

Look Out, Look In, Look Up

Suffering, Tests, and Temptation Part 10

James 1:17-18 12-14-2014

Summary: When tempted, look out! (be alert to the danger), look in (instead of blame-shifting, find the real culprit in your own deceived desires and kill those desires), and look up, at the only source of life and good gifts. It was His desire to give us life, and He never changes, so that desire remains intact.

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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. **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.

Introduction

Starting in verse 13 of chapter one James gives us some very helpful instruction about how to deal with temptation. I think you can summarize what he is saying in three parts:

- 1. Look out!**
- 2. Look in**
- 3. Look up**

Look Out!

Verses 13 through 15 are a warning – look out! That thing that looks so enticing to you is a baited hook - watch out! It promises life and good gifts but it only leads to death, so be alert! A huge number of our failures are due to a simple failure to be alert. We let our guard down, we fall asleep spiritually, and the roaring lion catches us time after time.

Look In

Secondly, when you are tempted, you need to look inward to find the problem. The problem is not that person who is provoking your sin, the problem is not circumstances, it is not the devil, it is not God. With temptation, the problem is always one of your own desires that has become deceived into thinking it can get good things from sin and so it's trying to crawl up onto the throne of your heart so that you will obey its impulses.

Kill Deceived Desires

God's Word is constantly calling us to deal with those deceived desires. If you don't deal with sin at that level, you will never have success. Here's a sampling of what the Bible says about sinful desires:

Don't conform to them (1 Pe.1:14).

Don't gratify them (Gal.5:16).

Don't obey them (Ro.6:12) or follow them (2 Pe.3:3, Jud.1:16, 1 Pe.4:3, and Eph.2:3).

Don't serve them (Tit.3:3).

Don't be drawn out and enticed by them (James 1:14, 2 Pe.2:18, 2 Tim.4:3).

And the one in Romans 13:14 is interesting: Do not make provision for them. Do not give bad desires any room to operate. Do not put yourself in contexts where it can start to get some traction. Those are all the things we are not supposed to do with bad desires. So what are we supposed to do with them? I found five commands.

- Renounce (Tit.2:12)
- Abstain (1 Pe.2:11)
- Flee (2 Tim.2:22)
- Regard them as crucified (Gal.5:24)
- Kill them (Col.3:5)

Let's just briefly look at each one of those.

Renounce Them (Titus 2:12)

Titus 2:12 [the grace of God] teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly desires

That word translated **say no** means to renounce, deny, refuse, repudiate, or disown. It points to a strong act of the will. It is a powerful, earnest, intentional, wholehearted rejection. John Piper suggests: "Say NO to every lustful thought within five seconds. And say it with the authority of Jesus Christ. "In the name of Jesus, NO!" You don't have much more than five seconds. Give it more unopposed time than that, and it will lodge itself with such force as to be almost immovable. Say it out loud if you dare. Be tough and warlike. As John Owen said, 'Be killing sin or it will be killing you.' Strike fast and strike hard." That is always step one in dealing with a temptation.

And notice that it says the grace of God teaches us how to say no. How does it do that? The next couple of verses go on to explain that Jesus died on the cross not just to *pay for* our sin, but also to *prevent* our sin. The cross is the double cure - saving us from both the penalty and the power of sin. When we think of Jesus desiring our purity so much that He suffered and died on the cross to enable us to say no, that gives us motivation to shout “No!” when temptation comes.

Abstain From Them (1 Pe.2:11)

1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you ... to abstain from fleshy desires, which war against your soul.

That word **abstain** means to keep your distance - steer clear – stay away. Avoid things that will activate that desire. Don't go near the door of her house (Pr.5:8).

Flee (2 Tim.2:22)

Run! Don't manage it – run from it.

Regard Them As Crucified (Gal.5:24)

Galatians 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If you have any kind of thought in your mind that you might not have enough strength to resist, you just lost. Those desires have been crucified, they have received a death blow, and you do not have to submit to them.

Kill Them (Col.3:5)

Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Those desires have been nailed to a cross, they have received mortal wounds, but they are still gasping for breath. God has given them a death blow, but he has also commanded us to finish them off. And he uses an unusual word for **kill** here. It comes from a root that was a medical term that referred to a part of the body that no longer functioning as a result of atrophy. You don't use that part of a body, and over time it just withers to the point where it is not even functional. The idea is you don't do things or watch things or think about things that will feed those desires. Those desires are like a bully at school, and you have his meal ticket. If you stop feeding him, after a while he's not a problem. Feed those desires and they will become a raging forest fire. Stop feeding them and they will wither and die on the vine. So many times people will feed their sinful desires every day and then wonder, “Why are these desires so powerful?” Don't do things that excite or stimulate or awaken sinful desires.

Look Up

So that is a quick summary of what the New Testament has to say about desires that have gone bad. You will never have success fighting against sin if all you do is try to pick the fruit off the ends of the branches. You have to strike sin at the root. You have to look inward and identify the deceived desires and put them to death.

But all of that is preliminary. The real power to do all this comes from the third step. Step one, look out. Step two, look in. Step three, look up. Look at God. Every good and perfect gift comes only from above. Look inward to find the *problem*, then look upward to find the *solution*. Too many people get that backwards. They look upward or outward to find the problem and assign blame. And then they look inward to find a solution within themselves. They try to fix the problem in their own strength by picking

the bad fruit off the branches. Look inward to find the problem; look upward to find the solution. Victory over sin depends in very large measure on the way you think about God.

There are three things you need to know about God in order to have victory over sin in your life. Three things James wants us to watch for when we look up to fight temptation. And the first one is, God is the source of all good.

Source of All Good

17 Every good and perfect gift is from above

We will never have success in fighting sin until we stop looking at God as *a* source of good. God is not one of the sources of good. God is not even the best source of good. Victory over sin will come only when we are fully convinced that God is the *only* source of good.

Every Perfect Gift

Use all the wonderful things in creation to remind yourself on an hourly basis about what God is like. Every good gift came from Him. How many good gifts are there in this world? Food? That was God's idea. Sleep? That's from God. Sex? God. Laughter? God. Rivers? God. Ski slopes? Mountains? Flowers? Trees? Music? All from God. How about the sun? I love the sun – it is my absolute favorite star. It warms me up every day, it grows plants, it gives us light, it makes my wife nice and tan. God spoke that thing into existence. Oceans? From God. Beaches? From God. Women? From God. Men? From God. Children? God's idea. How about perception? Do you like being able to see? Your eyes didn't evolve out of the slime – God made those – custom, just for you (even custom colors.) You like hearing? Tasting? Smelling? Touching? – All compliments of God. How about thinking? Are you glad you have a mind and can reason and think and wonder and imagine and create and learn and worship? Check the label on every one of them – they are all made in heaven.

What kind of a God dreams that stuff up, and then gives them to a race of humanity that is rebelling and blaspheming against Him every day? This is what God is really like – He is the source of *every* good gift.

Acts 14:17 Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

Was there ever a temptation that came from God? No, not a single one. But every perfect gift came from God.

"Some of those things you mentioned don't really seem all that perfect. Like children, or men and women – not exactly perfect. In fact, isn't there something wrong with every single one of those gifts you mentioned?"

Yes, there is. In this cursed, fallen world, God's good gifts are mixed with corruption and sin. So how can we reconcile that with this verse? The answer is simple. If some good gift is mixed with some evil or corruption, the good part came from God and the corrupt part didn't. When a gift becomes corrupted with sin or ruined in some way, it is not because there was something wrong with the gift. The fault lies not in the gift but in that which corrupted the gift. If you buy a new car and someone throws manure all over it, the problem is not with the car manufacturer. God's gifts are perfect.

Gift vs. Wage

And it helps that James calls them *gifts*. The concept of gifts seems to just come out of the blue here, but it is important. Identifying them as gifts makes it even more obvious that they are from God. And it

makes the contrast with what sin offers even starker. Life is a gift; death is a wage. Death is like a paycheck that you earn. Life is an undeserved gift you are graciously given.

Isaiah 55:1 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Generosity

God's gifts are perfect. But even more important than that – God's heart is generous. I think the HCSB does the best job translating verse 17: **Every generous act and every perfect gift is from above.** He is pointing out both the gift and the generosity behind the gift. The thing you get as well as the motive behind the giving. When God gives you a good gift, never just look at the gift without appreciating the meaning behind it. Think about what the gift means. A few weeks ago my daughter Nikki got a diamond ring from the man she loves. She likes diamonds, but the ring itself was nothing in her heart compared to the meaning of the ring. If she would have just found that ring lying on the ground somewhere, she would have been happy to have a really nice ring. But that kind of happiness would have been nothing compared to the happiness of having the man of her dreams get down on a knee and present that ring to her. And why? Because of the meaning behind it.

Have you ever thought about the meaning behind the gifts God gives you? Maybe God gave you a good night's sleep last night, or a tasty breakfast this morning, or the ability to use your eyes, or good health. And maybe you recognize that those are good gifts and that they are from God. But do you ever stop to think about the meaning behind those gifts? A girl knows what it means when a guy gets on his knee and presents a diamond ring. But do you know what it means when God gives you all these gifts? It is worth thinking about, because the meaning behind God's gifts will give you 100 times the joy that just the gift itself will give you.

Do you enjoy a nice sunny day or a car that doesn't break down? So do atheists. But what an atheist can never do is enjoy the meaning behind the gift. Never leave out the personal aspect of God's gift-giving. All His gifts are expressions of His love for you. And when He gives you the ability to enjoy those gifts, that is supposed to be a reminder to you of His acceptance of you, and His favor toward you, and of the delight that He takes in you because of your close association with His Son. Enjoy that. Sin can't offer you anything like that.

It is so important that we stop thinking about God as an irritated father who is constantly annoyed and disappointed in us. It is bad enough that we fall into the lie of self-condemnation without dragging God into it and imagining that He has a condemning attitude toward us.

One thing that marks James' thinking is the amazing generosity of God. Back in verse 5 James referred to God as the **“giving-generously-to-all-without-finding-fault God.”** “Giving generously to all without finding fault” is God's middle name. If you lack wisdom, ask God. In chapter 4 – You don't have, because you don't ask! You get the impression as you read through James that James is just shaking his head thinking, “If these people had any idea how generous God is, things would be so different.”

Think for a second: how would an increased awareness of this attribute of God change your life. Have you ever seen a mother bird feeding her chicks? This is what it looks like.



Did you know your soul looks like that all the time? All day every day our souls are walking around with mouths wide open desperate for some good gift to be dropped in. That's why when your soul gets deceived into thinking that good gifts come from sin, there is no stopping it. But if we could become convinced of the generosity of God, and that good gifts only come from Him, then we would have that kind of orientation toward God instead of toward sin. We would open our Bible in the morning, and our souls would look like that toward our God.

So what should you do to fight temptation? Look up! Look away from the baited hook, and look up at the only giver of good gifts. Say, “I lift my eyes up, where does my help

come from? My help comes from above. All my good comes from above. Life comes from above.” I have found that for me, many times, when temptation hits, it helps to actually go outdoors and physically look up at the sky. Something about seeing the grandeur of the sky helps snap me out of the fog of temptation and wake up to reality. God seems more real and the pleasure of sin seems more like the scrawny, worthless pseudo-pleasure that it is.

Power

So God is generous. And not only generous, but powerful.

17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

He is **the Father of the heavenly lights**. He is the Father of all the stars and all the galaxies - just a little reminder of the immensity of God. If someone is going to be generous with you, it makes a difference if that someone is Bill Gates or some beggar who has nothing. This God, who is so incredibly inclined to generosity towards us, happens to be the Maker of the galaxies. The lights you see when you look up into the sky are the greatest, highest, most awesome objects we know of in the physical universe. And James says, “God is the Father of those.” The biggest things you can imagine – He made. He marks off all the billions of light years across the universe with the breadth of His hand. Which source do you want to go to for your good? That puny little temptation that has no power at all? Or the Father of all the galaxies? Do you want your source of happiness to be the One who designed sunsets and sunrises? Or some moron in Hollywood who does not even have the power to give your soul a single thing that it needs?

Giver of Life

I told you there are three main points that James wants to make about God. First, that He is generous and the only source of good gifts. A second one is in verse 18.

18 He chose to give us birth

God is the source of good gifts, and God is the giver of life. There are two things that we seek from sin: good gifts, and fuller, richer, better life. But sin cannot provide either one, because the only source of good gifts and the only source of life is God.

If you want fullness of life, life that is really life, you want to really live it up – this is the way. James wants us to understand - life only comes from God. He wants us to understand the source. But he also wants us to understand the how and the why.

How God Gave Us Life: The Word of Truth

When God takes somebody who is spiritually dead and makes them spiritually alive, what tool does he use to get that done? The answer is in verse 18.

18 ... He gave us birth through the word of truth

Spiritual life comes through God’s Word.

Sometimes people say, “Why do you emphasize the Bible so much at Agape?” Because that is how God saves us.

18 ... He gave us birth through the word of truth

And look down at verse 21.

James 1:21 ... humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save your souls.

The supernatural, awesome, mighty, life-giving power from God is the only thing that can save your soul. But that awesome power is carried from heaven on the wings of the truth of the Scriptures into your

heart. The delivery system for antibiotics might be a pill that goes into your mouth. The delivery system for an immunization might be a syringe that injects it into your bloodstream. The delivery system for a decongestant might be spray that you inhale through your nose. And the delivery system for the awesome, saving power of God is a message that comes into your ears. As the truth of God's Word is proclaimed, it travels into your ears, and riding on that message is the saving power of God. And that powerful medicine, delivered through your ear gate, drops down into your heart and it sparks faith.

Romans 10:17 faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

That is how salvation works, and that is how sanctification works.

John 15:3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

The Holy Spirit

Last week someone asked, "Where is the Holy Spirit in all this?" That is a great question because all the power comes from the Holy Spirit. But how does the Holy Spirit deliver that power? He delivers it through the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

Galatians 3:5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

How do you receive the Spirit? By believing what you hear from the Word of God. Hearing the Word sparks believing, and believing enables us to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. If you want the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, open up the Word of God.

Use Scripture to Fight Temptation

And that is a topic James wants to expand on. So the whole next section of the book is all about receiving God's Word. But for now let's just focus on the context of this section, which is about temptation. If you want success in resisting temptation, use the same method that Jesus used when he was tempted in the desert for 40 days. Every time Jesus was tempted, He used the same method – He quoted Scripture. Why do you suppose He did that? He's God! Every word out of His mouth is the Word of God. He could have just made something up and it would have been the Word of God. But He quoted Scripture. Why? As an example for us. This is the way God has designed for human beings to gain access to spiritual power. And even the Son of God Himself, in His human nature, needed Scripture to battle temptation.

And if you study that account in Matthew 4, you will be struck with how absolutely perfect the passages Jesus chose were for that particular temptation. Jesus is out in the desert being tested for 40 days, and He quotes passages of Scripture that were designed to help God's people when they were out in the desert being tested for 40 years. And each passage Jesus quotes addresses the exact deception that Satan was trying to use and exposes it. How did Jesus come up with those passages? Did He just whip out His i-phone and do a search? No. Jesus probably didn't even own a Bible.

In those days, Jewish boys, starting at age six, would go to a school and begin learning the first five books of the Old Testament – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And by age 10 they would have those books memorized. You say, "That's no big deal. My 10 year old can say the first five books of the Bible." No - not the names of the books; the content. By age 10 a Jewish boy would have all five of those books of the Bible memorized. Next, they would begin working on the Psalms and Proverbs. And it wasn't unusual for them to have the entire Old Testament memorized by age 14. Jesus was able to quote those passages because he had hidden God's Word in His heart that He might not sin.

What is the source of life? God. How does God deliver that life to us? Scripture. Then one more question: What is the purpose? Why did God give us life?

Why God Gave Us Life

The answer is in verse 18.

18 ... He give us birth through the word of truth, so that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

The word **firstfruits** refers to the first part of something much larger. The first people who became Christians in a particular region were referred to as the firstfruits (Ro.16:5, 1 Cor.16:15). The first part that pointed to a much larger harvest that was coming. In first Corinthians 15, Jesus is called the firstfruits of those who will be resurrected (v.20). So the reason he gave us new birth is so we could be a kind of firstfruits. Firstfruits of what? We are the first part of some much larger harvest –what kind of harvest? Literally it is so that **we might be a kind of firstfruits of his creation**. God created the universe for a purpose. Genesis 1 is like God is planting a crop. And the whole point of it is to produce a harvest of something that God wants. Right now the whole thing is still in process. What you see when you look around is not the final crop that God intended when He started everything. But we know that final, intended state is coming, because the firstfruits point to it. And the firstfruits are us. Our redemption is a guarantee of the redemption of the whole universe.

If you are into end-times – you should know this is one of the most exciting end-times of verses in the whole Bible. What will that new heavens and new earth look like? But God wanted there to be a preview, so instead of making a video or a brochure, He gave spiritual life to a group of people so that they could function as the preview of the new world. The Church is a sampling of what the new world will be like. We are the section of God’s creation harvested by God as the first part of the new creation.

There are some Christians who are mostly just irritated by the church. All they can see are the flaws. The miracle of the new birth, the sanctifying work of the Spirit in all the saints, the supernatural form of love that exists –they can’t see any of it. Redemption doesn’t impress them. Sanctification doesn’t impress them. Spiritual gifts bore them. The way Jesus Christ functions as the head of the body and orchestrates the movements of His body – they don’t care for it. If that is you, you are missing out on the most glorious thing that exists in this world. It is the preview of the new earth! Jesus gave His life to create this preview of eternal life.

Giving birth

And when God gives us spiritual life, He describes it in terms of giving birth. The word for **give birth** here is the same word in verse 15, where **sin gives birth to death**.

Our sin gives birth to death; God gives birth to us.

“Isn’t it a little strange that James would talk about our father giving birth to us?”

No, not all. The reason there is such a thing as a father in the human realm is to teach us some things about what God is like. And the reason there is such a thing as mothers in the human realm is to teach us some other things about what God is like. Everything that is good about maleness is good because it resembles something in God’s nature. And everything that is good about femaleness is good because it resembles something in God’s nature. The reason women give birth is to teach us something about what God is like.

This is a marvelous picture of how your spiritual life came into being. It came forth out of God like a baby coming out of a woman. You participate in His very nature (2 Pe.1:4)!

God Desires Life for You

And notice the first word in verse 18.

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 Having willed, He gave us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

18 He chose to give us birth through the word...

Why does James include that word – **chose**? Why not just say, “He gave us birth through the word...”? James wants to emphasize God’s choice. Literally, it is, **Having willed, he gave us birth...** God willed something. He desired something. And the result of that desire was that we were given spiritual life – new birth.

Our deceived, sinful, messed up desires lead us into death. But God’s desires for us are the opposite. His will – His desire for us, is life.

Once again, James wants to point us to God’s heart and attitude toward us. He not only gives good gifts, but He does so with a heart of love and generosity toward us. And He not only gives us life, but He does it because He really wants to. There is nothing grudging about the life and good gifts that God gives you. He loves giving them to you. When God gives in to His impulses and just does whenever He feels like doing, He gives you life and good gifts. Lamentations 3:33 says that when God gives us hardship, He never feels like doing that. He does it when we need it, but He doesn’t enjoy it. But when God just sits back and does what He enjoys doing, He gives His children life and good gifts.

Let every temptation you face stimulate a reflex to look up. And when you look up to God, notice three things: First, He is the source of all good. He has a generous heart. Second, He is the giver of life and loves giving us life. And then the crux of James’ argument is the third one. God’s desire to give us good gifts, and His decision to give us life *never changes*.

Unchangeable

17 Every generous act and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

You could translate that **in whom there is no shadow caused by turning**. This is the verse that is quoted in the hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness”: “There is no shadow of turning with Thee.” As the heavenly bodies turn they create shadows. So we have light sometimes and darkness other times. But God is a light that casts no shadows. There is no downside to God. He is utterly reliable.

According to Genesis, God created the movements of the heavenly lights to enable us to have an accurate standard for measuring time – seasons, days, and years. And the creator of that process obviously has to be more regular and reliable than the process He created. God is more reliable and unchangeable than the best timekeepers there are in the universe. You can tell the guy who wrote “Great is Thy Faithfulness” was studying this passage.

“Summer and winter and springtime and harvest, sun, moon, and stars in their courses above, join with all nature in manifold witness to Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.”

Nature testifies to a Creature that must be utterly faithful and reliable. The National Institute for Standards and Technology in Boulder has an atomic clock that measures time by the regularity of the movements in an atom. Those movements are so regular that for that for that clock to get off by one second would take more than 300 million years. What James is saying is, “Think of how regular and reliable and unchangeable the Creator of the atom must be.”

But reliable for what? What is it about God that is unchangeable? Everything that is essential to God’s nature is unchangeable, but the thing that James is concerned with here is to make sure we understand that God’s desire to give you good gifts, and God’s decision to give you life – *those things* will never change.

1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to ... to put their hope in wealth...

Why Paul? Why not put my hope in wealth?

... which is so uncertain

Don’t put your hope in something that is unreliable and uncertain.

...but to put their hope in God, who...

There you expect him to say, “Don’t put your hope in riches, which are so uncertain. Instead, put your hope in God, who is utterly certain and reliable.” But Paul says more than that.

...but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

God is reliable, yes, but reliable for what? You can count on Him, but count on Him to do what? You can count on Him to richly provide everything for your enjoyment. Everything you need to have joy in the Lord, you can count on Him to provide.

Is it possible that God would give us life and then tempt us to walk down the path toward death? Is it possible that at one point it was God’s desire for us to have life, but now he has changed? The sun will rise in the west before God will change His mind about His desire for you to have life and not death. He gave you new birth, that is what He wants for you, and so He will never, never, never entice you in the direction of death. The purpose of temptation and sin is to drag you toward death. God’s unchangeable desire is to pull you in the direction of life.

Does God allow us to take steps in the direction of death? Yes – obviously. He just got done warning us not to do that. God allows us to choose death, but He would never entice us in that direction because His desire for us to have life never changes. The people who are close to you - your husband, your wife, your parents – they desire what’s best for you ... sometimes. A lot of times, they desire what’s best for you, but at certain times, they change. You can’t count on them to always be the same. When the drunkard says, “I will never drink again” he means it with all his heart. But then he changes. The husband might say, “I don’t ever want to hurt you again,” and mean it with all his heart. But in a moment of anger he changes. God isn’t like that. God says, “I’ve decided to give you life and good gifts,” and the universe will go out of existence before that decision will ever change.

Conclusion

So when you face a temptation, look up. Look out – be on the alert and avoid temptation. Look in – make sure you understand the source of the problem is inside you not outside you. Then look up for the solution. Fix your gaze on the only source of good gifts, the only source of life, the one who desires only good for you, and who never changes. Draw near to Him, experience His presence, and you will have pleasure and joy beyond what any sin can give you. When you face an alluring temptation, your Father in heaven says, “I will give you something a lot better than that – trust Me.” When that sin just looks so desirable and so satisfying, the awesome, glorious Creator of the heavens says, “I can satisfy your soul better than that – trust Me.” And when it just seems like if you don’t take at least a little step into this sin you will be missing out – missing out on one of the pleasures of life, the unchangeable giver of life in heaven says, “I’m the only one who can give you real life. And I will. That’s My desire. It was My choice to give you new birth in the first place, and I will give you fullness of life.” He is saying to you the same thing He said to David - “I gave all these things to you, and if that’s not enough to satisfy, I will give you more if you just don’t despise My Word. I will give you all you need to be happy forever. Just trust Me. Wait for My timing, and don’t run to any other source, and I will give you abundant life.”

Benediction: Psalms 145:8-10 The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. 9 The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. 10 All you have made will praise you, O Lord; your saints will extol you.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. Name a few of God’s gifts that you would like to try to learn to not just enjoy the gifts, but to enjoy the meaning behind them.

2. Is there any anger or resentment toward God in your heart that is preventing you from accepting the truth about God's love and goodness that you need to confess and repent of?
3. Of six principles in the F-A-B-C-D-E outline for fighting temptation, which one or two do you think you need to focus on the most in your struggles with temptation?

Appendix

When you face temptation, fight it with A-B-C-D-E-F (although I find it best to put the F first).

Fight!

James 4:7 Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Titus 2:11 the grace of God ... teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly desires, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives ... [Jesus] gave himself for us ... and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

John Piper: "Say NO to every lustful thought within five seconds. And say it with the authority of Jesus Christ. "In the name of Jesus, NO!" You don't have much more than five seconds. Give it more unopposed time than that, and it will lodge itself with such force as to be almost immovable. Say it out loud if you dare. Be tough and warlike. As John Owen said, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." Strike fast and strike hard."

IMPORTANT: The sins we have the most trouble with are the ones that just do not really seem all that evil to us. It is essential that we train our hearts to see those sins as wicked. Until they taste like poison, we will not have long term success in resisting them.

Alert/**A**void

Alert:

Being alert means, "Watch out!" Act like you would if there were a mountain lion loose in this building somewhere.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

1 Corinthians 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, watch out that you don't fall!

Avoid:

Proverbs 5:8 Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house

Romans 13:14 Make no provision for the flesh with regard to desires.

If you usually fall to 1 out of every 10 temptations, and you expose yourself to 100 temptations, you will fall 10 times. If you can reduce that to only three or four temptations, you might not fall at all. Remove as much temptation and opportunity to sin as possible in your life, and don't give deceived desires any breathing room.

RUN!

1 Corinthians 10:13 ... when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 14 Therefore ... flee

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee the lusts of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

How do you flee from a desire/lust? As the desire begins to rise in your heart, put distance between you and that desire by running in the direction of righteousness, faith, love and peace with others (don't try to do it alone).

John Piper: "Move into a useful activity away from idleness and other vulnerable behaviors. Lust grows fast in the garden of leisure. Find a good work to do, and do it with all your might. "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord" (Romans 12:11). "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Abound in work. Get up and do something. Sweep a room. Hammer a nail. Write a letter. Fix a faucet. And do it for Jesus's sake. You were made to manage and create. Christ died to make you "zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). Displace deceitful lusts with a passion for good deeds."

Keep Running

One of the most important principles of fighting temptation is perseverance (James 1:2-15). John Piper: "Here is where many fail. They give in too soon. They say, "I tried to push it out, and it didn't work." I ask, "How long did you try?" How hard did you exert your mind? The mind is a muscle. You can flex it with vehemence. ... Hold the promise of Christ before your eyes. Hold it. Hold it! Don't let it go! Keep holding it! How long? As long as it takes. Fight! For Christ's sake, fight till you win! If an electric garage door were about to crush your child you would hold it up with all your might and holler for help, and hold it and hold it and hold it and hold it."

Bible, Prayer, and Fellowship

Bible

Fight temptation the way Jesus did – by quoting Scripture (Mt.4:1-11).

Psalm 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Memorize some verses that will be especially helpful in the types of temptations you face. Nothing exposes the hook under the bait (or the poison in the doughnut¹), and the goodness of God and His way, like God's Word. The way to stop gratifying the desires of the flesh is to walk by the Spirit (Gal.5:16). And that is done by using the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph.6:17), and by believing what the Word says (Gal.3:5).

¹ Imagine a nice, warm, delicious doughnut. You see the doughnut and you really, really want it. If someone walked up and asked you, "Is there anything I could say right now that would take away your desire for this doughnut and make you not want it anymore?" you might say, "No way!" So you grab it, and you are just about to take a bite, and right before you put it in your mouth he says, "Oh – by the way – I put some rat poison in that doughnut. If you take a bite, you'll die." Now you don't want the doughnut anymore! What happened to your desire? It went away when you found out the truth about the doughnut. That is what reading the Bible can do with sin. It can show you that it is really poison. All sins are like gross, disgusting, poisonous slime scraped the bottom of a garbage can. But the devil makes it look like a really tasty treat. The more you read the Bible, the more you can see that it is gross slime and not a treat.

Prayer

It also comes by praying in the Spirit.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray so that we will not fall into temptation.

Fellowship

The Spirit's power also comes through the Spiritual gifts of other saints (that is why they are called the gifts of the Spirit – 1 Cor.12:1). Don't try to win the war alone. Lone rangers are dead rangers – get help!

Change Your Thoughts

When tempted, look up! The good you are seeking only comes from above (James 1:1:16-17).

If you have already started to sin in your thoughts, repent and replace those thoughts with thoughts from God's Word (the way to "resist the devil" is by repenting - James 4:7-9.)

2 Corinthians 10:4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

The main way we jump the guardrails of conscience and decide to go ahead with a sin is because of some rationalization. That rationalization was a lie that we believed. In order to avoid falling for that lie in the future we must demolish it. Pick it apart, expose its folly, tear it to shreds, smash it to smithereens. It also helps to think of the consequences of sin.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to his flesh, from his flesh will reap destruction; the one who sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

In the law of sowing and reaping, the reaping is far greater in volume than the sowing.

Mark 4:8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

Always be asking, "What am I sowing right now?" Perhaps you are watching a TV show, or reading a news article, or chatting with a friend, or having a daydream, think about what effect that is having on your flesh. Is it weakening and killing the flesh, or awakening and strengthening it? Even if the movie or book is just stimulating your flesh only slightly, that sowing will later on reap 30 or 60 or 100 times greater problems. The thrilling truth is – that same principle applies to sowing to the spirit and reaping wonderful spiritual benefits!

Draw Near to God

James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will run away from you. 8 Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

When you read your Bible, don't just read the words. While you are reading, pray and say, "God, please come near me in this room while I'm reading." And then believe that He will do it. Any kind of

fighting against Satan that does not involve drawing near to God is not real fighting. Nearness to God, once you have it, makes sin look ugly. Keep reminding yourself of God's presence with you right there in the room. The thing that helped Job fight against lustful temptations was remembering that God could see every step he took in his mind (Job 31:1-4).

Enjoy God's Presence

When God comes near to you, you can tell He is there because He makes you feel things like happiness or comfort or peace. Instead of being all worried or upset, you feel calm.

Psalm 16:11 You fill me with joy in your presence.

Really try to enjoy that when it happens. Keep reminding yourself, "The reason I feel calm or happy right now is because God is right here with me. This is how it feels when God is near." The more you enjoy those times, the easier it will be to say no to temptation, because when we sin, that makes God move farther away from us.

Preferring

We do not glorify God just by resisting sin. We glorify Him by preferring Him above sin. Whatever you prefer, you glorify as the greatest treasure. Experiencing God's presence and favor is more delightful and satisfying than anything else life has to offer (Ps.36:3). But the decision to sin forfeits that.

Jonah 2:8 Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

2 Samuel 12:7 This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more.

If you have a box of cookies in the house and you are constantly tempted to eat them, the solution is easy – buy a box of better-tasting cookies. Then you won't be tempted at all with that first box. That is the way God wants us to fight temptation – to open our eyes to the truth that experiences of His favor are a far better box of cookies.

GratITUDE

The reason we sin is because of some form of covetous desire (also called greed). And one key solution to covetous desire/greed is gratitude. The heart cannot feel greed and gratitude at the same time.

Ephesians 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed ... but rather thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is what displaces greed from the heart. At the onset of temptation, turn your attention to the things you have to be grateful to God for. All of the principles above will only work momentarily unless you turn to a greater, more satisfying delight ("the expulsive power of a greater affection"). The sin offers some kind of pleasure or satisfaction, and you will eventually gravitate back to it unless your heart latches on to a more satisfying alternative.