting the truth of the character of God, who is the giver of all good things, exposes the bait for what it really is, giving us the strength to resist the lie of sin and death. Anchor your life to the reality of who God is, and you will never ultimately drift away.

## **Live from the Reality That God Gave You Life**

### **James 1:18 NIV**

**He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.**

- The truth is that God chose to give us a “new” birth through the word of truth, who is Christ, the Word made flesh. He has given us life by making us new in Him, so that we may know Him and enjoy Him and all that He gives, forever!
- God did not tempt us into sin. He gave us life. New birth is not behavior modification; it is identity transformation. James calls believers firstfruits, the beginning of something God intends to complete.
- Our struggle with temptation does not mean God has abandoned us. It means God is still shaping us in and through our relationship and understanding of Him. The cross has settled forever what kind of God we serve. The God who gave His Son to give us life is not working against us but for us and in us and through us.
- Faith that works does not merely fight temptation; it lives out of new life already given, founded, formed, and forged in the reality of who God is. The God who sovereignly gives new life by the word of truth is not the God who lures His people into death. He gives us life, life that is in, through, and because of Christ.

### **Conclusion: Where Temptation Meets Trust**

- James calls us to a faithful response. Refuse to blame God. Recognize how desire can become deadly. Reject lies about God’s intentions. Anchor your trust in the unchanging giver. Live from the reality of new birth.
- The God who saved you is not trying to destroy you. He is forming you into someone who is truly alive and will live eternally. And real faith, the kind that works, shows up right there, when temptation appears, and we choose to trust God’s goodness more than the bait. Trust the God who loves you, who redeemed you by giving His life for you. You can trust Him, His heart, His promise, His goodness, His wisdom, and His strength.
- Looking ahead, James now turns to the next question. If God has given us new life, what should that life look like in everyday practice? Next week, James will show us that faith that works listens to the Word, receives the Word, and lives the Word.

***Our prayer team is available to pray with you after the service, near the “prayer” sign at the front of the sanctuary, and in the prayer room next to the offices. Also, you can send your prayer request to [prayer@crosspointrockford.com](mailto:prayer@crosspointrockford.com)***

### **Questions for Growth Groups**

1. James distinguishes between *trials* and *temptation*. How would you describe the difference in your own words, and why does confusing the two create problems in our faith?
2. In verse 13, James tells us not to blame God when we are tempted. What are some subtle ways people (including believers) shift responsibility toward God without saying it outright?
3. James describes temptation as a progression that begins with desire and ends in death (vv. 14-15). Where have you seen this “snowball effect” play out, in Scripture, in others, or in your own life?
4. The sermon emphasized that desire becomes dangerous when it becomes *ruling* rather than *submitted*. How can we tell when a desire is starting to take control of our will?

5. Verse 16 warns us not to be deceived. According to this passage, what kinds of false thoughts about God tend to take root when temptation is strong?
6. James contrasts what sin gives with what God gives. How does remembering God as the “unchanging giver of every good gift” help us resist temptation in real life?
7. Verse 18 reminds us that God has given us new birth through the word of truth. How does living from this identity (rather than just trying harder) change the way we face temptation?
8. How can this group help one another recognize the “hook” earlier and keep our desires submitted to Christ?