

Week 3: The Process of Temptation

The Place of the Passage

Having encouraged his readers to endure trials with perseverance and steadfastness, James now begins to teach them that they should not blame God for the temptations with which they struggle. On the contrary, God is infinitely good and faithful. He does not change, he is not capricious, and he gives good gifts to his children. Just look at what he has done for you, James says, in giving you new spiritual life! No, the sins you face—and commit—result from your own heart being enticed and lured away by evil desires. So stand firm, he tells them, because when the test is over, reward is waiting!

The Big Picture

[James 1:12–18](#) shows us how our hearts respond sinfully to temptation and directs us not to blame God for our sins, but to find strength in his goodness and grace.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, [James 1:12–18](#). Then review the listed passages and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible, page 2392, available online at www.esvbible.org.)

Reward for Those Who Endure ([James 1:12](#))

What is the reward that James promises will come to those who steadfastly endure trials? Can you think of other passages of Scripture that point to similar rewards?

How should the promise of reward for endurance motivate us in our walk with Christ?

The Process of Temptation ([James 1:13–15](#))

We often read [James 1:12–13](#) as if James is moving from one topic to a wholly different one—as if he has been talking about trials but is now moving on to talk about temptation. The two concepts are tightly related, however, because trials in our lives will always lead us to temptation. Financial struggle, for example, leads us to distrust God. Stress tempts us to be selfish. Name some specific trials that you have experienced, and consider the sins that you were tempted to fall into because of those trials.

The Bible teaches that God often, in his providence, ordains that his people should face trials. What passages of Scripture teach that truth? What stories in the Bible illustrate it?

If God sometimes ordains that his people will face trials, what then is James saying in [James 1:13](#) that God does not do? (Hint: there is a difference between trial and temptation! See the note on [James 1:13](#) in the ESV Study Bible.)

In [James 1:14–15](#), James uses two metaphors to describe the process of temptation and sin in our hearts. The first, in [James 1:14](#), is an image from fishing. Temptation “entices” a person to bite down on sin, and then when the hook is set, he or she is “dragged away.” That is a terrifying thought. We see the pleasure of sin, are enticed by it, and then before we even

realize it, we have lost all control and sin is dragging us away. How have you seen that process of temptation, enticement, sin, and dragging away play out in your own life?

The second metaphor James uses is one of conception and birth. What does it mean for a desire to “conceive?”

When once we act on our evil desires and give birth to sin, what does James say is the end result after sin “is fully grown?”

God’s Goodness and Faithfulness ([James 1:16–18](#))

Why does James turn in [James 1:16](#) to talk about God’s goodness and faithfulness? What are his readers in danger of deceiving themselves about, with particular reference to their trials and the temptations that come with them?

With what do you think James is contrasting God when he says that “with [him] there is no variation or shadow due to change?”

What does it mean to be “brought forth?” Has James used this metaphor before in this chapter? Read [John 3:1–6](#). Where did James get this idea of Christians having been “brought forth?”

What is the “word of truth?” If we are brought forth “by the word of truth,” do you think it’s possible for a person to be saved apart from the gospel?

James’s point in [James 1:18](#) is to show his readers that God is good and that he gives good gifts. How does his example of the gift of regeneration accomplish that goal? (Read [Romans 8:32](#). James is using the same kind of reasoning.)

Read through the following three sections on Gospel Glimpses, Whole-Bible Connections, and Theological Soundings. Then take time to reflect on the Personal Implications these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Providence: God’s good, wise, and sovereign guidance and control of all things, by which he supplies all our needs and accomplishes his holy will.

Regeneration: The Holy Spirit’s work of bringing spiritual life to a person, thus enabling him or her to love and follow God. Essentially equivalent to what is often referred to as being “born again” or “saved.”

Gospel Glimpses

THE WORD OF TRUTH. James is very clear that salvation comes through the message of the gospel, that is, the word of truth about Jesus and his work on our behalf. Paul uses the same phrase in [Ephesians 1:13](#) when he says that those believers were sealed with the Holy Spirit when they heard “the word of truth.” He even explains what he means by “word of truth,” calling it “the gospel of your salvation.” Salvation comes when a person hears the message about Jesus and responds to it with faith and repentance.

BROUGHT US FORTH. One of the clearest characteristics of James’s book is how much he learned from Jesus. His teaching can almost always be traced directly back to the explicit teaching of the Lord. This metaphor of salvation as birth, for example, finds its roots in Jesus’

teaching about the new birth in [John 3](#). Becoming a Christian is not just a moral decision or “turning over a new leaf.” It is a radical change of one’s heart—a gift of new spiritual life where there was once only death. God is the giver of life, both physical and spiritual.

OF HIS OWN WILL. James is in agreement with the rest of the New Testament that salvation is not finally attributable to human will or action, but rather to God’s own will and mere mercy. John makes this clear in [John 1:13](#) when he says that salvation is “not . . . of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Paul says the same thing in [Romans 9:16](#) when he teaches, “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” Our salvation is wholly of grace. It is not deserved, and it is not earned. God gives it to us as a gift—of his own will.

Mercy: Compassion and kindness toward someone experiencing hardship, sometimes even when such suffering results from the person’s own sin or foolishness. God displays mercy toward his people and they, in turn, are called to display mercy toward others ([Luke 6:36](#)).

Grace: Unmerited favor, especially the free gift of salvation that God gives to believers through faith in Jesus Christ.

Whole-Bible Connections

FATHER OF LIGHTS. James traces God’s goodness—his desire to give good gifts—all the way back to creation. At every stage in his creating of the universe, God declares that his work is good. That reveals something to us not only about the universe that God made but also about the character of God himself. He is good, and therefore he does good! Throughout the Bible, believers confess this to be true. Joseph affirms it even in the midst of his trials ([Gen. 50:20](#)), the Israelites confessed it as they looked into the Promised Land ([Deut. 26:11](#)), and the psalmists said it over and over ([Ps. 73:1](#) and [Ps. 84:11](#), for example). We do not serve a grudging, stingy God, but a good and generous one!

FIRSTFRUITS OF HIS CREATURES. James may have in mind here the fact that his readers were some of the first people in the world to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. Other New Testament writings take special note of those who were “first” in believing ([Rom. 16:5](#); [1 Cor. 16:15](#)). But James may also be looking forward to the last day, when God will create a new heaven and a new earth. As the crowning act of God’s work of creation ([Gen. 1:26–31](#)), it is fitting that humans should be the “firstfruits”—the down payment, as it were—on the re-creation of the cosmos. Paul seems to teach this when he says in [Romans 8:19–21](#) that the creation “waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God,” because in that last day creation will share in “the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Our salvation in Christ is the firstfruits—the crowning act of and the down payment on—God’s universe-encompassing work of redemption.

Theological Soundings

GOD AS CREATOR. James reminds us that everything begins with God. He is the Creator, the Father of lights, and the originator of everything that exists. In fact, the Bible teaches that God created the world *ex nihilo*, or “out of nothing.” He did not take preexisting material and form it

into something else, nor did he simply bring “order out of chaos.” Interestingly, that is what the pagan deities were said to have done. But the Bible is clear that our God is no pagan deity. He did not just bring order out of chaos; he brought everything out of nothing. He is the Father of it all.

GOD IS HOLY. When James says that God cannot be tempted by evil, he affirms that God is holy and pure and perfectly righteous. God is not a mixture of good and evil motives, good and evil desires. Without fail and without exception, he is holy and good.

GOD TESTS, BUT DOES NOT TEMPT. The Bible is very clear that God does sometimes test his people. He tests Abraham, for example, when he tells him in [Genesis 22](#) that he is to sacrifice his son Isaac. He also tests his people Israel in the wilderness to see whether they would obey his commands ([Ex. 16:4](#)). But God does not tempt his people to evil. When we are tempted in the midst of our trials, that is the result of our own sinful hearts, and the question is whether we will remain steadfast and endure our trials in faith, or give in to temptation and sin.

Holiness: A quality possessed by something or someone set apart for special use. When applied to God, it refers to his utter perfection and complete transcendence over creation. God’s people are called to imitate his holiness ([Lev. 19:2](#)), which means being set apart from sin and reserved for his purposes

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of [James 1:12–18](#) for your own life today. Note the personal implications for your walk with the Lord in light of (1) the Gospel Glimpses, (2) the Whole-Bible Connections, (3) the Theological Soundings, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses
2. Whole-Bible Connections
3. Theological Soundings
4. [James 1:12–18](#)

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you engage in this study of James. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and to note things to review again in the future.