

## 4-7-24 Finding Community (Growing together in Christ)

**James 1:1–8, 12-18, 19-26.**

**Application Point:** Christians are called to live active lives in their communities, presenting a true example of what it means to follow God by facing trials with grace, by listening well, and by obeying the Word of God.

James’s letter to Jewish believers who were scattered throughout the lands is a powerful and timely reminder for us as Christians. These Jewish believers weren’t surrounded by megachurches or large groups of people like them; they were alone and spread thin. James reminds them to retain their Christian lifestyle, refusing to allow the culture around them to be a major influence in their life.

James writes to teach them that pure joy is found in facing trials; faith produces **perseverance**, and perseverance develops **maturity and completeness**, earning us the crown of life (**vv. 2–4, 12**). He also teaches that we should be slow to respond in anger but **“quick to hear” (v. 19)**. Taking it one step further, James says that mere listening is not enough but that we need to obey what God tells us (**vv. 19–22**).

James’s words are difficult and challenging when we understand that the believer is asked to live among other people, leaving the walls of our church buildings for the purpose of forming welcoming circles in our communities.

Everyone is faced with two things that can torpedo faith – our trials and temptations. Here’s what we’re going to learn today: Trials that test us will toughen our faith if we don’t allow temptations to trip us up. Trials from without and temptations from within are no match for the Christian who stands in truth from above.

Because it’s so easy to get off mission when we go through the messes of life, let’s consider three commands we’re to obey.

### 1. **Count it all joy.**

- **Read verse 1-2.**
- The word **“count”** has the idea of “pressing your mind down on something.” The picture is of someone leading his or her mind through a reasoning process to arrive at a conclusion.
- Counting **“it all joy”** means we can find jubilation in tribulation. Instead of just telling people we’re “surviving,” we can give testimony we’re thriving through Christ.

Warren Wiersbe writes: “Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to ‘count it all joy!’ If we live only for the present and forget about the future, the trials will make us bitter, not better.”

- We tend to equate “happiness” with joy, but happiness is often dependent upon what is “happening” to me. If things are going good or ok in my life, then I’m happy. If my happenings are horrible, then I’m unhappy.

- Here's a helpful definition of joy: Joy is deep satisfaction that comes from knowing God is in control even when my circumstances seem to be out of control. Even **IF** things are dark and burdensome, guess what comes in the morning? (Joy!)
- The phrase, "**my brethren**" is a term of pastoral affection which reminds born again believers we are members of the family of God. It means, "those of the same womb" and is used 15 times in the book.
- Also notice James doesn't say "**IF**" you fall into trials but "**WHEN**" you meet them.
- Mark it down, you **WILL** fall into various trials, a multitude of different ones. You can't stop from falling into them, but you can determine how you will face them and who you will honor during them.

## 2. Concentrate on the know.

- **Read verse 3.**
- The word "**knowing**" means, "to know from experience" and "**testing**" refers to precious metals being heated until all the impurities rise to the top to be scraped off.

**Job 23:10: "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold."**

Erwin Lutzer reminds us, "God often puts us in situations that are too much for us so that we will learn that no situation is too much for Him."

- God's purpose is to make us more like Jesus and He uses trials to get us there. We can benefit even while being buffeted. One author puts it like this: "God already knows what's in our hearts...but He tests us, so we'll see it for ourselves."
- This testing "**produces,**" or brings about "steadfastness," which is translated as "**patience**" or "endurance." The Greek comes from two words, meaning to "remain" and "under." The testing of your faith produces the ability to remain under without going under.
- When we persevere, our trials make us complete. We see this in **verse 4: "But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."** Patience and steadfastness bring us to the intended end. If we persevere under pressure, we will become finished and fruitful. The phrase "**lacking nothing**" means all the necessary parts are present. If you and I want to be mature, we must learn how to stay under our suffering. Only those who go through some messes will become mature.

## 3. Connect to God's wisdom.

- **Read verse 5.**
- God gives wisdom in two ways. He gives it to those that lack and ask, but He gives it "**liberally**" generously, or bountifully. Second, He gives it "**without reproach**" or graciously, meaning it gives it without fault...He enjoys giving it freely!
- We need wisdom during our trials so we will not miss what God wants to teach us. For me when I don't have wisdom, I just end up whining.
- We're to ask without doubting and He will give it to us. We see this in **verses 6-8.**
- When we're all tore up inside by the trials we're going through, we can become very unstable. According to **verse 8**, a doubter "**is a double-minded man, unstable in all his**

**ways.”** This word was used to describe someone staggering like a drunken man. Someone has said if your heart and mind are divided, trials will tear you apart.

C.S. Lewis was once asked, “Why do the righteous suffer?” He replied, “Why not? They’re the only ones who can take it.”

Ray Pritchard preached a sermon called, “The Sixth Law of the Spiritual Life,” in which he stated there is no growth without struggle.

1. Because we live in a fallen world, bad things happen to all of us.
  2. We have no control over many things that happen to us or to those around us.
  3. We **DO** have complete control over how we respond.
  4. Our response to our trials largely determines our spiritual growth—or lack thereof.
- Look at **verse 12**. Trials that test us will toughen our faith if we don’t allow temptations to trip us up. There is a difference between trails and temptations.
  - Trails are sent or allowed by God to try us, test us, show us where we need to be, and drive us **TO** God. Temptations are allowed by God **BUT NOT** sent by God, and temptations are meant to take us down, to destroy us, and drive us **FROM** God. (**Read verse 13.**)
  - Trials on the outside can become temptations on the inside. Douglas Moo writes: “Every trial, every external difficulty, carries with it a temptation, an inner enticement to sin.”
  - How we handle trials and temptations will determine the depth of our discipleship because either one can derail us. Someone has said the greatest threat is not the wrong being done to me but the wrong that may be done BY me.
  - God often tests, but He NEVER tempts. When it comes to temptation, we tend to blame everyone but ourselves. This blame game has its roots in the Garden of Eden.
  - What about you? Are you quick to blame someone else for your sins? Are you holding God responsible for your sinful choices?

#### **Some things about temptations.**

1. **Temptations are inevitable.**
  - **Read verses 13-15.**
  - Again, James doesn’t say “**IF**” he is tempted, but “**WHEN**”. You will be tempted!
2. **Temptations are NOT from God.**
  - Even after losing everything, we read this about Job in **Job 1:22**: “**In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.**”
3. **Temptations are universal.**
  - **Verse 14, “But each one is tempted...”** Each one of us faces temptations.

**1 Corinthians 10:13, “The only temptations that you have are the same temptations that all people have. But you can trust God. He will not let you be tempted more than you can bear. But when you are tempted, God will also give you a way to escape that temptation. Then you will be able to endure it.”**

#### 4. Temptations are personal.

- **Verse 14, “when he is drawn away by his own desires...”** Temptations are tailor-made to trip us up.

#### 5. Temptations are designed to deceive and destroy.

- **Verse 14, “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.”**
- The word “**drawn**” means to “drag out and draw away” and “**enticed**” refers “to bait, capture or catch.” The idea is we’re drawn out of the place of safety and entrapped by a specific attraction.
- The fish sees the bait and bites, thinking he’s getting a meal. Instead, he’s hooked and becomes the meal! It’s in the present tense, which means temptation is always trying to catch us off guard, to entice us and drag us away.
- Satan is persistent and will continue to pursue you. Our evil desires may be under control for 9,999 times but then we take the bait. We must always be vigilant. We could say no to the same temptation over and over and over and over and then give in.
- We need to think and plan ahead.

#### **1 Peter 5:8: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”**

- There are people today who are nibbling on bait but sooner or later the hook will be set! **Numbers 32:23: “...Be sure that your sin will find you out.”** Sin will take you farther than you were planning to go, keep you longer than you were planning to stay and cost you more than you want to pay.
- We must understand ourselves. There are some things you just can’t do because of your past, your tendencies, or your triggers. You must be careful not to go into the wrong locations as well.
- We’ve been set free by God’s grace if we know Jesus Christ as our Savior and yet many of us go back to the very things we were hooked on before.
- Trials that test us will toughen our faith if we don’t allow temptations to trip us up.

Temptation is more than an event...it’s a process. The pattern is predictable and can be spelled out. I like how Warren Wiersbe describes it.

**1. Desire.** It starts with our evil desires. Sometimes we think the problem is “out there” but the desire to sin lives “in here.”

**2. Deception.** The hook is hidden. One reason we’re enticed by sin is because we don’t see the hook. We are deceived into thinking it’s not there. Sin seems enjoyable at the time but in the end, pain outweighs pleasure. Bait not only attracts but it disguises the sorrow, pain, and consequences sure to follow.

It's at this point James changes metaphors. He moves from the world of fishing to the process of human development, from bait to biology. We see this in **verse 15: "Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."**

When we play around with temptation a conception occurs and gives birth to sin. As sin is allowed free reign it grows and develops, leading finally to death. We could call it the death spiral of sin. Conception leads to birth which leads to growing up which ends in death.

**3. Disobedience.** This is when we act on our feelings and thoughts. Sin starts with our emotions (desire) and then goes to the intellect where we rationalize (deception) and then to the will (disobedience). Listen. The place to deal with temptation is at the point of desire.

**4. Death.** It may take years, but sin always leads to separation or death. There is no future in sin. **Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death..."** Sin always looks better through the windshield than the rearview mirror. It might promise pleasure but always delivers pain. When faced with temptation, stop looking at the lure or the beauty of the bait and look ahead to the consequences of getting caught.

## Conclusion

### The Solution to Temptation.

#### Read verse 16.

The tense reads this way: **"Stop being deceived."** It's an action that is already in progress. Notice James calls them **"my beloved brethren."** He is giving a warning, but he does so with great warmth and affection.

The key to overcoming temptation is to recognize its source and how it's designed to ensnare us. If we want victory, we must focus our attention on the Almighty. We must not be deceived about the doctrine of God.

#### Read verses 17-18.

If we want to win over temptation, we must come back to the character of God. While it's important to resist, the real key is to refocus. Since temptation begins with inner thoughts, changing our thoughts is the way to victory. Let's focus on who God is and what He has done in the past, what He is doing right now, and what He will do in the future. (**"Submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinner; and purify your hearts, you double minded."** James 4:7-8 **"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, He will lift you up."** James 4:10)

1. God is good!
2. God is great!
3. God is a giver! God is the source of salvation, not temptation:

Have you believed and received Him as your Savior and Lord? He's offering you a gift right now, but you must take it.

Have you been buffeted by the bricks of life? Does it feel like the barrel dropped on you? Are you at the end of your rope?

Some of you have filed a claim against God for all the trials and temptations you're facing right now. It's time to tear that up and declare God is good, He is great, and He is a giver.

Because these three doctrinal truths are so critical in dealing with trials and temptations, let's say them together: God is good. God is great. God is a giver.

Instead of filing a claim against God, claim these truths about God by faith: God is good. God is great. God is a giver.

As we close, let's stand and declare these truths. I'll say each phrase and you repeat after me.

God is good. God is good!

God is great. God is great!

God is a giver. God is a giver!