

Conception by Deception

Suffering, Tests, and Temptation Part 8
James 1:13-15 11-30-2014

Summary: God does not tempt us – He is our ally. The real enemy is within. Desire draws us out of our safe place with God and lures us with bait. When we allow that to happen, sin is conceived (the mother is desire and the father is the deception – the baited hook).

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James 1:13 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 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.

Introduction: The Problem of Temptation

Last week I saw a new product on TV that I thought was a great idea. It is a kitchen canister with a locking top on a timer, and it’s for controlling temptation. The idea is, you make a batch of cookies, you have one or two, then you put the rest in this canister and set the timer, and it locks until the prescribed time. There is no override, so there is no way to get to those cookies until the time you set. I think it’s a great idea. Instead of buying ice cream and then throwing half of it out because you don’t want that temptation in the house, you just put it in that thing and make it so it won’t unlock at 10:30 at night when your craving hits. I think if my family saw that thing they would want to get one – not so much for their temptation problem, but for mine. Then they could bring some leftovers home from a restaurant and lock them up so Dad wouldn’t end up eating them for lunch the next day.

The reason there is a market for a product like that is because the problem of temptation is universal. It is one thing all human beings have in common. Christians and non-Christians, secularists, atheists – no matter what people believe, every human being finds himself or herself doing things they wish they wouldn’t do. People reject religion because they don’t want to be bound by rules; they invent some other

standard that allows a lot more freedom, and yet no matter how lenient or relaxed that standard is, they find themselves saying, “I don’t want to do this anymore because it causes problems,” and yet they keep on doing it. The whole human race is plagued with temptation.

Someone once said, “I can resist anything but temptation.” That’s a humorous statement, but it brings up a profound question. What gives temptation so much power? We have free will, right? Why are there situations where someone says, “This thing is ruining my life. It’s ruining my marriage. It’s destroying my body. It’s taking all my time and money. I hate it! I don’t ever want to do it again!” And they are sincere – if they could buy a canister that would lock them out of that particular temptation, they would gladly do it. And yet, when temptation hits, all that resolve is out the window and they cave like a house of cards. What gives temptation so much power?

It is one of the most powerful forces known to man. Temptation has brought down the mightiest warriors and the most disciplined people. Proverbs 7:26 says **her slain are a mighty throng**. If you look over the battlefield of human history, temptation stands there with blood dripping from her sword, as it were, looking over the corpses of millions of the strongest men and women ever born, and she boasts: “I defeated them all.” Kings and presidents have been willing to risk all their power and position and reputation all for a moment of pleasure promised by temptation. Men and women have sacrificed their children, their marriages, placed every dime to their name plus thousands more they borrowed on a poker table – all because temptation gave the order. Where does temptation get that kind of power over people? And why is it that I can easily say no to 100 desirable things, but not to this one thing? Some of you can say no to the TV, but not to the refrigerator – others can say no to the refrigerator but not to TV. You enjoy them both, but one seems to have power over you, and the other one you have power over it. Why? Where does the power come from?

The Ally Above

Normally whenever we ask the question, “Where does the power for something come from?” the answer is really easy: God. But in this case, that would be the wrong answer. Temptation has incredible power, but the power behind temptation is not from God.

Temptation Is Not from God

James 1:13 When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.”

Rule #1 when it comes to temptation – don’t try to blame God. That is actually the only command in this whole paragraph – Don’t say that your temptation is from God. If your answer to all those questions about where temptation comes from is any version of, “**God is tempting me**” then you are way off.

Context

And this is important for James to say because for 12 verses now he has been talking to us about God’s purposes in trials. God sends trials into our lives to test us and refine us, so we should consider them pure joy because they are good things sent by God to change us for His glory. But in the Greek, the word for **trial** and the word for **temptation** are the exact same word. The only way to know if the author means trial or temptation is by the context. So James has been talking about trials coming from God, but now he wants to make sure we don’t misunderstand. So he spells it out: “When I say that these things are good things sent by God, I’m talking about trials, not temptations.” In fact, you could translate verse 13 this way: **When you face a trial, don’t say God is tempting me**. Trials are from God; temptations are not. Temptation is an enticement toward sin, and God never does that.

That’s important to know because sometimes when God puts you through trial after trial, and you keep failing the test again and again, you can start to wonder, “Is God toying with me? Does He want me to fail?”

God is Your Ally

And James' answer to that is an emphatic, "No!" James wants to help us deal with one of our most deadly problems in life – temptation. He wants to help us win this war, but you cannot win a war if you are confused about who is on your side and who the enemy is. You have an enemy, and you have an ally. If you turn your guns away from your enemy and fire them at your ally, you will lose the war. This is a war where we are totally outmatched, and so our only hope of victory is in our ally. And our ally is God. In your battle against sin, you have an ally in heaven. God is not against you – He is on your side.

God Does Not Want Evil

No, God is not toying with you. He would never do that.

13 ...For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone

In order for God to entice you to evil, someone would have to first entice Him to evil and that is impossible. God has only perfect, infinite hatred for sin – which means it is impossible for God to even want to sin. He can't desire it. He can't like it – not even a tiny little bit - so no temptation would work on Him. God cannot have anything in His heart toward evil other than absolute, complete, utter hatred. He has no interest in generating evil. He doesn't need it, He doesn't want it, He doesn't like it, and so He does not tempt people to do it. God never exerts any force on your soul to push in the direction of sin.¹ One hundred percent of the influence God exerts on you is in the direction of righteousness, never in the direction of sin.

“What about when God uses someone's sin as part of His plan – like Judas?”

I believe the way God does that is by letting go, not by pushing. When someone is pulling hard in the direction of sin, and God, in His mercy, is restraining his sin to some degree, there are times when God will give some more slack in the leash, remove some of the restraints, and allow that person to go further into sin to accomplish God's good purposes. But never does He ever push us in that direction. Never does He entice us in that direction.

God Helps You Fight Temptation!

That is great news for us, because if God were the power behind temptation, the battle would be hopeless. We would be doomed to lose. But the great news is that God is our ally, not our enemy. The whole Trinity is involved in helping you stand against temptation. The Holy Spirit empowers us to defeat temptation if we walk with Him.

Galatians 5:16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Jesus empowers us in the battle against temptation by supplying grace:

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation ... 12 teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives...

How does that work?

14 Jesus Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

¹ And if you have those purposes in view, there is even a sense in which you can say that God was behind the temptation. **1 Chronicles 21:1 Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.** God allowed that to happen because of His anger against Israel. It was time for judgment, and so He allowed this temptation that would result in further sin, bringing further judgment. And in that sense you could actually say that God did it. **2 Samuel 24:1 Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.”** God was accomplishing His purposes. But lest we get confused and imagine that God was the one who actually pushed David in the direction of sin, we have 1 Chronicles 21:1 to let us know that it was Satan who did the pushing.

There are all kinds of things that Jesus purchased for us on the cross that give us the power to not only say no to temptation, but to become **eager to do what is good**. So the Spirit helps us, the Son helps us, and the Father also helps us.

1 Corinthians 10:13 ... 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 stand up under it.

So God the Father uses providence to make sure we always have a way of escape. God the Son gives us grace to enable us to desire holiness more than sin. And God the Spirit empowers us to defeat the desires of the flesh when we keep in step with Him.

We have some air cover in this war. You are not on your own. When that temptation hits and it just seems absolutely overpowering, and everything in you is saying, "I can't resist this!" – don't forget about your ally in heaven. When you say, "I can't resist this temptation," God is up in heaven saying, "Did you forget about the other army that's fighting on your side in this war?" You never have to sin. No matter what your husband or wife does, you don't have to sin. No matter how powerful your craving is, you don't have to give in. God has promised. It would be as if you were a football team and the league officials promised you, "We will never let a team take the field you can't beat." That is God's promise to you in temptation. God is on your side, He wants you to win, and so He will never let an enemy ever show up on the battle field that you cannot defeat by His power. You have air support in this battle from your ally above.

But if that is the case – if I have such a great ally above, why do I lose so many battles? Why do I just seem to get ambushed time after time? In many cases it is because even though I have an ally above, I am oblivious to the enemy within. Do I have an external enemy? Yes – the devil is like a roaring lion trying to devour me. I need to be aware of his schemes. The devil is dangerous, because he places temptations in front of you. But he is not the one who supplies the power to those temptations. The one supplying the power to those temptations is a threat more dangerous even than the devil. It is the enemy within.

II. The Enemy Within

Sin is from the Inside

14 but each one is tempted when, by his own desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

(The NIV adds the word "evil," but that's not in the Greek. It is just an interpretive addition.) The enemy within is my own desires. The problem is not God. The problem is not my spouse or kids or the people around me. The problem is not even Satan. The problem is me.

James is using hunting and fishing terminology here. And in the fishing metaphor, I am the fish, the temptation is the baited hook, but who is the fisherman? Who is the one who actually reels me in? You expect him to say the devil, but look at what he says: It is my own desires that reel me in. The reason Satan can put some temptations in front of me and they have no effect is because the only thing that can hook me in to the evil on the outside is corresponding evil on the inside.

All my sin originates inside me. No exceptions.

Mark 7:21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside

"If that's the case, why do I do just fine when I'm alone, but when my spouse is around I sin all the time?"

It is because spouses are great at exposing what is really in the heart. My heart is like a big jar full of sin. And when Satan, or some difficult person slams into me, it jostles my jar so some of the sin spills out. But when that happens, the sin did not come from that person. The sin was not caused by that person.

It was caused by my heart. That is where it was born and raised and then hidden until the moment when someone bumped me and made it spill out. Your sin did not originate in your DNA, it did not come from your hormones, no abusive parent beat it into you as a child, it didn't come from the world; it didn't come from the devil. It came from your heart.

Why No Mention of Satan?

Does the devil play a role? Absolutely. He is a major factor. And later on, in chapter 4, James is going to teach us how to do battle with him. But in this passage on temptation he does not even mention the devil. Why? Because James wants us to win the battle, and step 1 in winning the battle is knowing how sin is born. To fight sin in your life you have to know where it comes from, and what powers it. And the mother of sin, and the power plant that gives it so much strength, is our own desires.

True to Self?

The greatest danger is not your trials, it is not the things people are doing to you. Your greatest danger is what your own heart might do to you. People say, "I need to be true to myself." We have a name for people who are true to themselves: *inmates*. Last week in Ferguson, Missouri, there were riots. You know what a riot is? A whole bunch of people being true to themselves. When you remove the threat of being arrested you get to see what people are really like, and it's not pretty. Self is not the solution to your problems – it is the cause.

Blame Shifting

You would think that would be obvious enough, but it isn't because we are natural born blame shifters. Someone said, "To err is human. To blame someone else for that error is even more human." Try to correct a little kid.

"You shouldn't have done that."

"Yeah, but he..."

It is always someone else's fault.

"Why are you fighting? What happened?"

"It all started when he hit me back."

We are just blind to our own evil. That is almost all I hear in the marriage counseling room – "Yeah, but she..." "Yeah but he..."

Adam

It is as old as humanity itself. God told Adam, "Don't eat from that tree." Adam eats from the tree. God asks him straight up – a very simple yes or no question.

Genesis 3:11 ...Have you eaten from the tree...?" 12 The man said, "The woman ... she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

"Don't make me out to be the bad guy here. That woman practically shoved that fruit in my mouth. If I don't eat the fruit I'll never hear the end of it. How do you expect me to lead this marriage when she's out there talking to snakes?"

Blame shifting was the second sin ever committed. Pushing blame away from ourselves is endemic to the human race. When Aaron was held accountable for the golden calf, what did he do? He blamed the people.

Exodus 32:23 They said to me, 'Make us gods...24 Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!'"

First he blamed the people, then he tried to blame the fire. In 1 Samuel 15 Samuel says to Saul, “God told you that you were supposed to destroy all the livestock. So why do I hear animal noises right now?”

1 Samuel 15:15 Saul answered, “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.”

“It was these crazy soldiers. They just wanted to worship the Lord, so they kept a few animals. Soldiers will be soldiers – what can you do?”

Then down in verse 24, he finally confesses his sin, but even then here is how it comes out: “**I was afraid of the people so I gave in to them.**” That is as much responsibility as he could muster: “I admit I gave in to the unrelenting pressure of these wicked people who practically forced me to do it.” A lot of husbands “confess” sin that way.

“Yeah, I admit I was wrong to let my wife pressure me into a harsh response by her incessant nagging.”

This is where our culture’s victim mentality comes from. I was manipulated into sin by someone else. I’m the victim.

Blaming Chemicals

And when we run out of people to blame, we start blaming hormones or DNA. “Don’t try to hold me accountable for my attitudes – I have chemical imbalances.” When we are kids we shift blame by just pointing the finger at whoever is nearby. But then when we grow up and go to college we learn much more sophisticated methods.

“Modern neuroscience and peer reviewed double blind studies have shown that there are causal physiological mechanisms modulated by environmental exigencies that regulate behavioral impulses.”

Can hormones make things a lot harder? Yes. Can they control your decision making? No. Only your heart can do that.

Other people point to environmental factors. I do what I do because of my upbringing or past trauma. Others blame it on their genes: “I can’t help it. I was born this way.² It’s my orientation.” Some people try to blame temptation itself. I was just tempted beyond what I have the power to resist – I couldn’t help it.

Blaming God

Those are all just variations on the same theme: blaming God. Who is in charge of circumstances? God. Who is responsible for your genetic makeup? God. When Adam blamed Eve, who was he really blaming?

Genesis 3:12 The man said, “The woman you put here with me...

² Suppose I was born that way. Does that make me less culpable? Does that make me a better person somehow? Last week I heard about an attack by ISIS on a US military facility where some US soldiers were captured. And two of our soldiers were held in a room where they were repeatedly beaten, and the female soldier was tortured and raped. Now, suppose we captured those men who did that. And you were the judge in the case. And all the evidence is presented, and it’s not even disputed – yes, he did this horrible things, he beheaded innocent people, murder, torture, rape – he admits to it all. But then here is his defense: He says, “Look, I’ve been doing this stuff since I was a kid.” Does that make you say, “Oh, well, if you had this kind of bent as a kid then it’s all good. You can go free.”? Does that make it better? No, it makes it worse! It makes him even more wicked. That was David’s attitude. **Psalm 51:5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.** That is in the context of him confessing how sinful he was. In his mind, the fact that he was that way from birth made him even more deserving of punishment, not less. It is true that Adam and Eve sinned, and as a result we all inherited a sin nature. But we cannot claim any innocence based on that, because every single time we choose to sin we prove that if we had been in the Garden of Eden we would have done the exact same thing. “But what about original sin inherited from Adam? How can God hold us responsible for something we have no control over?” Answer – no one is punished by God for things he had no control over. Everyone who is punished by God will be punished for things they freely chose to do. Nobody is ever forced against his will to sin against God.

Adam says, "I didn't ask for this. I was doing just fine, and one day I went to sleep and woke up married." If you blame someone God put in your life for your sin, you are blaming God.³ If you blame circumstances, you are blaming God. If you are irritable because you had to shovel two feet of snow off your driveway – who put that snow there? God. Our sin is not God's fault, it is not other people's fault, it is not the weather's fault - if we are looking for someplace to assign blame, the place to look is in the mirror.

Proverbs 19:3 A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against Yahweh.

We spend all our days smacking ourselves in the head with a hammer and then get mad at God for making hammers so hard.

So why does James tell us all this? Is it so you can get even more discouraged and down on yourself than you already were? No. James tells us this because he wants you to have victory, and that is not going to happen until you do something about the power plant that fuels your temptations. Do something about renegade desires, and all Satan's temptations will fall on deaf ears. But if those desires remain, then Satan or no Satan, we will fall over and over and over.

Drawn Out and Enticed

So how does all this work, exactly? Desire, by itself, is not a bad thing. It is a wonderful gift from God. Desire is what powers all of life. But when it goes bad it can become our worst enemy. So what makes desire go bad? James uses two words from the hunting and fishing world.

14 Each one is tempted when, by his own desire, he is dragged away and enticed

That word translated **dragged away** could be translated **drawn out**. The picture is of an animal being drawn out of its lair, or its place of safety. A fish might be hiding way down deep underneath a rock where no predator can get to it. A fox will go down into a hole; a deer will hide out in the thick timber. As long as they stay there, they are safe. But if they get drawn out into the open, then they can be lured into a trap with some bait. And that is that second word translated **enticed** – lured with bait.

Two Kinds of Bait

That is what temptation is – bait on a hook. It seems to me, there are really only two kinds of bait: pleasure, or avoidance of pain. The promise of pleasure is the bait for sins like overeating, or drinking, drugs, sexual sin, bragging, man-pleasing, etc. Avoidance of pain is the bait for sins like lying to avoid getting in trouble, or to going along with the crowd instead of standing up for righteousness, or holding on to bitterness and anger, because you don't want the discomfort of humbling yourself and reconciling with the person. Pleasure or avoidance of pain – that is the bait.

Now, is bait bad? If you are a fish, the problem isn't the worm; it's the hook. The desire for pleasure and the desire to avoid pain are the very same motivations God uses to bring us along His good way. Temptation happens when one of those things (pleasure or avoidance of pain) attaches to something God has forbidden. A couple weeks ago I was staying in a cabin up in Estes Park and I woke up in the morning and as soon as I opened my eyes I saw a deer out the window walking through the trees. I'm a hunter, and so to me, spotting a deer in the woods and getting a good shot off is very exciting and thrilling. Is there anything inherently wrong with the desire to feel the thrill of hunting? No. But in this case, that legitimate desire happened to be attached to something that was off limits. I didn't have a license, it wasn't hunting season, and I was in a residential area. Shooting that deer in that context would have just been all kinds of illegal. So the bait was the desire to hunt (and that's not a bad thing), but the hook was that in this

³ The word translated "from" in verse 13 is apo. It refers most naturally to indirect origin. The word translated "by" in verse 14 is hupo. It generally refers to direct agency. James seems to be forbidden blaming God even as the indirect agent of temptation (Peter David disagrees).

particular case the only way to fulfill that desire would have required a sinful action. It is fine to desire money, but if getting it requires some sin, then it is bait on a hook. It is fine to desire sex, but if it's with someone you're not married to, it's bait on a hook. It is fine to desire respect, but if it requires boasting to get it, it's bait on a hook.

So here is the picture James paints. You are safe and secure on God's righteous path. Nothing can touch you there. You can experience pain there, but no ultimate harm. Even the pain will do you only good. You are perfectly safe as long as you stay in the security of that path. But desire can lure you out of that safe place. And it can entice you to go for the bait and bite down on the hook, or get caught in the trap.

What Makes Some Temptations Stronger Than Others?

Now, why does that happen in some cases and not in others? My desire to hunt that deer was strong, but it was a piece of cake to resist. Even if I would have had my rifle with me at the time, the idea of shooting that deer in that context was absolutely out of the question. And that is the way it is for you for the vast majority of temptations. You see an old lady putting a \$100 bill in her purse. You think, "I sure would like to have \$100." But that is as far as it goes. Suppose Satan puts the thought in your mind, "Just take it from her," you would dismiss the idea just as fast as it came in. It would be a non-starter. When you think of evil things – things like armed robbery, or beating someone to death, or kidnapping – there are all kinds of sins that are so repulsive to you that even if something you strongly desire is available if you do that sin, it is still totally out of the question. If that thought comes into our minds we would be shocked and horrified at the idea. It would be utterly rejected instantly. No argument, no internal debate - the answer is just no – end of discussion.

That is the way a healthy heart functions. But there are some areas where our hearts are not healthy. There are some sins where our shock reflex is broken. The temptation barges in and instead of being horrified and disgusted, my heart says, "Oh, hello there... So – you're sinful are you? Funny, you don't look very sinful."

"Do I have to leave?"

"No, you can hang around. I need to think this over."

There are certain sins that don't shock us, don't repulse us, don't grate against our soul; and so if there is something I really, strongly desire, and I can have it if I'm willing to commit that sin, my response is, "Hmmm, interesting." And the possibility of doing that sin in order to get that pleasure or avoid that pain is still on the table.⁴

Your desires do not have the power to drag you toward sin without your consent. And when we give our consent it is because we just don't see that particular sin as being all that evil.

Striking a Chord

If I walk up to a piano and play a note on my trumpet, as soon as I stop you can hear that same note ringing inside the piano. The sound waves, vibrating at that particular frequency, vibrate the one string in the piano that vibrates at that same frequency. But it has no effect on the other strings in the piano, because they don't vibrate at that frequency. So I walk up and play a concert b flat, and when I stop you will hear the b flat string ringing out a b flat from inside the piano, and no other strings will be making

⁴ When we try to get rid of sin in our lives, we not only forsake the evil, but we always try to replace it with the missing virtue. You cannot stop lying unless you replace that lying with a love for truth. You can't stop being harsh with people unless you replace that harshness with kindness. The only way out of bondage to sin is to be attracted to something better. That is how God draws us away from the evil path, and sin uses the same method to get us to leave the good path. It pulls us away from what is good, and replaces that with some promise of pleasure and satisfaction. People do not just stop coming to church. They stop coming to church so they can do something else that they think will be more satisfying. They don't just stop reading their Bible. They stop reading it so they can do something else in that time that they think will be more satisfying. Sin will drag you off the good path by alluring you to another path.

any sound. The way Satan tempts us is by simply playing the note of some sin, then listening carefully to see if there is a string inside us that is ringing. Is there something inside us that vibrates at that same frequency? What happens when the world plays the note of “Get drunk,” or “Get high on something.”? For some of you, that strikes a chord. Something inside you will ring at that frequency. Others of you don’t have that particular string at this time in your life so the temptation has no pull on you. But when the selfishness note or pride note or irritability note gets played, it does get a response. We all have different points of weakness.

Conception – Getting Desire Pregnant with Sin

So, how do I solve the problem of having these strings inside me that resonate with certain sins? What do I do about my desire disorders? James gives us some priceless insight on this in verse 15, where he changes the metaphor. He leaves the hunting and fishing illustration and describes desire as being like a woman getting pregnant.

15 Then, after desire has conceived it gives birth to sin...

To conceive means to get pregnant. So at what point does a desire in your heart get pregnant with sin? The answer is in verse 14 – it happens when you get **drawn out and enticed**. Verse 15 is literally, **Then, desire *having conceived***, it gives birth to sin. The grammar that James uses requires that the being **drawn out and enticed** and the becoming pregnant with sin are referring to the same thing. So the point is this – when you allow desire to draw you out of the place of safety to go after the bait – that is the moment when desire gets pregnant with sin. That is all it takes to conceive sin. You want something, you realize that getting that thing would involve some sin, but instead of the normal reaction of, “Well, I guess that’s out of the question,” it remains on the table as an option – right there you just got your desire pregnant with sin.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus’ desires were very strong, but those desires didn’t become pregnant with sin, because He didn’t allow Himself to be drawn off the path of safety to bite down on the hook of sin. I had the desire to hunt that deer out of season, but that desire didn’t become pregnant with sin, because it didn’t strike a powerful enough chord in my heart to lure me out of the place of safety. But what about those sins that do strike a chord in my heart? How do I get rid of those responsive strings in my heart that don’t seem to be horrified at the thought of committing certain sins? James will answer that question for us next week in verses 16-18. But for now, let me just give you one principle from our text today.

The Dad: Deception

The goal is to prevent desire from getting pregnant with sin. For pregnancy to happen there has to be a mom and a dad. So when sin is conceived, who is the mom and who is the dad? The mom is easy to spot in the text – James just tells us directly: desire. It is desire that gets pregnant with sin – that’s the mom. But what about the dad? What is it that gets desire pregnant with sin? Desire is a good thing – what is it that makes it go bad?

I think the answer lies in the imagery of verse 14 – especially that word translated **enticed**. That word means to lure with bait. What is the purpose of bait? Why use it? Because the only way to catch a fish is to persuade that fish to voluntarily bite down on the hook. Fish don’t have gigantic brains. They aren’t down there solving quadratic equations in their spare time. But even with their little fish brains they know enough not to just swim out and bite down on a hook. The purpose of the bait is very simple: deception. You think you are getting a tasty meal – surprise! You are the meal. To lure with bait is to deceive the animal into thinking it is getting something good rather than something deadly. If it could see the threat clearly, it would run away. So the purpose of bait is to disguise the deadly threat to deceive the animal into entering the trap or biting on the hook.

That is the process that James refers to in the next verse as conceiving sin. The mom is desire and the dad is deception. Desire is a good thing, but when desire gets in bed with deception, that is when desire gets pregnant with sin. The reason certain sins strike a chord in my heart; the reason certain temptations meet with willingness and consent in my heart is because my desires have gone to bed with deception. It is the exact same thing that Ephesians 4:22 is talking about when it says your old self **is being corrupted by deceitful desires** (or literally, the **desires of deceit**). James finishes describing the process of temptation in verse 15, then look at the very next thing James says in verse 16: **Do not be deceived**. Sin is ugly. It is hideous. It's repulsive. It's disgusting. It's lethal. It's poison. You cannot possibly desire it without first being deceived. And if you are deceived, as soon as that deception is lifted, the desire for sin will be gone.

Conclusion: God is Good

So how do you recover from deception? If my heart is deceived into thinking that a particular sin is worth it, how do I change that? That is where we'll have to pick it up next time. But I will give you a hint. It has to do with your conception of the goodness of God. That is where James goes next. I would urge you this week to locate the areas of deception in your desires, write them down, and then write down right below each one all the truth you can find in God's Word about that particular lie. Spend this week exposing the hook, and next week we will talk about how to fulfill those cravings for happiness and pleasure and satisfaction in ways that please God.

Benediction: 1 Thessalonians 5:23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. Which sins in your life are you most prone to shift blame from yourself?
2. What kind of baited hooks tend to get you? And what are the lies behind them?
3. What cultural things (TV, friends, books, movies, etc.) are the most influential in your life in convincing your soul of those lies?