

Join us in being on mission with God!

OUR VISION

To continually mature and grow as a united body of Jesus-imitators who live out God's greatest commandment to "Love" by exalting God and serving one another, and His greatest commission to "Go" by reaching into and shaping our local, regional, and global communities.

“Dynamics of Battling Temptation”

James 1:13-18

Getting Started

After an introductory time, discuss the following questions in your group or class.

You linger in the bleachers with friends at an ISU game in Ames, talking until you are among the last to leave. Your friends depart ahead of you. As you prepare to go, you move down the row and notice something silver near a pile of empty pop cans. It's a digital camera. What do you do?

You enjoy a pleasant stay at a motel during a vacation. You don't drink coffee, but packets are made available in the room. You think about a friend who likes to try different coffee. You think about taking the packets, and wonder if you should or not. What do you do?

You're meeting with friend at another's house. Your mate recalls an experience you both had at a lake years ago. As you listen, it's obvious that your mate is getting the details of the story mixed up in his/her mind. You think about interrupting to correct the details. What do you do?

You fill out an insurance form and come to the part where it asks about your weight. You know you're about ten pounds over where you normally are, and you intend to lose the weight you've put on lately. Do you record your typical weight or your actual weight?

An acquaintance calls you on the phone and immediately asks, "Are you busy on Thursday evening?" You don't have anything scheduled for that evening, but you assume that your acquaintance has something in mind you don't enjoy. Part of you wants to respond by stating that you have something important planned for that evening. What do you do?

Q: Each of us face daily temptations to mislead, exaggerate, make excuses, lie, withhold facts, take advantage of circumstances for money, say nice things insincerely, use anger or praise to manipulate, or make promises we are not likely to keep. Why do you think it is difficult to avoid these common challenges?

Thinking about Temptation

Our culture tends to view temptation as anything but a moral battle. It easily ascribes the temptation to some kind of defective ethical mechanism in our heads. We are told that these inclinations are relatively safe. People who wrestle with temptation have over-developed consciences that rob them from true happiness and joy in life. If we are overly scrupulous, we are told we're acting like Pharisees who made up rules to feel self-righteous or to control others.

1. Why do you think the call to fight temptation is increasingly viewed as something that may not be healthy? What makes the idea of giving in to things that were once considered wrong a good choice in some people's eyes?

2. Carl Menninger wrote a book a few decades ago entitled, *Whatever Became of Sin?* It showed how many people now classify things that were personal moral battles as unimportant or antiquated choices. Murder and child abuse still rise to the level of "sin," but most other behavior does not. What is the danger of living in a world where the



James 1:13-18:

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 one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. 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. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

definition of sin becomes increasingly narrow?

Sources of Temptation

3. Sometimes people jokingly (or seriously) blame their misbehavior on Satan, claiming, "The devil made me do it!" This attitude does acknowledge the reality of a malevolent supernatural being whom we call the devil. He is called "the tempter" in Matthew 4:3, where he challenges Jesus to command that the stones become bread. (See also 1 Thessalonians 3:5.) To what degree is it correct to say that Satan is the source of temptation?

4. How does 1 John 2:6 describe the sources of temptation that entice us in the world today? Which ones, if any, do you think are most powerful in our culture at this time?

God and Temptation

1. The Bible declares that God is sovereign. He can direct, allow, or permit anything he chooses on this earth. Some would argue, therefore, that whenever God puts you in a situation of acute need, relieving that need becomes more important than anything else. For example, a mother may shoplift some food to feed her three children. Since God has allowed such dire circumstances, some may argue that he is responsible for the temptation to take food. How would you respond to this reasoning?

2. James 1:13 insists that the conclusion that God is tempting us is false. What two reasons does he give for this assertion?

The Greek word "tempt" in verse 13 can be used positively or negatively. Sometimes God "tests" us. (See John 6:6, for example.) In most cases, it is used negatively. Many times the gospels use the word to describe the traps the Pharisees set for Jesus. (See Matthew 22:18.)

3. What do you think is the difference between an ethical "test" and a similar challenge that would be in the category of a temptation?

Dynamics of Battling Temptation

4. What kind of outcome is in mind when someone is tempted? How is this different from what God did with Abraham in Genesis 22:1 ff.?

5. What difference does it make to you that the Bible insists God will never tempt you?

Responding to Temptation

The Greek word for “desire” in verse 14 can also be negative or positive, depending on the structure of the sentence and the context. Once again, most of the uses of the word in the New Testament are in the negative sense. The metaphors used here are hunting terms.

1. The power of inner desires is depicted by two strong verbs in verse 14. How does *desire* impact us according to this claim of James? Describe in your own words the kind of coercion desire exerts on us.

2. One of the responses of desire is aggressive and direct, the other is more subtle. What are some of the temptations in our culture that tend to be blatant? What are some that tend to be more quiet and seductive?

3. Verse 15 describes a process where desire continues unchecked and bears offspring in our lives. What is the offspring of unchallenged desire?

4. There is a second generation in verse 15. If sin grows up and becomes mature in our lives, something else emerges. The word here is not the word for “give birth” but a uglier word that could be translated “spawn.” What is the ultimate outcome of unchecked desire?

5. The concept of death here most clearly refers to spiritual death without Christ. But sin can breed a kind of death in other things as well. What are some of the things that die if we allow sin to continue unchecked in our lives?

Verses 16-18 give a contrast to the ugly offspring of unchecked desire.

6. Verses 16-17 urge us not to be fooled. What is it that we can be fooled about that will mislead us into yielding to an evil desire?



Reaching Up and Reaching Out

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7. James argues that the source of the good stuff we want in life is not found by traveling down the path of temptation. The best things in life are in a different place—in God himself. Why do you think he wants us to view God as the “Father of the heavenly lights”?

Two horizontal lines for writing an answer to question 7.

We celebrate the changes that happen when children mature and develop into capable adults. For us, change is a good thing, especially when the change is in the direction of growing skill, better character, and wiser thinking. In one sense, the idea of God not changing makes him sound uninteresting and old-fashioned. But Malachi 3:6 and other verses insist (along with James) that God does not change.

8. What does James have in mind when he states in verse 17 that God does not change?

Two horizontal lines for writing an answer to question 8.

9. What might be possible with God if he did change? (Remember that God is perfect in qualities like his love, his justice, his wisdom, and his faithfulness.) Why would change in the case of God be a bad thing?

Two horizontal lines for writing an answer to question 9.

10. How does the unchanging nature of God as the giver of all perfect gifts help us when we face temptation?

Two horizontal lines for writing an answer to question 10.

11. Instead of evil desire giving birth to sin, which produces death, there is another conception for those who trust in God and his goodness. What is the birth that is celebrated in verse 18?

Two horizontal lines for writing an answer to question 11.

12. The ‘mother’ of sin in verse 15 is unchallenged desire. What is the ‘mother’ of the birth mentioned in verse 18? What does Ephesians 1:13 add to this picture?

Two horizontal lines for writing an answer to question 12.

13. James speaks of the consequence of this spiritual birth relative to firstfruits. What is the purpose of the firstfruits in the thinking of the Old Testament? (Hint: See 2 Chronicles 31:5-6.)

Two horizontal lines for writing an answer to question 13.

14. How does understanding our purpose as people born by God’s truth change the way we can look at temptation and its appeal?

Two horizontal lines for writing an answer to question 14.

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