



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Real Faith. Real Life.

Part 3: Temptation: The Traitor Within
James 1:13-18 | Tim Badal | January 29, 2017

This is our third week in our series, "Real Faith. Real Life." We're learning how to connect our faith to the daily, mundane, even crazy aspects of our lives. Last week we learned how we are to live out a vibrant faith as Christ followers when trials and tribulations come our way.



In James 1:1–12, James makes it abundantly clear that we will not be exempt from hard times. This past week we have had church family members who have been going through some real struggles. One of our men was diagnosed with lung cancer. As he was sitting with you last Sunday, he had no expectation that this was coming. Trials don't warn us when they'll be knocking at our doors. They can arrive in all shapes and sizes, and often we are ill-prepared for them. That's why James tells us that if we want to have real faith for real life, we need to "count it all joy," believing that God has a plan and purpose in everything we face.

Now, in verses 13–18, James will flip the coin of "trouble." Last week, we saw our troubles as trials. Now we will be looking at the other side, where our troubles can be seen as temptations. Trials are things that hit us from the outside, whereas temptations are troubles that have their origin within us. If we as Christ followers want to go farther in our Christian walk, we will need to learn to stand against these temptations that can wreak havoc in our lives. We have a hard time dealing with temptations.

The story is told of a man who had started on a diet to lose some weight. He knew he struggled with resisting sweets. He especially loved to feast on the delicacies of a certain bakery in town. One day when he had to go downtown, he realized he had to do something about staying out of that bakery. So he prayed, "God, You know I'm trying to lose weight. You know I really like those cakes in that bakery, and I know You want to give me good things. So here's my prayer. If You want me to stop at the bakery, then leave a parking space open right in front of the bakery, and I will know it is Your will for my life to stop there." And wouldn't you know it? God heard and answered his prayer. On the seventh time around the block he found that parking space.

Like that man, we often find ourselves falling into temptations, making excuses for the temptations that wreak havoc in our lives. We blame others and even God for our failures, instead of looking inside ourselves. Someone once said, "I wouldn't be tempted if temptation wasn't so tempting." How true is that? Oscar Wilde, the playwright, remarked, "I can resist anything except temptation."

However, we aren't alone in this struggle with temptation. The recipients of James' letter in the first-century Middle East also dealt with temptation. It was hard for them to keep the temptation of their desires at bay. James loved them, calling them "my beloved brothers," and wrote what he did because he cared for them. He knew that his older half-brother, Jesus, had promised that they could find abundant victory in following Him and His ways.

But he also knew temptations were hard. Just like he realized that life in general was hard, with its persecutions and trials from the outside, he knew there was an enemy within. The victory available through Jesus would only come through properly dealing with these things. So he wrote these words to his brothers:

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Of God's own will, he brought each one of us forth by the word of truth—that Word that's in your hand this morning. He did this so we might be examples of His creatures.

When you're in a battle against an enemy, there's nothing worse than learning that the person fighting next to you has decided—unbeknownst to you—that he's now fighting with the enemy and against you. Oh, he may wear the same uniform as you, but he's doing everything in his power to destroy you without your knowing it. He has become a traitor.

This happens in warfare. This happens in athletics. Sometimes a player on a team may be offered money to “throw the game.” From time to time we hear stories of how a star player, for the sake of money, is willing to betray his coach, his teammates, the fans, the university or whoever he's playing for, for the sake of some personal gain.

We can find this kind of betrayal in some marriages, when one spouse gives up on their covenant commitment and pursues another person through an affair. It happens also in the business world, when an employee takes the company secrets or intellectual property and divulges them to the competition for the sake of higher pay.

Let me remind you that this even took place in the life of Jesus. Jesus lived with and ministered to His twelve disciples in every way. Yet he knew what the others didn't know—that one of them, Judas, was a traitor. We should remember that the first sin was not in the Garden of Eden, but rather was in heaven, when the great rebel Satan—Lucifer, the chief cherub—convinced a third of the angels to become traitors, rebelling against the God of the universe. And as a result, he and they were thrown out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12–21; Revelation 12:9).

When we as Americans use the word “traitor,” the name that comes to our mind is none other than Benedict Arnold. He was one of our rising stars, a good-looking soldier in the U.S. Army during the Revolutionary War. He was trained at West Point, an alma mater he had come to love. He became one of the single-handed reasons why West Point fell to the British. He went from rising in the ranks to transferring his loyalty to Britain.

It began when he started dating a Loyalist woman who disapproved of what the colonies were doing. His treacherous inclination grew when he was passed over for certain assignments and commendations he thought he deserved. But when he failed to receive honor for his part in a battle, he made his decision. Instead of joining the men beside him in their fight for freedom, he chose to sabotage the work of the Continental Army.

Years later, when Washington was asked who his greatest enemy was, who caused him the most consternation across enemy lines, Washington responded, “I don't know which one is greater: the betrayal of one Benedict Arnold, or all the armies of General Cornwallis.” Washington was saying that the massive army of Redcoats paled in comparison to one of his friends turning against him.

You see, within every one of us there is a traitor. Within you, within me, there is one who seeks to sabotage our walk with Jesus Christ. Because it is “all about us,” our desires and wants are willing to sabotage our lives. We have a choice. We can either bring that traitor into custody and lock it away so it can't create problems for us, or what many of us have done, we allow it to run free, knowing that at some point it will get the best of us.

We need to do some interpreting of what James says in this text, because our English translation may not exactly communicate what the Greek is saying. When James says “trials and temptations,” in English these are two different words. But in the Greek, he used only one word for what we see as two. In James 1:2 he says, “Consider it pure joy my brothers when you meet *trials*”—one Greek word. Then in verse 13 when he says we are “tempted,” it's the same Greek word. In verse two, he uses the noun form, and in verse 13 he uses it as a verb. For this reason we can say that in the first case, these are trials and tribulations that hit us from the outside, as we had in our church this week. But he turns the coin over in verse 13. When the trials and tribulations come from within, we call them “temptations.” They're internal struggles.

How can the same word mean two different things? How can one word create two word pictures? Let me explain. An assailant uses a sharp knife to harm and maim and destroy his victim. But with the same sharp knife, a surgeon can cut the flesh—not to harm but to heal a person. It's the same sharp knife used for two different purposes. It can destroy, or it can build up.

Last week James told us that God allows trials in our lives as a masterful Surgeon who cuts us. We hurt. We bleed. But we're cut for God's good purposes, and we are thus able to consider these trials as "pure joy." However, in verse 13, it is the devil who is cutting us with the intent to destroy our lives through our flesh. One for our good; one to bring harm and destruction.

We need to know what to do with this, and James gives us four truths about temptations. He's going to tell us about the substance, the source, the steps and the solution we can find to temptation. We need to know where it comes from in order to overcome it. Said another way, once we know the truth about temptations, they will not be so tempting. That's our goal today.

1. The substance of temptation

We'll begin with the substance in James 1:13: *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one."* What is temptation? We may have a hard time defining it.

Some of us think temptation is sin. It isn't, and here's why we know it isn't. It's what we call a syllogism: two truths that apply to a third objective truth. First: we know Jesus was sinless. Scripture tells us that. Second: Jesus was tempted. Therefore, if He was sinless and tempted, then the logical conclusion is that being tempted is not itself a sin. Does that make sense? The Bible says Jesus was sinless yet He was tempted, therefore temptation is not sin. We read in Hebrews 4:15, *"For we do not have a high priest [Jesus] who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."* So we know that to be tempted doesn't mean to sin.

Let's first give it a definition so we can then give a diagnosis and remedy for it. **Temptation is the act of enticement to sin by promising pleasure or some other gain.** What I mean by enticement is that temptation is attractive.

I'm not going to assume that among seven billion people worldwide there are not a few who might be attracted to plates of maggots and garbage. It's gross. It doesn't seem to bring any pleasure or gain for me to eat garbage, and I doubt many other people are attracted to it either. Nobody in the first service was, but maybe one of you guys here are. Why? There's not much attractiveness to it.

But when we are tempted, it's because there's something that attracts us. Like a moth to a flame, there's something that arouses desire in us. It's not the ugly, crazy things that we need to be concerned with, but things that "flip the switch" of our desires.

Second, this enticement draws us to sin through some kind of luring. A fishing lure is colorful and beautiful and well-crafted camouflage for a hook. In this sense, temptation is sin packaged in a beautiful way such that we can't see the embedded hook, the attached strings, the consequences that will come. These have been shrouded in something attractive. So we're enticed, we're lured, and then we're trapped by the deception that the thing that appears to be beautiful will only bring us pleasure or gain without consequence. And little do we know that we're entering into the gates of hell.

We need to understand four important truths about the substance of temptations.

Temptations should be expected.

Just as we should expect trials, James also tells us that temptations should be expected. Notice in verse 13 he says, *"Let no one say when he is tempted..."* He doesn't say if—he says when. It's not that temptations might come. They're going to come. It's only a matter of time. We should expect them. We should be watching at all times, in all occasions, because they'll come whether we want them to or not.

We must realize that our enemy can strike at any time without warning, so we need to build walls in our lives to make sure that when temptation comes, we're protected.

None of us are exempt.

The Bible is not only full of stories about people who struggled with temptation, but it also gives us stories of the majority who actually fell for temptation. I love the brutal honesty of the Scriptures, which don't paint a picture of perfect people who never made mistakes. Rather, Scripture gives us story after story of human failures.

Let's go all the way back to Adam and Eve. Or how about Noah? Abraham? Jacob? They all fell. Joseph was tempted, but he did not fall; so you would think that might have started a new pattern. But then we get to Moses who was tempted and fell. Samson was tempted and fell. King Saul was tempted and fell. David was tempted and fell...twice. Solomon, even though he was wise, fell into sin.

Even Daniel was tempted. But what did he do? Daniel stood the test. Maybe a new time was coming? But then the prophets were tempted and fell. Then we get to the New Testament. We see John the Baptist tempted, but he withstood. Then the disciples were tempted and fell. Only Jesus, Who was the perfect Lamb, the Son of God—Who was tempted in all things just as we are—remained without sin (Hebrews 4:15). And we should remember that He was tempted directly by the devil himself (Luke 4:1–13).

One of the greatest lies we can believe is that we are the only one who is being tempted. That's hogwash. The people sitting next to you—as cleaned up as they look, as Christian as they look, as mature as they look—they too have been tempted. But remember, when you're pointing a finger at them, there are three fingers pointing back at you. If any of us think we are too holy or righteous or godly to be tempted, Paul reminds us, *"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:12). We're not exempt.

Temptations can be hard to explain.

Sometimes our temptations are hard to explain. All of us could write down exactly what we struggle with—what tempts us. We might well ask, "Where did this come from? When did it start? What did I do? How did I catch this? Why do I like this?" Often it makes no sense.

But this side of heaven, some of our temptations will remain hard to explain. Maybe something happened early in our lives, some pattern of habitual sin that we allowed and maybe weren't even aware was sinful. But it took root in our lives, and even though we can't explain it, we still deal with it on an ongoing basis.

It is easy to make excuses.

Still, figuring out where it came from isn't what's so important, but rather deciding how we're going to deal with it. We live in a society that seeks to take every malady and reduce it to a label. Of course, there are some things that are good to label, such as medical, emotional or mental issues. But sometimes I think we label things way too much. We do this to subtly condone certain behaviors, because we feel like it gives us a pass. You see, if I can call myself an addict, then, "I'm not culpable for my sin. The disease made me do it. I don't want that responsibility on me." We see this everywhere. Everything is becoming an addiction. While I'm not saying there aren't addictions in our lives, we should never allow that label to mean we ourselves are no longer responsible. When we allow someone to blame their behavior on their addiction, we're not helping them—we're hurting them.

We need to be careful. When we're tempted, we can sometimes excuse ourselves by saying, "Well, I'm just a sinner and that's what sinners do. I can't help myself. I just have to give in to it." Our world is filled with people who can't say no to temptation, but just give in. Sadly, this can be true even with Christians. Even your preacher can be quick to make excuses for his sin. But when we do that, we deprive ourselves of the victory God wants us to have. James teaches us that we ourselves must take responsibility for our actions. The onus is on us.

I will grant you, some of our sins are very hard to eliminate. I do not want to understate the power of temptations. When we have given in to a certain temptation over and over again, and then we start trying to curb it, it will seem impossible to overcome. The man or woman who continues to ingest drugs believes they have to have those drugs to survive. Anyone who has depended on a drug to get them through their lives by the highs it brings, if they say "No more" to that thing, their body will begin to convulse. It will scream, "Give it to me! I will die without it." Some people have given in to temptations, and when they're challenged to back away from them, they will protest, "If I do that, all hell will break loose." Yes, it may. It may, because we can be so accustomed to having that pleasure or gain that when we say no to it, it will wage almighty war against us.

In order to battle against these sorts of temptations, we have to prepare. We need to build walls—build a strong determination—because if we don't, at some point this sin will cause our lives to go off the rails. We must work past our cravings, no matter how hard they are. But it is very tough to eliminate these habits.

2. The source of temptation

James writes in verses 13 and 14, *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire."* Our first instinct when we are confronted with temptation can be to blame someone else. Surely, we think, we're not at fault.

When my boys get into arguments, Mom or Dad will ask, "What's going on? Who started this?" And what happens? Fingers are pointing everywhere. Blame takes place—why? Because my boys are not different than anyone else. Mom and Dad do it too. We're part of a human race that does this. When heat is directed toward us, we want to deflect it to someone else. It's someone else's fault.

We should not blame God for our temptation.

Our first impulse can be to blame God, but James specifically tells us we can't blame God. *"For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one."* In essence, he's saying the same thing in both of these phrases. He clearly wants us to know that option is off limits. We can't blame God for what we do. It isn't His fault. Author and pastor Chuck Swindoll put it this way: "Don't even remotely suggest that God has anything to do with your temptation. His character makes this kind of conduct impossible."

After Job lost everything, Scripture records that *"In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong"* (Job 1:22). We should not do it—but we do it all the time. "God, You've surrounded me with dumb people. It's Your fault." "God, I've read You poured out Your wrath on people, so why can't I?" "God, You gave me my spouse. You gave me my kids. You gave this problem. Therefore it's Your issue, not mine." But we can't do this.

A couple weeks ago we talked about how James grew up with Jesus, and how he might have started a fight with his older Brother. Of course, this is all my speculation, but then when Mary came into the room, James might have said, "He started it!" To which Mary would of course have responded, "We both know that can't be true." Let me tell you something: you will never win when you put God on trial, so stop doing it. It's not His fault. He does not tempt, nor can He be tempted Himself.

We should not pass the buck.

James tells us we can't blame God, so what do we do next? We say, "Okay, I'll find someone else to blame." We do this all the time. For example, when you're tempted to lust, you might say, "Tim, you don't know how pretty she is. You don't understand how provocatively she dresses." Or, "Tim, you don't know how ruggedly handsome that guy is, or how athletic, or how smart he is." Or even, "It's his fault. It's not mine. He talked to me. He said nice things about me. Therefore I had to give in."

Or what about sinful anger? "Tim, you don't understand how mad my spouse or my kids make me. It's not my fault—it's theirs." How about lying? "Tim, you don't understand the pressure I'm under at work. If I don't start fudging some of the numbers, I'll never make it." How about, "Tim, you don't understand how easy life can be when you have money. Therefore I'm going to give in to the temptation to become greedy."

You see, the Bible is clear that we cannot pass the buck. In Genesis 3 we find a story that is very familiar even to people who are not part of the church. God set a man and woman in creation to have dominion over the Garden of Eden. He also gave them one rule. They must not eat the fruit of a tree in the middle of the Garden.

We know that the devil came in the form of a serpent and began to persuade the woman, Eve, that if she ate of that fruit she would become like God, knowing the difference between good and evil. He was speaking a half truth. Temptations often contain some truth while concealing the "hook."

Against God's command, Eve took the fruit and ate it. Then she handed the fruit to her husband. Adam wasn't deceived, but he had to make a choice. Did he choose God's command or Eve's offer? He decided to rebel against God, not wanting to give up his relationship with Eve. So he also ate of the fruit.

Genesis 3 goes on to record that God was walking in the Garden, and in verse 11 we read that He said, "Who told you that you were naked?" Adam and Eve were scared and running from God. They were filled with shame. They knew they were guilty, so they tried to cover themselves. So God asked, "How did you know you were naked? Why did you hide yourselves? *Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?*"

The man responds, *"The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."* This is the first of a million times that a husband blames his wife. In a sense Adam is saying, "Remember the days before You created Eve? We had something great going on then. We walked and we talked. We were compadres. Things were going good. But then You brought in that woman. She messed everything up! It's her fault."

Think about this. Adam is not only blaming Eve—he's also blaming God. "The woman You gave me." He's deflecting it all. "Hey, it's not my fault. I was just hanging out here. I was doing what I was supposed to do. She got me in trouble, and really, it's Your fault, God, because You're the One Who created her. It's on You. Stop coming down on me. I'm innocent."

Then notice what happens next. Verse 13: “Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’” Eve thinks, “Adam’s argument sounded good. I’ll go with it. God’s been blamed. I’ve been blamed. Can’t go there. Ah, the devil made me do it. *The serpent deceived me, and I ate.*”

Look carefully now at what James writes about temptation. There’s no mention of the devil anywhere. James won’t allow us to blame God for our temptations, nor should we blame the devil. We must be careful never to pass the buck. If we want to gain victory over our temptations, we must look inward.

Genesis gives us three ways we should not deal with our guilt—we shouldn’t blame God, we shouldn’t blame our spouse and we shouldn’t blame the devil. But James gives us better help. He tells us we are tempted when we are enticed by our own desires.

On a side note, we had some great discussions in our small groups regarding what the role of the devil actually is. How involved can he be in our lives? I believe we must be careful not to give the devil more credit for our temptations than he deserves. Scripture tells us that while the devil uses temptations as a weapon against us, he is simply working off our own desires. He knows we are hungry, so he sets up places where we can eat food against the will of God.

Think about being on a journey. Let’s say you’re on the interstate that leads to God’s glory and goodness in our lives. God has told us that if we get on Interstate 80, mile marker 150 is where He will supply you with food. That’s His command. But He says, “The devil will set up a lot of food stands along the way. I don’t want you to stop until mile marker 150.”

So you’re driving along and everything’s fine—until you pass the first Burger King. You start smelling it. Remember, the devil does what IDOT does. He starts telling you in advance where you can get food. “In three miles you can stop at Wendy’s, A&W and Olive Garden. There are all kinds of restaurants at this exit.” As you’re driving you’re beginning to salivate. The ads on the billboards are there as well, with beautiful pictures of food, and they’re reminding you, “In just two miles, your belly can be filled.”

You have a decision to make. Will you stay true and wait for mile marker 150, where God has promised to take care of you, or will you seek to take care of your hunger on your own? Can you keep your hunger at bay until then? But here’s what the devil can’t do. He can’t force your decision. He can’t push you off the interstate. He can’t grab your hand and make you turn that steering wheel. The only thing the devil can do is set traps along the way. That’s it. All he can do is entice you. He will do a good job of that. He’ll do it with pictures or with smells. He’ll show you that everybody else is stopping. You know you’re supposed to wait until mile marker 150, but at mile marker 78 you see the all-you-can-eat buffet, and it’s packed out with people. As they’re walking out, smiling and saying, “Ooh, that was so good!” you’re dying inside—because in that moment, that’s all you want.

We should unmask the enemy.

The question is: are you going to let your desires get a handle on you, or will you get a handle on your desires? We need to unmask the real enemy. When the mask is taken off, we realize the real enemy is ourselves. It’s us. We’re the problem. The onus is on us. As President Truman said, “The buck stops here.” It’s our desire.

You might ask, “Well, what is this desire?” Our desire is a hunger or appetite that God Himself has put in you. Your longings, your desires, your hungers are not bad. They’re not the problem. The problem is that we have more than one way to fulfill our hungers and desires. Will we fill them God’s way, or will we fulfill them our way? In and of themselves they are not prone to sin.

God created our desires, and James will tell us that He is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Our hunger is a good hunger. We’re sexual beings. God has given us sexual desires. But then He challenges us, “Are you going to act on them My way or your way? Will you follow My timeframe and My place for marriage, or will you go with your time and place?” It’s not the hunger that’s the problem. It’s our unwillingness to obey that is the source of our consternation.

We should understand that there can be victory.

We have to unmask the enemy, but we also need to realize we can have victory. Some of you are broken up because you have given in to your temptations for so long that you feel you are facing a giant that can never be slain. But here’s what we know: *“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). Greater is Jesus in us than the temptations that wage war inside us. When we allow Jesus to take His place in our lives, we will begin to minimize the greatness of the internal temptations.

So we must unmask the enemy, knowing that when Jesus was tempted by the devil himself in Matthew 4, He did not use some superhuman strength. He had been fasting for 40 days in the wilderness and was utterly exhausted. But three times He used the Word of God—the same weapon He calls us to use—saying, “It is written. It is written. It is written.” He quoted the Old Testament to combat the temptations the devil was throwing His way.

And we can find victory as well. But the question is: will we do it?

3. The steps of temptation

First, we need to understand the steps that temptation takes. We see in verses 14–15 how temptation comes about: *“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”*

What are the steps of temptation? After we realize we’re our own worst enemy and we’re responsible for where temptation comes from and where it will take us, we need to ask how it takes form in our lives.

Enticement

First, temptation comes with enticement, that which attracts our desires. Remember, these desires are God-given. These desires have a proper place and must be Spirit-controlled, yet we find ourselves straying from this.

When I was a kid, instead of playing video games we played something called “tag.” You may have heard of that before. Everybody over 40 knows about tag; under 30—you don’t know what I’m talking about. In tag, someone was always “it”—the bad guy. You would run around, keeping yourself away from that person. But here was the provision that was given. In tag, you stayed away from the bad guy, but you also knew you were always given a “home base.” When you were on home base, you were safe. When you were on home base, you could be at ease. As long as you were touching home base, you could confidently stand there saying, “Nanna nanna, boo boo. You can’t get me.”

Here’s the problem. The devil longs for us to wander from home base. He lures us with enticing things to get us off home base. As long as we have a hand on home base, he can’t touch us. The second we’re off home base, we’re open season. So he’s doing everything in his power to get us off, and he is masterful at that. He doesn’t have to grab us and pull us off. He doesn’t have to touch us. All he has to do is put enough things around us that elicit our desires and we’ll want those things badly enough that we forget about home base and let go of it. Then he will have the opportunity to tag you out.

Home base is the Word of God. Jesus showed us how to use it to combat temptation. When we pick up this Word, it doesn’t mean we’ll be immune from temptations. We read in Psalm 119:9, *“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.”* We protect ourselves by meditating on and memorizing the Word of God. This is home base.

For some of you who are dealing with temptation, you might think God is not strong enough. That’s hogwash. You’re not in the Word. You’re not connected to home base, so you’re open season for the devil right now, and he’s tagging you out at every turn. Every time the game starts, he says, “Gotcha! Out!”

The problem is you haven’t been filled in to the fact that those enticements are leading you away from safety and causing you to be vulnerable to the devil’s attacks.

Entrapment

The devil’s second move is entrapment. He entices you with something that looks really wonderful, really pleasurable, and tells you that you don’t need to wait to have your desires met. You don’t have to wait for marriage. You don’t need to keep a tight rein on your tongue. If it feels good—if it feels freeing—just do it. You see the freedom, but you don’t see the strings that are attached to it.

The first century words translated “lure” and “entice” were terms used for outdoorsmen. Lure is related to fishing. The fisherman did what he could to attract fish into his net. It’s hard to grab fish when they don’t want to come to us, but if they want to come to us, then we can snag them easily. Even today we know about fishing lures. They’re beautiful and shiny things that attract fish. But little do the fish know that there’s a hook.

A similar strategy is used when a trap is set to capture wild game. Even back then they made traps for animals. There was something in the trap that appealed to the animal, and the trap was set in such a way that all the animal saw was what was appealing and not the iron claws that were waiting to take it hostage.

So too we are enticed by something that appeals to our desires. But note that neither desire nor entrapment constitute sin. Jesus endured both of them without sin. He had hunger and other desires that were from God and were part of His human nature and

He was also being trapped. The devil set traps. "Hey, if You do this, then You can have this. If You want this, then do that." Traps were set, but Jesus did not fall into them.

Right now you may find yourself being enticed, but you're not sinning. You may find yourself with traps all around you—but you're staying away from them. At that point you should not have a guilty conscience. But I must warn you: that's a slippery slope. You can fall really quickly. It takes but a moment for those claws to grab hold of you.

Endorsement

So when does it become sin? Verse 15 speaks of what I would like to call endorsement. If you think about it, we just got done with a political campaign that contained many political endorsements. What were those? One person would stand next to someone else and say, "I like this guy," or, "I like this lady. I think they're important. I think they're wise. I want to follow them." That's an endorsement.

When temptation becomes sin is when you grab your temptation—whatever it is—you put your arm around it and say, "I like this. This is good. We need more of this in our lives. I want this thing to lead and guide me. I want this thing to take me where it says we're going to go." Isn't that what political people say? "You follow me and good things will happen."

But temptation says—and please don't take this in a political way—"Let's make sin great again. Let's have fun." We put our arms around it and we say, "You betcha. I'm with you." When you do that with your temptation, you have gone from a place of purity to a place of sin.

You might say, "Wait a minute. I haven't even done anything yet." Jesus makes it clear that in the area of lust, we don't have to do something physical for us to be sinful. It is the endorsement of the heart. It's the lingering of the heart that gets us into trouble. Some of us right now are in the endorsement phase, and we're looking at the people on the other side of the entrapment and we're judging them: "You sinner." Yeah, they're sinners. You're right. That's the truth.

But here's the problem: They are sinning physically or outwardly and have gotten caught. They're what I like to call Romans 1 sinners. But then Romans 2 describes inward sinners—those who sin internally. These people have never lifted a hand against someone in sinful anger, but they sure feel it. They're saying inside, "I hate that person. I want that person to die." They may never have committed physical adultery, but they've fantasized about all kinds of crazy things on the inside.

Romans 2 people say to Romans 1 people, "You're the bad ones. We're okay." But the Bible says that when we get to the endorsement phase of our temptation, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). We're all guilty.

Enslavement

Then what comes after endorsement is enslavement. James uses the metaphor of conception and birth. Biology tells us that for conception to take place two things have to be brought together for a third to become a reality. So the two things that are brought together here are our desires and the temptation. When we bring these two things together, a third thing results: sin.

You might say, "I've allowed temptation to have the best of me. I'm there all the time and nothing has happened to me. I'm not feeling anything. It's all good." But we don't know when the actual moment of conception takes place. That's done in the secret will and plan of God. Yet at some point, that conception becomes public. It starts becoming evident. Some of you right now are in the conception process of your sin. It's sin, but you aren't having morning sickness yet. Your body isn't changing yet. There's a period of time between conception and the first signs that something's wrong. With human conception, I believe it takes about 30 days before you start figuring things out. But as the days go on, the evidences become more and more apparent. Everybody can see it.

Some of us right now are in the secret chamber of our temptation and sin. Nobody knows about it and we're loving it. It's great. It's quiet. It's done behind closed doors. It's done within our hearts. Of course, God knows it, but we don't want to think about that, because we're too busy blaming Him. We may be living in that conception time now, but at some point unknown to us it will become more and more evident to others. We're allowing it to happen and at some point we won't be able to hide it any longer.

I can't tell you how many times I've read or seen with my own eyes great men of the faith who have pastored wonderful churches and been models of righteousness, only to find out that for years they were dealing with temptations they thought they could keep at bay. They had sins they thought they could keep in their closet. But little by little their sin came out, until it became so public it cost them everything. That happens.

I told my small group almost with tears in my eyes how broken I am when I or our elders get involved in the lives of our people who are in sin, because usually it's too late. We could have helped them in the temptation phase, but now that it's exposed that they've done X, Y or Z, their lives have fallen apart. They come to us after it's all out of control, begging for help. But we as pastors have to tell them, "Well, we can pray for you or even counsel you, but the damage is already done. The toothpaste is out of the tube; you can't put it back in."

I tell you today, before it's too late—get help! When you're in the enticement and entrapment phase, before you endorse that thing, get help! Say, "I'm losing the battle. I'm struggling with this temptation. What can I do?" Because when enslavement happens, as James says, "*Sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*" Paul agrees, "*For the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23).

We've all died because of sin. We're spiritually separated from our God. Get ahold of that. These aren't words I'm just preaching to you. I'm preaching to myself as well. "Tim, get ahold of these things before they get a hold on you." How many of us could stand and give reports on how our temptations got away from us and caused us great harm and struggle and broken fellowship with our God and with our friends, bringing angst to our lives. Get a handle on this through the power of the Holy Spirit before it's too late.

4. The solution to temptation

How do we do that? Verses 16 and 17 help us with the solution.

Victory is found when we are grateful for God's bounty.

The first step to properly dealing with temptation is to be grateful for God's bounty. "*Every good gift and perfect gift is from above,*" verse 17 says, "*coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*" God does not change. He gives and gives and gives. In fact, we are given salvation. Although we needed it, we weren't even looking for it. Verse 18 tells us, "*Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth*"—the Scriptures. We were given new life, so that we might be an example.

So here's this great and giving God and here's what we need to think about. The reason you and I struggle with sin is that we are ungrateful for the things God has given us. It's really not hard to not cheat with junk food when you've just enjoyed an incredibly awesome meal. You're not tempted. You're full. You're filled with good things. Our temptation to cheat on our diets comes when we're starving. We're told that if we enter a grocery store when we're hungry, we'll buy all the bad stuff before we buy the good stuff. We have impulses and desires that are increased when we're hungry, which is what the store owners want. If you want to save money, only grocery shop after you've had a big meal. You'll buy the right things.

When you're really hungry, you'll eat anything to relieve the cravings. God says, "I've given you every good and perfect gift from heaven itself. I've given it to you for your good. Fill yourself on those things, because when you do that, half the battle is won." It wasn't accidental that the devil came to Jesus after He had been fasting. Satan knew He was hungry and weak and longing for things. That's when he struck.

So we must fill ourselves with God's good things, eating up the bounty of all He gives us.

Victory is found when we are guided by God's battle plan.

Here are five things I believe Scripture gives us to do when we're struggling with temptation:

- **Fight.** James 4:7 says, "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" First Peter 5:8–9 says, "*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*" Ephesians 6:11, "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*" You need to fight.
- **Follow.** James 4:7–8, "*Submit yourselves therefore to God....Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*" First Peter 2:21, "*For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*" Who are you to follow? The example of Jesus Christ.
- **Flee.** There are some sins you just can't hang around and try to grapple with on your own. You just run. First Corinthians 10:14, "*Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*" Second Timothy 2:22, "*So flee youthful passions.*" Romans 13:14, "*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*" And the one we learned here not long ago, Genesis 39:12. When tempted by Potiphar's wife, Joseph "*left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.*"

- Find a friend. Second Timothy 2:22, *"Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord."* Proverbs 13:20, *"Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."* First Corinthians 15:33, *"Bad company ruins good morals."* We fight, we follow Jesus, we flee when we need to, and we find a friend who will hold us accountable, who is trusted to carry our burdens.
- Feed. *"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you,"* Psalm 119:11. Christ Himself, when tempted, defeated the devil by quoting the Old Testament, starting with replies, *"It is written...It is written...It is written"* (Matthew 4:1-11).

What's the solution? We fight. We follow God in the Person of Jesus Christ. We flee when it comes to certain levels of immorality and idolatry. We find a friend who will help us, and we feed upon the Word of God, which is the word of truth. When we do that, you and I will be more prepared for the fight. We'll be ready when the enemy comes our way, because we've acknowledged our temptation, we've identified it, we've addressed it, and now we're ready to resist it.

Now comes the hard stuff. Now we have to go into this world where the devil puts all kinds of temptations before us, and we are called to go and live like Christ, saying no to sin and ungodly lusts, following Him. James says that when we do that, we will receive the good and perfect gifts that only God can give.

Village Bible Church | 847 North State Route 47, Sugar Grove, IL 60554 | (630) 466-7198 | www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.net).