

# Trials and Temptations

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn now to our Bible reading for this morning, which you'll find in the New Testament, in the epistle of James, the letter of James. If you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, you should find that, I think, on page 1011, page 1011.

Otherwise, it's right after the long letter to the Hebrews. And we're going to read in James chapter 1 at verse 12 and reading down to verse 25.

James chapter 1 at verse 12. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial. For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, I'm being tempted by God. For God cannot be tempted with evil. And he himself tempts no one.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin.

[ 1 : 20 ] And sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. Know this, my beloved brothers.

Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.

Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness. And receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls.

But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in the mirror.

[ 2 : 31 ] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Amen. And may God bless to us this his word. It is an enormous privilege to join you again at the Tron.

I feel as if I'm coming home. There are so many links with this church and with its pastor. I do thank you for the welcome. I hope you will open your Bibles to James 1.

But I'm going to begin by telling you stories of two men. Man number one. A Brit who some decades went to a Bible college to prepare for pastoral ministry.

In due course, he became minister of a church. And he seemed quite gifted as a speaker. He understood the gospel. Men and women were converted.

[ 4 : 00 ] The church began to grow. And then he was caught out in adultery. And, of course, left the church. He seemed to disappear off the face of the earth.

He surfaced in Canada at the seminary where I was then training. None of us knew his background. We graduated about the same time.

I went to British Columbia to serve a church there. He disappeared into the wilds of Ontario. Some years later, I moved to Britain myself. And through the ecclesiastical grapevine, I heard that his ministry was flourishing.

Then I heard that he was caught out in adultery. And he disappeared off the face of the earth. More years went by. And in the strange providence of God, I ended up where I am now, in Chicago.

And when I first arrived at the seminary to teach there, the administration asked if I wouldn't mind helping out in a nearby church on the weekends. Because they had recently gone through a trauma.

[ 5 : 04 ] Apparently, there had been a minister there who, though quite gifted, and it seemed quite a lot of conversions. Nevertheless, he got caught out in adultery. And the church was in some disarray.

Would I help out? Yes, your friend and mine, man number one. Some years later, if you asked him what happened three times, didn't you learn anything?

And why did you go back in the ministry in any case? What kind of bald-faced, crass boldness is that? He would answer, as he sold computer parts in Ohio, he would answer, God says that he would not leave us in any temptation beyond what we are able to bear, but will, with the temptation, make a way of escape.

I wasn't able to bear it. God is a liar. And that's all he would say. That's man number one. Man number two.

Also a Brit. I mean, I want to give the impression that all Brits are like the first men. His name was Norman. And in the 1930s, he went up to Cambridge from a devout family, was a fine Christian young man, became president of KICU, the Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union, married a young woman called Pat.

[ 6 : 38 ] They went as missionaries to Egypt, where he learned Arabic. Then in World War II, he was drafted into counterintelligence in the Arabic-speaking world. After the war, he became the first warden of Tyndale House in Cambridge, and eventually helped to set up the Oriental Institute at the University of London.

He was eventually knighted. And during his many, many years of ministry, he preached evangelistically frequently and wrote not only his technical books in his own field, but also wrote many Christian books, a layman with immense grasp of the gospel and evangelistic zeal.

But not everyone knows about Sir Norman Anderson and his family. He had three children. The first was a medical doctor. She was serving as a doctor in what was then the Belgian Congo, when the revolution took place in 1959 that made it Zaire.

She was gang-raped. She was furloughed home, and then as she recovered, she went to California to do some more medicine, preparatory to going back to America. She tripped some stairs, knocked herself out, and drowned in her own spittle.

The second child, a daughter, died in situations almost as bizarre. The third child, a son by the name of Hugh, died as an undergraduate at Cambridge the same year I arrived there myself in 1972.

[ 8 : 11 ] In all the years I knew Sir Norman, and I got to know him well. In all the years I knew Sir Norman, not once, not once did I hear him blame God.

Even when his wife was dying of Alzheimer's, not once did I hear him blame God. So the question becomes, do you want to be like man number one or man number two?

Don't answer quickly. It's easy to be man number one. But if you're a Christian, surely you want to be like man number two.

And this passage that we've read together tells you exactly what the difference is. Number one. Four things.

Number one. When you are struggling under trial, remember the Christian's goals. When you are struggling under trial, remember the Christian's goals.

[ 9 : 23 ] Verse 12. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Now, in fact, this verse picks up the same theme from a little earlier in the chapter than the passage that we read. Go back to verses two and following.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

So when you are struggling under trial, remember the Christian's goals. And there are, therefore, two of them. First, perseverance, endurance, stability, as an athlete endures to build up endurance. And the result of that is maturity. That's the point of verses two to four. And the second reward then is found in verse 12. The crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

[ 10 : 34 ] The expression is not common, but it's very clear what it means. In Revelation 2.10, be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life. It is life in all its consummation, life in the new heaven and the new earth, life in resurrection existence, life to come,

life in spectacular beauty and array.

And in the light of sufferings and trials that we face here, that is altogether attractive.

One recalls what Paul writes in Romans 8. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. In other words, when you are struggling under trial, remember the Christian's goals.

If you are a Christian, you want to learn to persevere. You want to learn to be mature. You want to learn to be stable.

And beyond all of that, in this life, you look forward for the life that is to come, the life that will be consummated in resurrection existence, the very crown of life.

[11:49] And if the trials that come our way contribute to that end, you will say, as it were, yes. Yes.

Sufferings and trials I don't like, but bring it on. I want the goals. So when you are struggling under trial, remember the Christian's goals.

When I was an undergraduate myself studying chemistry and mathematics at McGill, in those days, all of us in the English language used the King James Version. And we had somebody come on the campus who was beginning a series of Bible studies on James.

And in the first address, he came to James 1, verse 2, which reads, Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into diverse temptations.

And then it runs on from there. Well, a number of us young men thought that we'd better take this seriously, so we made a little covenant together. That any time we heard one of the others complaining or whining, we would quote this verse at them.

[13:03] Well, you can guess what happened. The next day, somebody wandered onto the campus and complained about the calculus exam scheduled for 10 o'clock.

And another one would smirk and say, Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into diverse temptations, which didn't help. And someone else would complain, maybe he had just broken up with his girlfriend or something, or money was a little short that month.

Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into diverse temptations. And it became a kind of nasty bit of spiritual one-upmanship. I could say it to you more than you could say it to me.

But in the mercy of God, gradually, in that small group, it came to be heard as the voice of God. And complaints dried up.

We started trying to think with eternity in view. And that year at McGill, we saw more converts than in all the rest of my years at McGill together.

[14:21] Listen, do you really want to be mature? Then as awful as some trials are, as awful as they are, not good things, part of this fallen order, understand this.

God uses even such things for your good. And the goodness in its fullness is yet to be seen in eternity.

When you are struggling under trial, remember the Christian's goals. Note even this little detail in verse 12. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Alec Mateer writes in one place that when he was serving in ministry, an elderly woman died. She and her husband had been married for something like 60 years, but she died.

And at the graveside, the old man who was left said, I suppose God has something more for me to do.

[15:35] Else why would he have left me here? And Alec put his arm around his shoulder and he said, my dear brother, God has nothing more for you to do than to love him still.

You see, he was not saying that the man really had nothing more to do. But we are not finally identified by what we do.

We are identified by whether we love him still. So when you are struggling under trial, remember the Christian's goals. Number two, when you confess God's sovereignty, do not misunderstand God's motives.

When you confess God's sovereignty, do not misunderstand God's motives. Verse 13, when tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me.

You see, that's easy to do if you believe in the sovereignty of God. Nothing falls, finally, outside the sweep of his sovereignty. So you actually face temptation and you start to think, God is tempting me.

[16:57] But the mysterious providence of God won't let you get away with a theology that's quite that reductionistic. Part of our problem in understanding this verse is that the root behind test or trial and temptation is one and the same.

and context is everything. If I had to paraphrase the first part of verse 13, I would put it this way. If you are tempted by such trials, do not say, God is tempting me.

In other words, James plunges from trial to temptation because he is writing as we experience things. the same events, the same trials that are opportunities to go forward are also temptations to wallow in sin.

Trial becomes temptation because it finds an answering chord within us. And then we blame God. After all, God does test people in the sense that he purposely brings them into situations where their willingness to obey him is tested.

In Genesis 22, verse 1, the Bible says explicitly, God tested Abraham in the matter of bringing Isaac to Mount Moriah and telling him to sacrifice him.

[18:19] We read in Judges 2, God tested Israel. We read in 2 Chronicles 32, 31, God tested King Hezekiah. But although God may test us even to bring about judgment in some cases, though he often tests us to prove his servants' faith or to lower their pride or to foster endurance or even to prepare them for glory, he never does so in order to induce sin.

In that sense, God does not tempt us. God does not and the grounding of this truth, the truth of 13a is in 13b.

When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me for God cannot be tempted by evil nor does he tempt anyone. In other words, temptation is an impulse to sin.

And God is not susceptible to any such impulse. God is not ever tempted. So why should we imagine for a moment that God would be interested in tempting us?

It's ridiculous. No, a true account of temptation and sin is found in verses 14 and 15.

[19:51] Each person is tempted when they're dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death.

Dragged away and enticed. The words are drawn from fishing imagery. Bait and hooks enticed and hooked and dragged away.

The point is that as sweeping as the sovereignty of God is, it never functions in Scripture to mitigate human accountability. And here James insists this is a true reckoning of what temptation looks like. The desire itself is evil but then sin itself is committed by an act of will we assent to the desire and the sin is committed.

The imagery is stark and ugly. It's rather shocking, even grotesque. The mother is desire. She gives birth to the child which is sin and the child full born, full grown is death.

[21:12] The expression gives birth to death is shocking. Shocking language to be full grown and still born. today we would put it a little differently but still with the same idea.

You flirt with sin. You tease the desire. You perform the act. You establish the habit. You construct the character and you are damned and enslaved by your own sin.

at some point as Spurgeon says a man receives his masters in worthlessness and his doctorate in damnation. What James says is this.

When you confess God's sovereignty do not misunderstand God's motives. God's goodness.

Number three. When you feel abandoned and crushed do not forget God's goodness.

When you feel abandoned and crushed do not forget God's goodness. Verse 16 is transitional.

Don't be deceived my dear brothers and sisters. Don't kid yourselves.

[22:28] Don't allow yourselves to wallow in rebellious self-pity or in an accusing stance. No. Understand the truth 17 and 18.

Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows. Now all of our experience of light brings with it shadows. The light in here is very good. It comes from many many corners. But the result is that when I hold my hand over this lectern I see many different shadows.

The light from there is casting shadows over here. The light from there is casting shadows over there. The light from there is casting shadows back here. And everywhere we look in the physical world we enjoy the light but something gets in the way and there correspondingly is shadow.

What James says is that God has no shadows. He's only good. If you like Star Trek or Star Wars better, if you like the Star Wars series, then you're familiar with the force.

[ 23 : 43 ] And the force is good or bad. It's light or dark. And which side of the force you enjoy, which side of the force you feed really depends entirely on you.

But that's not the way God is. There is no downside to God. Amongst us, we look at people with certain strengths and certain courageous features and we think, you know, that's their strength, all right, but there's a downside to their strength.

In this area, they're strong, but in this side, they're correspondingly weak. This person is bold and quick, but when it comes to sensitivity with poor people or weak people, they don't have it quite. This one is really compassionate and gentle, but, you know, really not a leader and so on. It seems as if every good side has a bad side. Every bit of light has a bit of darkness. There's shadows everywhere. But with God, there are no shadows.

He doesn't shift like shifting shadows. He is good. He can never, ever be not good. He is good, good, good, good, good, good, good, good.

[ 24 : 50 ] There's no bad. He is only good. God is not for a moment succumb to thinking that God is whimsical or mean-spirited or has it in for you or is on some little vengeance trip to satisfy a malicious streak.

Oh, I know that the Bible speaks of the wrath of God 600 times in the Old Testament. But the wrath of God in biblical terms is a function of his goodness because it's not arbitrary or whimsical.

It's a function of his holiness and he will see justice prevail. He is good, only good, which is part of the reason why Job, even in the midst of his inability to understand what God is doing, even in the midst of crying out for God to disclose himself, even in the midst of his uncertainty, can still say, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

You can't say that unless you're convinced that God is good. He is still trustable because he's good. If God were not invariably good, he would not be invariably trustable. God is good. When you feel abandoned and crushed, do not forget God's goodness.

[ 26 : 24 ] And what is the proof, the ultimate proof, that God is good? You could refer to the beauty of creation.

You could refer to the storyline of God's providence disclosed in scripture. You could refer to the new heaven and the new earth, but the author picks up the high water mark of God's goodness. Verse 18, he chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

What is this word of truth? word of truth? That expression, word of truth, is found only five times in the New Testament.

And every time, as far as I can see, it always means the same thing. It's most explicit in Ephesians 1.13 where we read, and you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

[ 27 : 31 ] salvation. So read verse 18 again. He chose to give us birth through the gospel, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

So the birth in view, therefore, is not natural birth. It's new birth. He chose to give us new birth through the gospel, that we might be a kind of first fruits.

And verse 18, then, is establishing the point of verse 17, the proof that God is supremely and invariably good.

He chose to give us regeneration, new birth through the gospel. gospel. And the gospel is the good news of what God has done in Christ Jesus supremely in his death and resurrection on our behalf. Are you suffering with cancer? And you wonder why God can allow it? Oh, we could talk endlessly about endurance and we all die and all the rest, but at the end of the day, what you most must hang on to is, but he regenerated me through the gospel.

[ 29 : 14 ] Are you out of work and don't quite know how the finances are going to work out and wonder if God really does care for you? But he regenerated me through the gospel.

Have you been bereaved? Your husband or wife of many years taken from you? But he regenerated me through the gospel. Do you find yourself in conflict, in the family, in the church? church? But he regenerated me through the gospel. What higher evidence is there of the goodness of God? The gospel in which the eternal son bore our sins in his own body on the tree.

The just dying for the unjust to bring us to God. And he chose to give us new birth out of that triumphant substitutionary death. And in eternity we will look back on all of the trials of this world.

And we will say compared with what we received from Christ through the gospel, it was all so small. We made so much of it at the time, but it's so small compared with the glory we have received through the Christ who bore our sins.

[ 30 : 38 ] through the gospel. We begin to see what is of transcendental importance. And so, even when we cannot see the whys or discern very far into the purposes of God, and we cannot bring justification to our explanations, nevertheless we still say, but I hang on to the cross.

Because the ultimate evidence that God loves me is there. It's in the gospel. And that I cannot deny. Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

It's the gospel that brings us stability in our utter conviction that God is good. God is good.

And finally, when you hear gospel instruction, do not merely listen to it, live it out.

verse 19. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this.

[ 32 : 02 ] Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word, but does not do what it says, is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror, and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do.

Now, when I was a boy, my father was a pastor. He was planting churches in French Canada, and he tried to teach us the rudiments of faithful biblical interpretation.

One of his slogans was, a text without a context becomes a pretext for a proof text. So the question is, this repetition of the word, word, in verse 21, verse 22, and verse 23, to what does it refer?

[ 33 : 35 ] But you see, there has only been one mention of word so far in the entire preceding paragraphs. It's the word of truth, verse 18, which unambiguously refers to the gospel.

That's what's going on in these verses too, and you will miss the impact of these verses unless you see that that is what is meant by the word. Therefore, verse 21, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word, the gospel planted in you, which can save you.

And you think, wait, wait, wait a minute, Don. If James is writing to Christians, it's already saved us, hasn't it? Well, yes, yes, yes, but it's like quite a number of other words about receiving the gospel.

There is a sense in which we speak of knowing Christ and also of getting to know Christ. The apostle Paul certainly knows God, but he cries in Philippians chapter 3, oh, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable to his death.

So also, if the gospel has come to us and we've received it, it has saved us, but there is another sense in which it continues. to save us. The gospel is not that which sort of tips us in, and then after that, what transforms us is our discipleship courses.

[ 35 : 01 ] Rather, the gospel is the big category, and this gospel which has saved us, so we are acquitted before the bar of God's justice, we have been justified before him, we have received the Holy Spirit, we have been regenerated, we already have life eternal.

Nevertheless, it continues to save us as this powerful gospel transforms us and brings us in increasing intimacy with Christ and aligns us with the character of Christ.

So what does the text say? Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word, the gospel, planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the gospel, and so deceive yourselves. It's possible for Christians to listen to the gospel and say, as it where do I know all that? This is really good for all those pagans who are here this morning.

I don't really need it myself, thank you. No, no, no. Do not merely listen to the gospel and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. The gospel is not only to be believed, it is to be obeyed.

[ 36 : 10 ] It is why 1 John can keep saying again and again, you must not only believe the truth, you are to do the truth. The gospel brings us Christ Jesus and his death and resurrection, and as we trust Christ and his death on our behalf, so Christ insists that we are to take up our cross and follow him, and we end up doing the gospel.

Do you see? The gospel demands that we die to ourselves and rise in renewed faith in Christ Jesus. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word, to the gospel, but does not do what it says, is like someone who looks at his face in the mirror and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like, but whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom.

In this context, with the flow of the argument, that must still refer to the gospel. It's the perfect instruction of God that brings genuine freedom.

They will be blessed in what they do. brothers and sisters in Christ, what will distinguish you from man number one?

What will align you with man number two? When you are struggling under trial, remember the Christian's goals.

[ 37 : 41 ] When you confess God's sovereignty, do not misunderstand God's motives. When you feel abandoned and crushed, do not forget God's goodness.

And when you hear gospel instruction, do not merely listen to it. Live it out. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

we bow in your presence, Lord God, and beg of you wisdom from on high that is first peaceful, peaceable.

You are the one who promises wisdom to those who ask, and we do ask. we hunger for the wisdom that enables us to see the gospel and all of its sweep and power.

[ 38 : 52 ] Draw us again and again to the cross of Christ Jesus and to the empty tomb. That our whole desire will be to die daily to sin and self rise again rise again in newness of life in Christ Jesus.

And for those this morning who have gathered here for whom this gospel, this good news is still essentially alien, will you not open their eyes, Lord God, enable them to see their need, to glimpse how utterly good you are as measured by the cross, and to cry out even now where they sit, from their inmost being, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

For those of us who have walked the Christian way for many years, in some cases for many decades, forbid that we should so be ensnared in difficult rumbling in our mind regarding the mysteries of providence that we forget the clarity of scripture on the glory of your goodness.

But bring us back again and again to trusting, adoring, obedient worship for Jesus' sake. Amen.