

m MASTERCLASS | JAMES

DAILY DEVOTION

DAY 3

READ

JAMES 1:13-18

FOCUS

¹³WHEN TEMPTED, NO ONE SHOULD SAY, "GOD IS TEMPTING ME" FOR GOD CANNOT BE TEMPTED BY EVIL, NOR DOES HE TEMPT ANYONE; ¹⁴BUT EACH PERSON IS TEMPTED WHEN THEY ARE DRAGGED AWAY BY THEIR OWN EVIL DESIRE AND ENTICED. ¹⁵THEN, AFTER DESIRE HAS CONCEIVED, IT GIVES BIRTH TO SIN; AND SIN, WHEN IT IS FULL-GROWN, GIVES BIRTH TO DEATH. ¹⁶DON'T BE DECEIVED, MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. ¹⁷EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF THE HEAVENLY LIGHTS, WHO DOES NOT CHANGE LIKE SHIFTING SHADOWS. ¹⁸HE CHOSE TO GIVE US BIRTH THROUGH THE WORD OF TRUTH, THAT WE MIGHT BE A KIND OF FIRSTFRUITS OF ALL HE CREATED.

REFLECTION from PASTOR CODY SURRATT

There is a lot going on in this passage. James talks about sin: it's origin, the way it lives in us, how it is put to death, and how believers can resist it. I want to pull out three simple learnings:

1. Trials, Tests and Temptations

In the original language, James uses the same word in verse 12 (translated as trial and test) as in verse 13 (translated as temptation), which gives us insight into the nature of trials, tests, and temptations. By looking at the context, it seems that trials and tests are things that happen outside of us, while temptation is something that takes place within us--it's our response to trials and tests. However, the fact that they are all the same word should, at the very least, tell us that they are interconnected. From personal observation and experience, we know that when you experience a trial, you are simultaneously being tested and tempted. For example, if you lose your job (a trial), you are experiencing a test (do you trust God?), and you might be tempted to doubt God or even abandon your faith.

James also points out that trials don't just come in the form of adversity but in success as well (see V9 "the rich should take pride in their humiliation"). If this is true, it means that virtually any and every change in life is not only a trial but a test: will I use this as an opportunity to become more or less like Christ? Because remaining the same is not an option.

If you were to pick any major season of life change, you can see this is true. I'll use a personal one, becoming a pastor. Before I went into ministry, I was like a lot of Christians: I had seasons where I felt "on fire" for the Lord, when I was passionate about the Scripture, prayer, and wanted to serve. Also like many Christians, I've had seasons where I was less than excited about my faith--when I put it on the back burner for a while. It's not that I didn't believe or was living in rebellion, I was just busy with other things and didn't focus or think about it as much.

When I became a pastor, my job was to now stand in front of people on a weekly (if not daily) basis and say "God is so great!"--even when I may not have felt that way (The Trial). I'm now forced to make a decision (The Test): I can either sit down and pray my way through it so that I do believe what I'm preaching or I can act like a hypocrite--put on a spiritual mask and pretend (The Temptation). Either way, I'm not allowed to be indifferent to my spiritual temperature any longer.

Everyone is in a season of change, big or small, and with it comes the opportunity to either become more like Christ or less, but remaining the same is not an option.

2. Circumstances are not the Cause

James says that man is tempted "By their own evil desire." This means that you and I sin because we want to, not because we are forced to. In a day where many people are trying to shrug off personal responsibility for their poor choices and instead blame their circumstances, the Scriptures are clear: we have free will and should not confuse the circumstances of our sin as the cause of our sin. Yes, the circumstances may influence us, but they are not the ultimate determinate, our choice is.

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If you were a student in an Algebra class and the teacher were to give you a test, what they are doing is revealing what is already in you (your knowledge of Algebra). If you fail (which I did!), it is not the test (the circumstances) that caused you to fail; the test simply revealed what was already happening within you. The same is true when it comes to our moral choices; when we sin it's not that the test or the trial has caused us to sin, it simply gave us the opportunity to reveal what was already within us.

3. A Greater Love

The way we counter our "evil desires" that ultimately lead to death is not simply through trying harder, white-knuckling it, and gritting our teeth--although that may do if we find ourselves in a pinch (Think of Joseph fleeing from Potiphar's wife). The long-term strategy to deal with sin is not to just resist temptation, it's to find a greater love. We must love something or someone more than we love the thing that is tempting us, which is why the Scripture calls us to love Christ more than we love anything else.

QUESTIONS

- DO YOU MORE COMMONLY TRY TO WHITE-KNUCKLE YOUR WAY THROUGH TRIALS? OR DO YOU VIEW THEM AS A TEST/PROVING GROUND TO PROVE THE WORK GOD HAS BEEN DOING IN YOUR LIFE?
- WHEN YOU ARE TEMPTED, WHAT "GREATER LOVE" CAN HELP YOU TO WITHSTAND THE TEST? HOW COULD THIS HELP YOU?