

**Faith with Hands and Feet**  
**Resisting Temptation**  
**James 1.12-18**

**February 12**

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**Shared Reading**

We are the beloved of the Lord.

In love He created us.  
In love He came to us.  
In love He died for us.

In love He makes us His own –  
folding us into His love  
transforming us by His love  
sending us out in His love

By our love this world will know that we are His –  
by our love this world will see Him in us –  
as He lives His life of love in us and through us,  
to the glory of God.

**Message**

Let's begin by taking a moment to do a little personal reflection.

Think of a time recently when you crossed a line you shouldn't have? Or fell short of a standard you should have kept? Or said or did something you shouldn't have?

Now stop and think about that moment. What happened? How did it happen that a thing that you knew was wrong was something you suddenly found yourself doing?

For example, what came to mind for me was a time when I interrupted Sharon a few days ago. And In looking back on it, I realize that in that particular situation what gave me the freedom to do that was a sense of my own self-importance – that what I had to share was more important than what she was sharing.

What about you? What sin comes to your mind, and what lay behind it? What made that sin make sense in that moment?

We've been walking our way through the New Testament letter that was written by James, brother of Jesus and *follower* of Jesus, to Christian believers who had a Jewish background.

The focus of much of the letter is what it looks like to follow Jesus in practical day to day sorts of ways, with faith that shows up in what our hands and feet are doing.

The passage we are looking at today, James 1.12-18, addresses three things  
How to think about trials and challenges we go through  
How to think about the temptations that surface in the midst of those trials  
How to think about God in the midst of those temptations

James also talks in these verses about the gifts that God gives his people, even in the midst of trials, including his greatest gift to humanity, which is the gift of life through His Son.

Let's walk through this.

### **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.

Two convictions lie behind this opening verse.

First, God assures us we will all experience trials and difficulties. Without exception.

As Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 3.2-4

<sup>2</sup>We sent Timothy to visit you. He is our brother and God's co-worker in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, <sup>3</sup>and to keep you from being shaken by the troubles you were going through. But you know that we are destined for such troubles.

<sup>4</sup>Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come—and they did, as you well know.

And second, God promises to use those trials for good in our lives if we let him.

Think back to the opening lines of this letter, to James 1.2-4

<sup>2</sup>Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup>because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

<sup>4</sup>Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Echoing his opening lines in verse 12, James again challenges us to think of trials and blessings in the same breath. Someone who is blessed is someone who is the recipient of God's favor, the object of his love and goodness.

Back in verses 2 to 4, James has already told us one reason we can consider ourselves blessed when we go through hardship. God will use those difficulties along the way to make us more mature and complete as followers of Christ as we go.

Now he gives us a second reason we should consider ourselves blessed when we struggle.

### **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.

James doesn't have a ruler's crown in mind. This is the victor's crown, the laurel crown given to the one who successfully finishes the race, spent and exhausted at the end of a long hard run, having given everything and seen it through to the end.

Unfortunately, there are some translations that express the idea that this crown of life is a reward. For example, one says:

Happy is the man who doesn't give in and do wrong when he is tempted, for afterwards he will get as his reward the crown of life that God has promised those who love him.

The idea of reward is very important in the New Testament. Again and again we're told that God will honor our faithfulness and our sacrifice, promising to reward us for

Working hard for the Lord Colossians 3.23

Showing love Hebrews 6.10

Doing good Galatians 6.9

Sharing our resources I Timothy 6.17

Giving to the needy Matthew 6.1-34

Refreshing others Proverbs 11.25

Doing what is right Proverbs 11.18

Enduring persecution as a follower of Jesus Matthew 5.12

The idea of reward is important, but that's not what this passage is about.

James here is talking about the undeserved gift of eternal life – which has nothing to do with what we do. Eternal life is something we receive by faith as a gift to us. As Paul writes in Romans 6.23, "The free gift of God is eternal life."

It's a gift that we receive the day we give our lives to Jesus by faith, but we only fully enter into when we go to be with him at the end of our earthly lives.

We already have a reserved place at the banquet table, and we know that one day we will be seated with the Lord and feast with him. Soon it will be our homegoing. But now

is the time of pilgrimage, of faithfully pressing on to the end, having seen it through faithfully to the finish line.

As Jesus says in

**Matthew 24.13**

But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.

Life in Christ is hard. It requires much of us. Constant discipline, sacrifice, deferring. Great riches and blessings too, yes. For those who love him there is great joy in making those sacrifices. But the life of faith is not without cost.

**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.

James then addresses a specific kind of trial – one in which we find ourselves on the edge of compromise, close to caving in, tempted to do wrong

**James 1.13**

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

A better translation is found in the Christian Standard Bible version, which says, No one undergoing a trial should say, “I am being tempted by God,” since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn’t tempt anyone.

Douglas Moo in his commentary on the book of James says,  
“Every trial comes with its own temptation.”

James says, *when* tempted, not *if* tempted. Temptation is part of life for us, because challenges and hardships are part of life for us, and every hardship and difficulty comes with its own temptations

What is a temptation? A persuasive suggestion that we will do well to follow a path that God has already said is the wrong way to go.

There are as many temptations as there are sins. We can be:

Tempted to sin against God with: pride, self reliance, independence from God, resisting God’s authority, spiritual indifference, resentment against God, despair

Tempted to sin against others: anger, unforgiveness, cutting words, sowing disunity, sexual sin, misuse of power, greed, self-importance

Tempted to sin against ourselves: self-recrimination, giving in to despair, numbing our pain with alcohol and drugs, workaholism, destructive relationships

Every trial comes with its own temptation.

James says

We will always face trials,  
and in those trials we will always face temptations,  
But don't go blaming God for those temptations.

Just because God allowed the trial doesn't mean God caused the temptation, or worse, caused the sin that resulted.

When we accuse God of tempting us, (when we blame God for our sin), we make two huge mistakes.

First, **we misunderstand the nature of God**. That's what James begins to address in this passage, and will address again in verses 16 and 17. .

James 1.13

For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

The New Living translation captures the black and white, no grey, no middle ground starkness of the language.

God is *never* tempted to do wrong, and he *never* tempts anyone else.

James has already told us that God allows difficulties to come into our lives in order for us to grow and mature. It requires a lot of spiritual maturity for us to reconcile God's love and our struggles.

It could be tempting for us to ask, "Then are you saying that God is an ends justify the means kind of God, that categories of right and wrong don't apply to him, that he's squishy on the idea of good and evil?"

James says, "Absolutely not!" God is perfectly and purely and completely good. There is no part of him that can be appealed to by what is not good, and he will never cross that line in his dealings with us. God's ways may be hard to understand, but they will never be wrong, or sinful, or evil.

But wait! Doesn't it say in the Bible that God tempts us, and we should ask him not to?

Look at the Lord's Prayer, where part of our daily prayer is to ask God not to lead us into temptation.

**Matthew 6.13 NIV**

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Unfortunately most English translations of the Lord's Prayer preserve a 640 year old translation mistake that Wycliffe made when he created the first translation of the Bible into English and he translated these words literally and failed to take into account that this was a Jewish idiom. That is what the words say, but that's not what they *mean*.

"Lead us not into" is a poetic way of saying "keep us out of," "steer us away from."

A much better translation would be the way the Contemporary English version has it.

### **Matthew 6.13 CEV**

Keep us from being tempted and protect us from evil.

The *God's Word* translation ("Don't allow us to be tempted") and the *New Living* translation ("Don't let us yield to temptation") are also good.

As we said, when we accuse God of tempting us, (when we blame God for our sin), we make two huge mistakes.

First, **we misunderstand the nature of God**. That's what James addressed in verse 13.

And second, **we misunderstand the nature of temptation and sin**. That's his point in verses 14 and 15.

### **James 1.14-15**

... but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

According to James, temptation begins with our desires. The Greek doesn't actually include the word "evil." James speaks of every desire we have, good and bad.

If you didn't get a chance to listen to or read my message on January 8 on being satisfied with God, I really want to encourage you to do that. It speaks of the deep desires God has planted in our hearts as human beings, and how the deepest of those desires is for God himself – it is a hunger, a thirst, a longing, a desire for him who alone can satisfy us and give us rest.

When we seek to find our satisfaction and rest in anything other than God, we'll end up frustrated and disappointed, we will remain restless and unsatisfied, with our loves all disordered.

As Augustine said,

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.

It's a bit of an oversimplification, but in a sense, it could be said that the issue isn't right and wrong desires. The issue is desires rightly directed and wrongly directed.

James uses two different colorful word pictures here to describe the way that desire gets misdirected, and how that leads to sin.

First he uses fishing language, of hungry fish and alluring bait and dangerous hooks.

He says our desires are awakened by some sort of bait that passes by in the current of life and entices them. We are tempted in that moment to believe that something or someone in this created realm - a person, a vocation, an ambition, an attraction, a possession, a position, a destination – has the potential of satisfying that deepest desire of ours that can that only be met in God.

So we attach our desire to that whatever-it-is that swims by, and then we are dragged away by that object of our misplaced desire, that alluring false food, just like a hook and line that grabs a fish and begins to reel it in.

The other imagery that James uses is the reproductive process: conception, birth, growth, then the offspring conceives, and gives birth, and it grows, and so on.

According to James, desire is tempted to land on the wrong object for its satisfaction. Right desire joined to the wrong object conceives what is contrary to God. That begins to grow and multiply and eventually is birthed as sin; and that sin then begins to take on a life of its own. When it is full-grown, it gives birth to death. All desire for God that is directed to anything other than God will eventually be fleshed out in words and actions that take life rather than giving it, vandalizing the blessings of God.

Think back on the example in your mind of how you fell into sin. Can you see how your desire lost its true object, joined to something else, and sought to find its satisfaction and rest there instead?

Two things James makes clear about temptation here.

God doesn't cause me to sin. God doesn't ever put us in a situation in which the only way out is to sin. Ever. He always gives us a way out.

See I Corinthians 10.13

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

God doesn't cause me to sin. Neither does temptation cause me to sin.

James places responsibility for sin squarely on the shoulders of human beings. Temptation isn't something that happens *outside* of us, it's something that happens *inside* of us. Temptation isn't something that happens to us, it is something we do.

As soon as we say, "I didn't have a choice; I was stuck in a situation where I didn't have a choice," we deceive ourselves.

There is no direct this-happened-so-this-has-to-happen-too link between a temptation and a sin. Temptation and sin are not the same thing, and they are not inextricably linked.

The author of the Book of Hebrews makes that clear when he writes this about Jesus:

#### **Hebrews 4.15**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

At the heart of this passage, then, are two alternatives. One is the choice to believe that my desires can be trusted but God can't. The other is the choice to look with mistrust at ourselves instead of God, to choose to believe that God can be trusted but my desires can't.

#### **Two approaches to temptation**

Encounter circumstance	Feel desire	Trust the reliability of my desire	Mistrust the reliability of God	Take the hand of my desire and let it lead me	Walk unbelievably into sin	Find my desire remains unsatisfied
Encounter circumstance	Feel desire	Trust the reliability of God	Mistrust the reliability of my desire	Take the hand of God and let Him lead me	Walk faithfully with God	Find my desire satisfied in God

Think again of the moment you tumbled into sin recently. Can you see where you went astray?



Now James takes us back to one of his foundational ideas. Yes, trials are difficult. They are disorienting and confusing, and it is often not clear how God is working in them for our good.

But . . . no matter how difficult our trials are, or how mysterious the ways of God are, this we can say without hesitation or qualification. God is *good*. He is only always and forever good.

When we slip over into believing that our desires are to be relied upon and our God is not, we've been deceived. And that's some slippery, dangerous territory.

### **James 1.16-17**

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Now James shifts to an image from astronomy. If you go out under the night sky, you notice that there are some things that are fixed and unmoving. Night after night, you know just where to look for the stars, and they never move around in relationship to each other. Orion, Cassiopeia, the North Star, the Pleiades – they are completely predictable and unchanging, as we rotate beneath them.

The planets, on the other hand, with their retrograde motion, traveling in odd and undecipherable rhythms from constellation to constellation, were seen as changing, unreliable. Comets, coming and going without warning, meteors, flashing and disappearing, and the moon, with its waxing and waning and occasional eclipsing, all these were seen as shifting or turning shadow.

James says the night sky is a parable of the steady and unchanging character of God. God, the Father of the Heavenly Lights, was associated with the highest heavens, the realm of the stars, where everything was fixed and unchanging. He doesn't change like the planets. He doesn't turn like the moon.

There is a singleness, a unity, an integrity, of character in God. In him, the Father of Light, is only perfect brilliant breathtaking good, and not even a shadow of anything else.

This absolutely unwavering Christian insistence that God is good, and is only ever good, is one of the ways that Christianity differs radically from some other world religions. As an example, in the Qur'an, in the chapter titled An-Nisa, it says,

If any good reaches them, they say, "This is from Allah," but if any evil befalls them, they say, "This happened because of you." Say: "All things are from Allah." [An-Nisa' 78] Myreligionislam.com

And one of the traditional sayings attributed to Mohammed says

A person is not considered a Believer unless he believes that good and evil are from Allah. [Tirmidhi]

James strongly disagrees.

**James 1.16-17**

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Even when life is filled with trials, and the specific outworking of God's loving purposes isn't altogether clear, and our hearts wrestle with myriad temptations, God is totally reliable, perfectly good, and completely to be trusted, giving us his blessings and pouring out his gifts along the way.

Before we turn to the final portion of the passage, what has God been saying to you this morning about how reliable you are, and how reliable he is, when you face trials and temptations?

As we come to the last sentence in this passage, we see how James brings together several important themes that he has raised earlier:

God blesses us with the crown of life, our salvation.

A birth that comes when our desires aren't in line with him as the true object of our desire.

The good and perfect gifts that come down to us from God, the Father of light.

Now James brings all those themes together with a powerful ending that echoes the place he began.

**James 1.18**

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

The Father of Light pours out his good and perfect gifts on us. And the greatest of those gifts is the gift of new life in Christ.

Desire directed to something short of God will inevitably give birth to sin and death.

But desire brought to God himself will mean a new birth into a new and beautiful life in which our souls find their rest and satisfaction and peace and joy in him.

The "word of truth" is the word of our good and perfect God, preserved for us in the pages of scripture. Specifically, the word of truth as James uses it here refers to the

central message of those scriptures, the gospel, the good news, that we were created for relationship with a good and loving God. When we love him, in response to his love for us, we enter into that relationship, and our lives begin anew.

“New birth” affirms that something changes in our interior. We are made new by God. We have become a new person with new power and new capacity, with new purpose and new identity, with new peace and new joy.

James says that person becomes a kind of firstfruit of all God created.

Think about the significance of the firstfruits of a Jewish harvest. You may remember that the firstfruit always belonged to God. And the firstfruits were a long-awaited gift that was meant to nourish and sustain others, the first taste of a new thing.

When we experience new birth into a living hope, our lives are turned out from ourselves. They are turned up toward God and out toward others.

And the name reminds us that behind the first fruits is meant to come a second fruit, and a third, and so on. What God has begun in us he means to spread through us to others, as they are drawn to the light of Jesus in us, and others too are brought to life by the breath of Jesus.

This morning we are blessed to hear the expression of faith of one person who has experienced this new birth by the breath of Jesus into life and light, to hear her public expression of faith and to witness her baptism.

Because of the sensitive nature of her story, we are going to ask our online audience to be patient with us for a few moments as we block our livestream to protect our friend and sister.

\_\_\_\_\_, I invite you to come forward before your sisters and brothers in the Covenant family.

## Baptism

\_\_\_\_\_, you have expressed a desire to be baptized as a follower of Jesus. Could you please share with about your faith in Jesus and how you came to know him?

I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The breath of Jesus has brought you life.

His light shines in you now.

Even your name has a meaning that points to the theme of light.

I speak this blessing over you from a sonnet written in the 1300s by Hafez, perhaps the greatest of the Persian poet, who comes from your hometown:

*'If you, like Christ, be pure and single-hearted,  
Who once ascended far beyond the sky,  
Your life will shine with beams of light, whereby  
The sun will brighten by your light imparted.'*

The Lord bless you and keep you

The lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you

The lord turn his face toward you and give you his peace.

What a friend we have in Jesus

Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

The fulfillment of all that has been promised and all that has begun in us

Reconciliation with God, enjoying the presence of God,  
His healing touch now, complete and perfect healing,  
Our finding our home in heart now, our arriving home after years of pilgrimage, of  
being on the way,  
Our being strengthened under attack, the end to spiritual attack,  
Our being forgiven and our hearts beginning to be transformed now, the end to  
temptation and sin,  
Our being made more and more like Jesus now, our being completely like  
Jesus then, the process of our being made holy complete,  
our being made whole,  
our being brought home

Love responding to love puts us in a position of choosing to trust God and open our  
lives to him even when it is hard.

When we faithfully persevere we have this waiting for us.  
Already yours, but not yet in your hands

Reward is different. A gift given in honor of our faithfulness or sacrifice or virtue or hard  
work. Which is also real and important and motivating but is not what this passage is  
about. Contemplation of God's rewards for our faithfulness is encouraged throughout  
the NT to spur us on to faithfulness in difficult circumstances

Important to see that because it can sound like James is a lot about what we have to do  
and what we get in return.