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I went camping with about 30 boy scouts one weekend. Thirty boy scouts in a cabin for 3 days, these are times for valium. After 3 days that place is pretty ripe, the air is just thick with testosterone, talk of football, and body odor. During that trip many of the boys had to get their campfire merit badge. They huddled in a huge fire pit outside individually making little teepees of sticks and screaming for matches to light their own fire. They'd light the match while standing up in the wind and by the time they bent over it would be out. The scout masters were telling them the obvious; you need to get down close.

They were determined to get their fire lit. About a thousand matches met their death to create a handful of small campfires. The process took an hour. But in the end there were 5 little fires blazing on the ground, and by nighttime they had combined those fires to a roaring inferno. Young boys just starting to feel the effects of manhood were dancing around that campfire and poking it with sticks like some tribal ritual. It's a wonder there were no deaths or injuries.

<sup>13</sup>When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup>but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. <sup>15</sup>Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

<sup>16</sup>Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. <sup>17</sup>Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows, <sup>18</sup>he chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created.

## PRAY

Last week we explored the issue of trials; God allows trial to mold a mature and complete character in us. We said trials produce testing and are opportunities to see God at work in us. Trials produce perseverance, leading to a maturity and completeness in Christ; lacking nothing. So, trials = testing = perseverance = maturity & completeness = the crown of life. In

that process God showers us with wisdom, not finding fault with any of his children.

Temptation is different than trial, although trial can bring about a temptation. Trial happens to us, temptation & sin we invite into our lives - we suffer by choice. It begins with me - my own evil desires. One of the gifts of the Spirit is self-control, and it is by this that I must keep desire in check through the power of the Spirit. Otherwise, I allow myself to be dragged away & enticed; I cannot blame God or even Satan, it begins and ends with my desire. Jesus modeled for us how to fight this by the Word of God when Satan tempted him which is portrayed here. We must notice, when I don't imitate Jesus in temptation, and give in, sin is birthed. When sin is first born, just an infant, still easily hidden, it seems almost harmless. However, as it matures & grows it takes over and we stand realizing that we have a tiger by the tail.

You've heard of the stories of people who buy exotic pets like tigers or pythons. They're cute when they're little, you can handle them. But as they grow, people panic, because now this thing you've invited into your home is uncontrollable and dangerous - and they end up dumped in the wilderness otherwise the owner would be eaten alive. That is the image James is painting of this sin process.

Proposition: We are to imitate Jesus.

Question: Will we choose imitation or temptation?

Our natural inclination in trial is to pray it stops, we often do not look at the process understanding God has something for us in it. We think trials will kill us. Rarely do we say, "God is allowing me to go through this for my betterment although this is hard." We need to realize the trial is not the most life threatening thing. What is most threatening isn't what is being done to me, but what is being done by me; my reaction. The real threat when faced with trial is that I may NOT choose the path of God, but I may to yield to temptation, to fall into sin myself. James will outline this second path in vv13-15 then urge us back to the former in vv16-18.

A man told a story once of a village woman who had her husband and children murdered in her home, in front of her, by a fellow villager. Any one of us would not blame her for hating that man. It is only natural. Her temptation is to hatred and bitterness, but in choosing that path she becomes a victim again. The path which brings freedom is forgiveness,

‘Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.’; the Jesus path. Aligning ourselves with Christ we must do as the Jesus does, forgive. That may sound harsh, but it’s a basic truth of the human heart. When we choose bitterness and hatred we eat ourselves alive. Mark Twain once said, ‘Feeding a dog his own tail will not make him fat.’

That woman realized this truth. She went to the jail to forgive him, but when she saw him she couldn’t. Understandable. Forgiveness is a process. She left for a year and was restless. The man was released a year later and went back to the village. He promptly came to her door and begged forgiveness, which she was then able to give. In the end, she adopted him as her son and he lived in the same house with her that he had murdered her family in. Very Jesus like of her, don’t you think? We killed him, yet he forgives and adopts us as his children.

Temptation does not just come in the forms of sex and food; the outward things. Desire drives temptation. James is addressing the attitudes of our hearts in the midst of trial, what will we choose imitation or temptation? [Temptation to sin, leads to death; not God’s will for us. Blame-shifting has always been the norm for human kind. Eve blamed the serpent; Adam blamed Eve, and then blames God, ‘This woman YOU gave me did this.’ It is hard to take responsibility for our desires which lead to our sin, but it’s necessary.](#)

James counters this blame-shifting with three truths about God in this passage; holiness, Grace & Immutability. It is said that flattery is the highest form of compliment. God is holy, unable to sin, and does not tempt, and we mimic his holiness by denouncing a life of sin. Choosing to learn under his corrective hand we show our love to him; we flatter by imitation. When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; God is holy, as far from sin as the east is from the west. It’s the reason why Christ had to die for sin, to overcome its power, which leads to death. 1 john 1:5 says, ‘...God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.’

God’s will for us is holiness; never towards temptation or sin. So, where does temptation come from? Within us, ‘but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.’ As if we have a box of matches within us just like our boy scouts. An evil desire within us contrary to Gods holiness. When facing trials we often look for the escape

route; the easy way out, or the temptation. The route which promises so much; hate him, he deserves it, you'll feel better. Get him back; no one would blame you. Turn on the internet and go surfing, it's harmless, you need a break, you're bored and have had so much on your mind. When we pick up that box of matches and place the head of the match to the box we have made our choice, we strike and 'then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.' It burns us up in the end. [Sin is enjoyable for a time, but the promises are empty. They are false, destroy, and don't give life. We allow ourselves to be dragged away and enticed, giving over our allegiance to something other than God. In doing so we no longer serve Jesus, but ourselves. Yet in doing that, we serve Satan. And, it is not within his character, or even his power, to bring life, only death.](#)

That's not to say Christians can lose their salvation. Death in this passage means death of an ideal. Death we experience when the tempter does not come through with promises of life, satisfaction, or wholeness. Escape is the bait, death is the trap. But we must put to death the idea that we can escape through anything but Jesus. You are single and lonely; when will God give you the woman of your dreams? Maybe she is right in front of you, a solid beautiful woman who walks with God and would challenge your faith; a woman who would love you, even for your faults, making you a better man each day of your life.

But your evil desire has convinced you she has to be the physical equivalent of Angelina Jolie or Megan Fox. She has to be smart, but not smarter than you. She has to be witty, but not more than you. She has to be funny, but not more than you. She has to make a good salary, but not more than you. She has to challenge you, but always submit in the end. She has to be independent, but still wash your underwear, cook your dinner, and wait on you hand & foot. You cannot find this perfect Aphrodite here in church, so you troll the bars praying, ['God if she is here when I walk in, let our eyes meet! And if she is not a Christian, let me lead her there!'](#) Of course you go to eight bars saying that prayer every time as you enter the door. Finally at the eighth bar your eyes meet hers, and you look to heaven and say, 'God, you do answer prayers!' Has he answered your prayer, or have your desires enticed you and drug you closer to sin?

The bait is set, she smiles, you bite. Fast forward 10 years. The girl of God's dreams for you is happily married to a wonderful doctor with 2

children living well. You however are trolling the bars again, lonely and broke. Your little 'dream bar chick' convinced you to marry only after she told you she was pregnant, because you were 'married to her in your heart' so you slept with her. The marriage lasted 2 years and 3 months. Your child hates you since you never come to see them because you and the ex don't get along. Your bank account is tapped monthly for alimony going towards her mortgage in Gladwyne, so you'll never get ahead. She has so much contempt for you that she's made sure you will suffer for years to come. You are approaching middle age, the little Aphrodite's in the bar no longer look at you, because you have a belly and grey hair; they call you sir now.

But there is a toothless biker chick at the end of the bar smiling broadly at you, winking. What happened to all the promises? And whose fault is it? [It's not spiritual death, or even loss of salvation; it is death of an ideal - the ideal that your path is better than Jesus path.](#)

[You may feel attacked verbally by someone. Who would blame you for hating them? You may start to gossip, grow bitter and hateful. Laying awake at night, not sleeping. It affects your work together, everyone feels it. Your performance wanes, people start to distance themselves from you because the anger is palpable; they don't want to be bothered with it. Are hatred, bitterness, and un-forgiveness worth the loss of friendship, sleep, joy, lightheartedness, and even promotion? Why not choose maturity? The Jesus path is practical.](#)

When we react guarding our 'rights' and swinging back we lose. Whenever we adopt the worldly response of inner turmoil, and the tactics of coercion and manipulation, we lose. [Whenever we say, "I know better than God" we lose. This is not only on an individual basis, but as a body of believers as well. History has shown us even on a corporate scale that any time we try to advance the Gospel by coercion or manipulation, we've lost the Gospel; we've lost credibility and integrity. The temptation to revert to worldly standards when faced with a trial is strong, but it never delivers its promise. The mistake of the Crusades is still fresh in the Muslim mind, hamstringing kingdom progress to this day. Christian missionaries for years to come in Sulawesi, Indonesia will reap the unwanted benefits of pastors who blessed the swords of their congregants who went out to kill Muslims because they were being attacked themselves. One missionary told of a pastor he met in Africa that said, after seeing his congregation kill each other in local](#)

warfare (even their own family members), that he never knew that he was pastor of a congregation of killers.

Sin is deceptive. Donald Miller, in *Blue Like Jazz*, was asked by his friend if he was capable of murder, rape, and the like. His first reaction was no, but after thinking, he had to admit that his heart was capable of such sin. If you think that is not in your heart to kill or commit other atrocities, you have not come to understand the nature of sin. Listen to your words for a week and notice how much your own speech belittles others just because they are different. Notice as a Caucasian what you feel like when an African American or Hispanic enters the room; then you'll realize you're still a racist, one ugly situation away from applauding a lynching under the right circumstances. The same goes for Africans, Asians, Hispanics and others – no one is off the hook, there is this blackness in all of us.

Mature Christians don't blame-shift they admit their propensity towards sin. Someone once said, 'Opportunity knocks only once, but temptation leans on the doorbell'. Oscar Wilde once said, 'I can resist anything but temptation.' Because temptation woos something deep in us. It is only when we are honest with ourselves and stop blaming others, or God, that we can start to develop perseverance which leads to life. James reminds us of the Lordship of Christ, and our call to imitate him in ALL ways, and absolutely in our hearts.

The second thing James says about God is that he is gracious, 'Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above.' God is not tempting through trials; but showers us with good gifts in our trials. Trials actually become the good gifts of testing which bring life. God's loving direction in trials brings life more abundantly, and he delivers his promise fully. And like him, we are to imitate Christ giving good gifts to others in the midst of trial. Even when we are persecuted to death, we must say, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing! Be Jesus. It says that these gifts are 'coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.' We have a father of all power and ability to lead us through; the Holy Spirit which resides in power in our hearts. A father who does not change like shifting shadows. The Spirit himself who can bring about self-control.

Which brings us to James 3<sup>rd</sup> point about God; He is Immutable. He does not change. He is solid. He can be relied on even in the worst of

circumstances. Which enables us to NOT ask those 5 questions we listed last week which lead to temptation:

Fear – What will become of me?

Anger – How can they do that to me?

Self-pity – Won't somebody feel sorry for me?

Envy of others – Why aren't they suffering like I am?

Confusion – Why is this happening to me?

We can trust that God is using these circumstances for his glory and our good. It leads us to trust, and be confident in, the unchanging love of our gracious Father. In mimicking his holiness and Grace, we develop something of this 3<sup>rd</sup> quality of God, his unchanging nature; we become solid. So, James is calling us to imitate God in his holiness, grace, and immutability.

In the midst of trial, will we trust in a holy, gracious, unchanging god, or will we believe the lies of escapism through sin which never delivers? Choosing rightly leads to God's will for us, 'He CHOSE to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created.' His will is that he chose you to be reborn through the word of truth; an imitation of his Son, Jesus. You and I are to be a model, to be like Jesus to the world. Sin derails and destroys the process; God is holy, gracious, and unchanging, coming down to lift you up. Will you respond in faith or yield to temptation? Will you choose imitation or temptation?

Let me give you some very practical advice.

- Do not put yourself in situations of temptation.
  - Mature Christians...
    - do not date behind closed doors, have their girlfriend or boyfriend sleep over, or live with someone before marriage
    - do not have 'emotional' relationships with someone other than their spouse
    - listen to wise counsel and obey even when they don't feel like it (you will be the product of the 5 people you spend the most time with). You are allowed mistakes as long as they are new mistakes. The first time may be a mistake, the second time is a choice of willful disobedience

- avoid even the 'hint of sexual immorality' - perception is reality, you are responsible for it
- respect the opposite sex in word, attitude, and action
- choose healthy patterns of spiritual formation
  - daily quiet times, allowing themselves to be washed by the Word & commit it to memory
  - engage in one local church home; worship, sacraments, and service
- recognize their propensity for sin in all situations and check unhealthy desires against the backdrop of grace
- Run through trial, not away and sacrifice the idol of self
- Key verses to commit to memory...
  - 1 Corinthians 10:13, “<sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. <sup>1</sup>
  - Genesis 4:7 <sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”<sup>2</sup>
  - 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 <sup>3</sup> It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you should learn to control your own body <sup>a</sup> in a way that is holy and honorable, <sup>5</sup> not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. <sup>e</sup> The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. <sup>7</sup> For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. <sup>8</sup> Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*. 2011 (1 Co 10:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>2</sup> *The New International Version*. 2011 (Ge 4:6–7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit. <sup>3</sup>

- James 1:12-15 <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The New International Version*. 2011 (1 Th 4:3–8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>4</sup> *The New International Version*. 2011 (Jas 1:12–15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.