

Overcome or Succumb?

- What would you do for \$1 million dollars?
- Swim in shark infested waters?
- Give up all internet, social media and tv for a year?
- Go your workplace in your underwear without making yourself up in the morning?
- Eat nothing but pet food for two weeks?
- Have a brand logo tattooed on your face?
- In a survey of 1,000 people conducted by OnePoll.com in 2017.
- 15 percent of people would shoplift for \$1,000.
- 20 percent would flash a stranger for \$10,000.
- 10 percent would enter into a sham marriage for \$100,000.
- 10 percent would punch a stranger in the face for \$1 million.
- 38 percent would be willing to euthanize their pet for \$1 million.
- 15 percent would fake their own death for \$100 million.
- 10 percent would commit treason for \$1 billion.
- 6 percent of people would commit murder for \$1 billion.
- That means if there are 100 people, 6 of them would kill you if the price was right – gulp!
- What is your greatest temptation?
- When faced with that question, the range of answers is quite wide. It could range from the not so bad (“I’m tempted by that open bag of Doritos at 10:30 at night” or “I am tempted to stay late and work instead of go home.”) but it could be more serious (“I’m tempted to steal from my employer” or “I am tempted to take that next drink.”)
- The answer to this question might change with time. What was a temptation before might not be a temptation now. We might even have the question, “what temptation is a big deal and which is not?”
- Maybe a better way of thinking of this question would be this way:
- “What are those things, that if you could go back and talk to yourself 10 years ago (or 20 years ago, or 1 week ago), would advise yourself to change the decisions that you made?”
- How do we keep from acting in a manner that will leave us in the same place 10 years from now wanting to come back to our current self to give us a shake and tell us to make different decisions?
- We can make those decisions. We can handle what is in front of us differently than we did before. We can be overcomers instead of succumb-ers.
- If we want to deal with trials and temptations well, to suffer well (as Skeeter spoke on a couple of weeks ago) or deal with those unhealthy behaviors that we so frequently engage in, we must deal with our desires, our wants. We might say it like this, and I am paraphrasing what Gino Curcuruto said (our partner church in Philadelphia) when I was there on Thursday.
- **WANTS PRECEDE WORDS AND WORKS.**

- We have just started going through the book of James. If you have not listened to the introduction from a couple of weeks ago or watched the bibleproject video on the book of James, I would highly suggest that you do so.
- It is generally believed that the book was written by Jesus half-brother James, who over the course of his life, went from brother who did not appreciate, believe or follow Jesus to someone who called his brother his Savior, led the church and gave up his life for his beliefs.
- The letter he wrote to the Christ-followers who had been scattered by persecution, famine and other hardships is a practical book. We said that the major point that we are going to keep coming back to over and over is this:
- **AUTHENTIC FAITH PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS.**
- That is, the life of someone who is genuinely following Jesus will show it in their life. You cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus and simply live on your own terms.
- Last week, we heard from Skeeter that we need to learn to suffer well. We need to view our circumstances through a different lens, knowing that God is using them to produce in us something that is for our good and for our glory, so lean into what God is doing instead of running away from it.
- As we go through James, we need to remind ourselves that the divisions, verses, chapters, and all that were added much, much later to our bibles.
- When James wrote this letter, it would have been like us writing a letter. No headings or breaks. So we must always be looking for the connections between thoughts and ideas.
- V12-18 are a continuation of thought from the previous section. In fact, some feel v12 belongs better with this next paragraph, but regardless of your view, the ideas are connected.

James 1:12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord 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.

- There are trials and then there are temptations. We can overcome or we can succumb.
- What is the connection? What is the difference between a trial and a temptation?

I. Temptation is anything that leads me away from God.

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

- Trials are problems that occur from outside us. They are caused by the sinful world we live in. Trials can *lead* us to temptation, the desire or tug to do something we know is wrong. Something that will lead us further away from God's loving plan for our lives.
- He is talking about temptation right on the heels of talking about trials (which also a universal experience by the way) so he seems to making some type of distinction, even though the words in the original language often are used interchangeably.
- James put this in this order for a reason. Troubles and trials are not temptations but they can easily lead us to be tempted because if we don't turn to Jesus turn to something else.
- I want you to notice a couple of things.

A. Temptation is universal

- Everyone is tempted. He uses the word "when" not "if".
- We change a trial into a temptation by the attitude with which we meet it. If we have the right lens, it leads to perseverance and maturity. If we do not, it leads to temptation, sin and

death. That's why James talks about trials first. If we learn to see them through the lens of God and learn to suffer well, we avoid so many temptations.

B. Temptation is person specific.

- He uses the phrase "their own evil desires." Yours. Not someone else's.
- While temptation might be a universal experience, *how* we are tempted is not. What tempts
- This is big because we must be careful when we look at others and decide their temptations must be the same as ours so what they do should be the same as what I do.
- It doesn't help that we have a spiritual enemy in Satan that will do what he can to try and tailor opportunities to sin to who we are.
- Yet that is not the focus for James. He wants his readers to understand that:

II. Temptation is rooted in my wants.

• WANTS PRECEDE WORDS AND WORKS.

- If you get nothing else from this morning, if you check out now, remember this. You will never overcome your temptations by trying to simply form new habits or new disciplines. You cannot simply work harder and do good. At best, you substitute one habit for another.

• That because WANTS PRECEDE WORDS AND WORKS.

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.

- The root of temptations is internal "their own evil desires."
- I find this an interesting phrase. What is an evil desire? The desire to kill someone? Sure. The desire to cheat on a spouse? OK. To commit theft from your company? But what about the desire to work hard? To make our family happy? To have a BigMac?
- Remember our definition. Temptation as James is talking about it is anything that leads me away from God. Any desire becomes an "evil desire" when it crosses that line.

A. Temptation is a process, NOT an event.

- The word James uses is one that usually connected to craving, either good or bad. To be enticed is to beguile or allure.
- I am not a fisherman, but it is a perfect illustration. What James is describing is exactly like catching a fish. You cannot reach into the lake or ocean and catch a fish. So those who fish drop a line in the water. It's invisible to the fish. Then they have a hook on which they put some bait. Something the fish likes. Something that will attract its attention. Sometimes a lure makes it look even better. The fish sees it, wants it, and goes for it. He has no thought on why this amazing thing is suddenly in front of it or what the result will be.
- That is exactly how temptation works. We have a desire. We want something. Then all of a sudden something is there that seems to satisfy that desire. And so we bite.
- There is an enticement. We are promised something that ends up trapping us.
- We are "dragged" away – it is almost like an involuntary thing. We give in and get dragged where we never intended to go.
- Notice the progression.
- We have a desire. We want something. In order to satisfy that want, we do something we know is inadvisable or sinful. We continue to do so, and it become a pattern of living. And when this has had full reign in our life, it leads to death. Spiritual death and deadness.
- Some of you are there right now. That's because:

B. Temptation always comes with a “gotcha.”

- Evil desires, the temptation to sin, the tug to improper things, never delivers what we desire.
- Temptation is deception. It looks good and desirable but has a hook in it.
- We're just friends.
- It's just a little look.
- It's only one donut.
- It's the only way I'll make ends meet.
- It's just one drink.
- **WANTS PRECEDE WORDS AND WORKS.**
- We must deal with them at that level. That is why just trying to stop behaving sinfully is ineffective.

III. We never get victory over temptation by blaming or excusing.

- It seems that this is what James is addressing. People were blaming God for their own sinful choices.

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

- God cannot be tempted nor does he tempt anyone. This seems right but if you have read your bibles, you might have some objections.
- Objection 1: God made it all so he made temptation and is responsible for evil and Satan.
- Objection 2: What about the OT (God sending spirit to tempt Saul, or incite David to sin). The problem here is in how we understand what the OT writers understood. They saw Satan as the intermediary that God allowed to tempt, but not beyond the boundaries he sets up.
- Objection 3: It says God cannot be tempted, but Jesus was tempted. It was in his full humanity that he bore the brunt of that temptation.
- Objection 4: When we pray to not lead us into temptation, why do this if he is not going to do it? It is better said “do not allow us to give into temptation”
- From the beginning of time man has attempted to shift the blame for his sin.

Genesis 3:11 Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” 12 The man said, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

- Adam shifted the blame...he said “Lord, it was her. It is her fault. Actually, since you gave her to me, it is really your fault.”
- Then Eve shifted the blame and said what was echoed by Flip Wilson so many thousands of years later: “The devil made me do it.”
- Today, our excuses are the same. I am the way I am because God made me this way. I can't help it. It was God, my upbringing, friends, bosses, governments, etc.

A. God is not trying to trip you up

- So what is James saying? When we say that God is tempting us, we are attributing evil to God, and that he wants to see us fail.
- The core of God's character is love, holiness and graciousness. It's who he is. He cannot be tempted to do something wrong or evil because it is fundamental in his character to be holy, good and just. God is always for you. He is not trying to make you fail.
- James does not deny that God never allows temptation, or that he never tests, but he wants to emphasize that God does not try to seduce his people to act wickedly.
- This is huge because it means we can always turn to God in times of temptation because he is not the cause of it.

- **WANTS PRECEDE WORDS AND WORKS.**

- Family, we have to stop excusing or blaming. We cannot change what we are pretending isn't happening. We have to stop lying to ourselves about it.

B. We deal with temptation by naming our wants.

- Listen how James ends this portion of his letter.

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

- We must be vigilant and on-guard because we are masters of self-deception.
- We are deceived whenever we attribute to God what should not be attributed to him or attribute to someone or something else when it is God.
- *"If you could kick the person in the pants responsible for most of your trouble, you wouldn't sit for a month."* (Theodore Roosevelt)

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. Every good and perfect gift is from God. He is the author of all that is good.

- God is described as the father of heavenly lights. He is the creator.
- Present tense of the word suggests continuous or repeated action, that God constantly lavishes his gifts on us.
- Then James says he does not change. Unlike the shadows that constantly move, shift, God is constant.
- This is huge. Our God is *always* a generous, giving Father to His children. He will never someday grow impatient or distracted. We can trust Him to always be ready to help in times of trial.

- If we want to overcome our temptations, our trials, we must name our wants. What are you trying to get? What is it that you really want? Why are you engaging in that behavior? What is the thing beneath the thing?
- We cannot blame our way to victory.
- We cannot excuse our way to victory.
- Skeeter talked about seeing the world through filters, even our troubles
- James wants us to take an honest look and the desires and thoughts that we foster or allow to grow within us, tugging at us and alluring us.
- James is not thinking of just the major crisis or blatant temptations that assault us but also of the countless little decisions we make on a daily basis, over a lifetime, that mold and shape us into the people we ultimately become.
- Wants become words. Words become actions. Actions become habits. Habits become character. Character becomes your destiny."
- **WANTS PRECEDE WORDS AND WORKS.**
- Temptations are the desires that lead us away from God.
- They are rooted in my wants, my desires.
- We cannot overcome them without identifying them and bringing them to Jesus.

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

- He proved his unfailing goodness in Jesus. He send Jesus, the word of truth, so that we can find salvation.
- Because we live in a fallen world, much of what happens to us is not a direct gift from God, but the result of our own sin, someone else's sin, or the devil's treachery.

- Frustratingly, it is often impossible to determine whether suffering in a given situation comes directly from God or not. Fortunately, our response ought not to change either way, so we need not have the answer to that question.
- We need not give in to the temptation to sin, but can always turn to God in dependence on him and respond in a way that we know will please him.
- Since we owe our salvation to him, we can certainly entrust all the lesser items to him as well.