

## “Shooting One’s Self in the Foot”

### James 1:12-15

Sunday, October 24th, 2021

I remember a time when I was about 9 years of age, going to a friend’s house to see if he could come outside and play. His mother answered the door, and invited me in to wait for my friend until he finished cleaning up. As I waited for my friend, I saw one of those Tootsie Roll banks on a chest in his room. I picked up the bank to look inside, and it was full of the bite-size chewy chocolate candies! The thought entered my mind, “He won’t miss one.” So I took one of the Tootsie Rolls and ate it. It was *good*, so I helped myself to another. And another. And another. I filled my pants pocket with 8 or 10 of them.

I don’t remember much else about that occasion - we went outside and played. I remember, whether it was later that day or another, my friend’s mother scolding me for taking her son’s candies. My mind is pretty efficient at covering up my sins. I rationalize that at least I didn’t take any money from that Tootsie Roll bank; but my memory is a bit foggy - I may have felt badly and apologized. But, the Holy Spirit working in me is finding the going a bit bumpy and rocky.

Oh, that that illustration was the only one from my life...

Both the sacred Scriptures (Bible) *and* our experiences teach us that everyone struggles with temptation. Like death, none of us is exempt from temptation. The struggles we have with temptation are often synonymous with the trials James described for us thus far in our study of the New Testament book named after him.

In the 4 verses before us today (**James 1:12-15**), the words ‘temptation,’ ‘tempted,’ and ‘tempt’ are mentioned 6 times - 4 times in verse 13 alone. James will show us that the sin that results from our succumbing to temptation is a process, and the longer we stay in that process, the more susceptible we remain to yielding to temptation.

#### **James 1:12-15:**

**12** Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. **13** Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. **14** But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. **15** Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

Bobby desperately wanted a new bicycle. His plan was to save his nickels, dimes and quarters until he finally had enough to buy a new 10-speed. Each night he prayed that God would help him save his money. Kneeling beside his bed, he prayed, “Dear Lord, please help me save my money for a new bike. And please, Lord, don’t let the ice cream man come down the street again tomorrow.”

*Bobby has some distance yet to travel to endure temptation, doesn’t he?* I’m going to look at today’s text verse by verse, much as I did with the previous 3 verses a couple of weeks ago. So, look again with me to verse 12 - “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Today's passage starts out happily. In fact, another word for "blessed" is happy. The one who endures temptation, James says, happily receives a crown of life. *Perhaps you've heard of this "crown of life" mentioned here in **James 1:12**?* It appears in one other New Testament passage - the Bible's last book, **Revelation 2:10**. Jesus is here addressing the persecuted Church in Smyrna - "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." This crown of life is awarded to those of God's children who faithfully endure sufferings.

It's interesting if we were to stop for a moment and consider our motivations in serving God in our times of trial. *What motivates you in time of trial? Is it securing relief from your trials? Perhaps you run away from your trials, essentially withdrawing from life? Who/what do we serve if we perform deeds for the sake of the crown of life? Whom are we serving in that situation - ourselves, right?* Our chief motivation for our Christian service ought to be love for God and our neighbors.

To love God, we must seek to obey Him. The Lord has promised the crown of life to those who persevere in loving Him. Evidence of our heartfelt ministry to others is a life that strives to please God by keeping His commandments, which includes serving Him and others.

It's always the case that Jesus is the epitome of the blessed man; and today's text is surely no exception of that here in **James 1:12**. **Mark 10:45** reveals this about Jesus, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Jesus was in no way focused upon Himself, nor was He distracted from the heart of His ministry, which was and is the salvation of the souls that God the Father had given God the Son (Jesus).

I like what seminarian and commentator Dan Doriani writes here, "Jesus wore a crown of thorns so that all who believe would receive the crown of life." (Doriani, 32) *Isn't that great?* Jesus wore a crown of thorns, but a day is soon coming when the elders in glory will lay down their crowns at Jesus' feet.

We move to the second verse (13) in today's passage, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." Again, Jesus is the model we seek to follow, even as He walked this earth seeking those whom the Father had given Him. Perhaps the best illustration of this is **Matthew 4:1-11** where we see Satan trying to do the impossible - tempting God.

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. **2** For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. **3** During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

**4** But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, **6** and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'"

7 Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the Lord your God.' 8 Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me." 10 "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"

11 Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus."

Notice **James 1:13** says of us, "when" we are tempted. Every one of us is tempted - several times every day. The battle rages between our flesh and the Spirit of God, between the Lord and Satan. We must be ever vigilant to detect when we are being tempted, and God in His grace has given us a whole room full of people who are also members and friends to help us achieve the same end. If you are without membership in a local church, you are welcome here. If you are a member of a church and are trying to get through this life without the rest of your church family, then you need to consider how you'll stay connected to us.

This verse also gives us a glimpse into something that God cannot do. You've likely heard someone ask brain teasers like, "Is God able to make a rock big enough that He cannot lift it?" Folly! Silliness! James says here that God is not able to be tempted by evil. I cannot wait until I am translated to glory and can say that I cannot be tempted by evil! But, I don't want to go before God has completed His work in me!

God doesn't tempt us, but He does try us. *What's the difference?* "A test can be taken two ways. We can view it as a trial and turn to God for aid, so we persevere. Or we can read it as a tragedy, senseless accident, or as a failure - on God's part - to love and protect us." (Dorani, 34)

God tests us so we can see how our faith in Him can be of benefit for us. Some "open doors" shouldn't be gone through, especially if entering them causes the professing Christian to sin. For instance, the job that looks a good paying job, but if taken would require the Christian to miss regular attendance at Sunday worship. That situation is never what it appears - people get hired, then their supervisor schedules them for work every other Sunday, and before they know it, the Christian is having all sorts of problems, because he/she is sick, travelling, or vacationing on those off Sundays from work, rather than attending worship. It's one way how people fade away from the Christian faith. They weren't rooted deeply in the first place.

Verses 14 & 15 lay out the process for temptation.

1 - First we are drawn away into temptation by our own desires and enticed. Some desires are good. We wouldn't move in any particular direction without them - we can desire good friends or fellowship, or helping others in some way. Desires cause us to move and get going. But, misdirected desires are what James addresses here. If our desires lure us to satisfaction, pleasure, or advantage improperly gained, they become sin.

2 - Once desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin. This step takes us over the edge of the waterfall into the water below. We are at the stage where we must act on our conceived desires or we cannot be satisfied. What makes this step especially difficult to overcome is that

temptation always looks good or puts on a positive, attractive face. We take the bait at this stage.

3 - As sin grows - becomes full grown - it brings forth death. Paul writes in **Romans Chapter 6** that the wages of sin is death. Death is more than the death of the body, tragic as that is. Rather, just as faith and endurance lead to eternal life, so selfish desire and sin lead to eternal death.

In taking the path of least resistance, which is the way of temptation, we prove ourselves to be weak believers at best, and spiritual frauds at worst. Temptation is so deceptive, deceitful, and dangerous. We must not let each other swirl down the drain in our failed attempts at resisting temptation!

I find this lengthy quote by the late CS Lewis to be helpful.

"No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness — they have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means — the only complete realist."

One of the largest freshwater turtles is the alligator snapping turtle. Found primarily in the southeastern United States, these massive turtles have been known to weigh close to 250 pounds. They are carnivorous, and while their diet is primarily fish, they have been known to eat almost anything else they can find in the water—even in a few cases small alligators! The alligator snapping turtle relies on a uniquely deceitful method of foraging for fish.

The turtle will lie completely still on the floor of a lake or river with its mouth wide open. At the end of the turtle's tongue is a small, pink, worm-shaped appendage. The turtle wiggles the end of its tongue so that it looks like a worm moving through the water. When a fish comes to eat the worm, the turtle's jaws rapidly close, trapping the fish so that it cannot escape.

Similarly to the snapping turtle's lure, temptation comes in the guise of something desirable, but it always carries destruction with it in the end. If we could see the end result rather than the tempting part, it would be far easier to resist. But Satan knows this, so he cleverly disguises what is deadly in the guise of something pleasurable.

On the TV show "Hee Haw," Doc Campbell is confronted by a patient who says he broke his arm in two places. The doc replies, "Well then, stay out of them places!"

We cannot regularly put ourselves in the face of temptation and not be affected. When faced with the problem of temptation, we need to take the good doctor's advice and "stay out of them places."