

'Pride and Temptation'

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Date: 13 September 2026

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[0:00] Okay, I'm going to begin with a question which is at the top of your outline but on the slide is a slightly different question. And the question is, is it wrong to be proud?

Is it wrong to be proud? Just think about it for 10 seconds in your own head. I wouldn't get a straw poll but I know that some of you really want to say that it is.

And yet I also know some of you want to say that it is not. Because on the one hand we've got the familiar phrase, don't we? That pride comes before a fall.

And yet on the other, you know, we sometimes criticize others and say, Oh, come on, take some pride in your work. Now as a parent, I'm often proud of my children.

Is that bad? And yet, when people keep gloating over their children's achievements, we raise our eyebrows, don't we?

[1:05] And in our first section today in the passage, I think we're presented with a similar kind of question, isn't it? In fact, I think James surprisingly commends us to be proud.

So verse 9, So for someone in humble circumstances, they are to take pride in the high position that they're already in.

Which is quite a surprising thing to be saying, isn't it? And I'll get into that shortly. But for the rich, they are to take pride in their humiliation.

Which again, is rather unexpected to hear. But in both cases, what they are to take pride in are to have a different perspective on their situation, compared to what most people would expect.

Now for James, he was writing to people, or Christians, that were recently scattered across the empire. And so for many of them, they probably found themselves worse off.

[2:46] Strangers in a foreign land, no property, a home of their own, having to start again, being mistreated by the locals. And perhaps they were even, even their fellow Jews were suspicious of them, because they were Christian Jews, not just Jews.

Now there might be a few, however, who found themselves, fortunately, to have gotten ahead, despite their dislocation. Whether it's their tenacity or their charisma, they have become rich, even though they have been persecuted.

Now to the former, James encourages them to take pride in their humble circumstances. Now that's another way, I suppose, of saying, take joy in their trials, which is what we saw last week.

But I want you to notice, if you look back into your Bibles, that James asked them to take pride in their humble circumstances.

Not in spite of their humble circumstances. And that means, the humble circumstances they find themselves in, is to be a source of pride. A blessing to rejoice over.

[4:02] Now how can that be, you might be thinking? Well, in part, we saw last week that it's because God uses these circumstances, these trials, to mature them, to be like Jesus.

But those in humble circumstances also find themselves, James says, in a high or great position within God's kingdom. This is something that God wants them to value more than the riches in this world.

Because Jesus himself said that the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Or, the least in the kingdom, in my kingdom, will be the greatest.

And Jesus himself, even though he was the greatest, he humbled himself by serving us and dying on the cross for all of us.

So, likewise, those who are in humble circumstances should take pride in their high position because they can see clearly that their position before God, that they are loved by God, valued in his sight, is not due to anything that they've got in life.

[5:15] Now, of course, this is very different, isn't it, to how the world sees things. For example, I've never seen an honor list naming the poorest 200 people in the world.

Instead, we have things like the BRW Top 200 Rich List. You might recognize some of the faces on the left there. Or, Times Magazine, Person of the Year, to name the most influential person for the year.

And in 2025, it was not a person, but it was the Architects of AI, which Steph just used in her introduction.

Anyway, whichever list you and I didn't make it onto this year, the Bible tells us to take pride in the fact that we didn't make it onto that list.

And so, for me, there's also, for example, maybe the fact that I wasn't shortlisted to be appointed the Archbishop of Melbourne. Or, for the rest of you, maybe you didn't get that promotion at work.

[6:23] Or, you didn't become ducks in your school or the top of the class at university. Well, take pride and comfort in it. Not because you're lazy and, therefore, don't really deserve it.

But, because even if you worked hard and didn't get the recognition you deserved, your high position isn't found in your status before society.

In the achievements that people value. But your status comes from God. And more specifically, your status before God comes by being in Christ.

Because James speaks here, not to just anyone in humble circumstances, but to believers in humble circumstances. And that's because, for believers, their high position isn't found in their humble circumstances in and of itself, but actually in Christ.

Which is something only believers enjoy. Or the riches that they can see now clearly that God has given to them is a result of their sharing in God's or Christ's glorious inheritance.

[7:33] And so, when there is no earthly wealth or status to distract them from this truth, they are blessed, aren't they? To be able to see where their treasure truly lies.

And so, they can take pride in those circumstances. These circumstances are helping the lowly believer see where their true riches lie.

It's not clouding their vision. And it's not telling them that, oh, it's these other things that they need in order to find status before God.

Conversely, when a believer happens to be doing well in life, and some of you might be in that situation. Perhaps, asaph is, you know, he gets to go to Oxford. Not bad, right?

You can be easily distracted, can't we? By that wealth or status. Such a person ought to reflect soberly. And be humble to realize just how fleeting these opportunities, these achievements, these riches are, because they are like the wildflower that quickly passes away.

[8:43] And James talks about wildflowers. He's not talking about, you know, the precious orchid or that bonsai that your mom might have at home, where, you know, it's carefully cultivated, pruned, you know, watered, nurtured.

No, these are wildflowers, which if you drive along the road, they are littered on the roadside or in the field, right? They appear by the thousands, exposed to the elements, blown about by the wind, here today, and then gone tomorrow.

And so, things might look secure for the rich. You know, you might drive down Touareg one day, and you see those mansions, and you think, wow, they're in secure accommodation, aren't they? With all their walls and their electric kind of remote control gates, or what have you, and security cameras. But in God's eyes, that is but a breath.

Can you see that? The book of Ecclesiastes says that all life is meaningless and a vapor. In Psalms chapter 8, we're asked this question. When I consider your heavens, that is God, your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them?

[10:02] Human beings that you care for them? And the answer we find in Psalm 103, verse 15 and 16. The life of mortals is like grass.

They flourish like a flower of the field, just as James said. The wind blows over it, and it is gone.

And its place remembers it no more. But you see, when we have possessions, when we have lots of stuff to give us comfort, it's easy to be deceived by these things, right?

To put your trust in them to protect you from really what is a very fragile life that you have. And that's why for the rich believer, James wants them to guard against this deception.

And instead, to know that their riches actually count for nothing. And so that is what I think it means for them to take pride in their humiliation. To psychologically debase themselves.

Dismiss all the stuff that they have, the comfort that they derive from their bank balance, their properties. And instead, to humble themselves before God and see that, you know, when they stand next to the poor believer, or they come to church, the rich and the poor, all of them are actually equal before God.

[11:26] Because the truth is, it's not how much we bring to God, how much we have that we think we can bring to God, that makes Him love us, that makes Him save us.

But what the Lord Jesus has done for us on the cross. And for the rich and the poor, that is the same. We are all leveled before the cross.

So, it may not feel like for the rich, this is like hardship or suffering, to have to debase themselves. But the process is nevertheless, I believe, a trial.

Because it is a testing of their faith. When we are rich, we are challenged actually to exercise self-control. To discipline ourselves, to keep humbling ourselves before God, rather than become proud.

Or to use our money and influence to throw our weight around. And I don't know whether you have noticed, but you know, have you ever met someone who has kind of said to you, or threatened somebody else, you know who I am?

[12:34] You know? As if, if you knew who I am, you better do what I say. Or, you know, someone who offers a bribe because they have money to get what they want. Or, can I offer you a favour in return if you give them preferential treatment?

I think we have all seen it, haven't we? If not, you have seen it on TV. I am sure. Now, this is the same, actually, temptation for Christians who are successful, right? Not to think that God loves us because we are successful.

To trust in our own devices because we can. That's what's the temptation, isn't it, for Christians. But actually, to patiently trust in God's way.

And remain humble despite all the wealth and achievements and whatever else we think is so valuable in life. And so, in a sense then, all believers, whether they are rich or poor, they face trials. Because trials, you know, are a way of testing our faith and how we respond can determine, actually, the fate of our eternity. And so, yes, for the rich, that's a different way of testing or trial than those who are poor.

[13:48] But in both cases, everyone is to take pride in their humble place before God. And recognise it to actually be a place of true blessing and honour rather than a curse.

And so, James now goes on in verse 12 to encourage all believers to persevere in that trial.

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.

True humility comes when we take pride in our lowly position. And see that, actually, as a truly high position that we can find in Christ.

And therefore, to hold out for the eternal glory, that promised crown of life that only comes to those who love the Lord.

And, as we move on, the thing that threatens this reward and stops us persevering under trial is temptation or to be deceived by it.

[14:56] So, verse 13, James writes, Now, let me first say something about this word, tempt or tempting, which is, I think, repeated how many times?

How many times? Five times, at least, in these two verses? Or three verses? This word is actually the same word as we've been hearing earlier for the word trials.

So, on the next slide, in verse 3, for example, Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials, that word. Yep. Verse 12, which we just heard, Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial.

In both those instances, that word in the original Greek is the same word as all the references to tempt or temptation or tempted in verses 13 to 15.

And so, in the Christian Standard Bible, which is a slightly different version, in verse 13, it's actually written like this. No one undergoing a trial. Alright? So, it's not when tempted, but no one undergoing a trial should say, I'm being tempted by God.

[16:20] Now, we know that trials and temptations, we understand them to be slightly different things. But, the fact that the Greek actually uses the same root word for it, shows us that actually,

trials and temptations are connected and related.

Trials themselves don't cause us to sin, but temptations often arise when we face trials, because they become a test of our faith.

We're easily tempted, aren't we, during trials, because we want an easy way out. The temptation is to then compromise on what is right in order to get that shortcut out of our trials.

And so, while God may allow us to face trials, and we read in Job that God allowed Satan to tempt or test Job, God himself is not the source of our temptation, Jameson.

Yes, he knows trials often expose us to temptation, because after all, he's God, he knows everything. But he cannot tempt, because when you tempt, what you're doing is enticing someone to do evil or wrong.

[17:37] And God, by his nature, cannot tempt. Nothing that springs from God can be anything but good. And so, James uses that phrase, God cannot be tempted, in the sense that God is impervious.

He's not moved. He's not enticed by wanting to do evil, and therefore to tempt people into wrongdoing. Now, of course, God recognizes evil when he sees it.

You know, he's constantly dealing with evil in this world. He has to respond to it. And not least, when he sends his son to die on the cross. That was the ultimate response to evil, wasn't it?

But his own thoughts and motivations are always pure. What he does is always to try and right a wrong, never to create evil to begin with.

Now, if you're trying to just kind of get your head around this, I think an example might be that of a judge sitting in court. Now, he or she, the job of a judge is to listen to offenses, and then try and seek to restore justice, right, in that situation.

[18:55] And so, that requires them to understand the nature of evil. They need to know, oh, what has gone wrong here? Why is this person doing it? But they themselves are never enticed by the evil, or should not be, right?

They're not going there, wow, yeah, that was a good idea. I might try that myself. No. They're not entertained or enticed by what they hear in court.

They want to actually address and make right whatever the wrongdoing is. And that is how it is with God, right, and sin. He knows what evil is, alright, but he's not enticed by it because it's not in his nature to be enticed.

And so, God's purpose for allowing trials in our life is not to tempt us, actually, but to spur us on to do what is right. He's actually cheering us on, you're right, and giving us the power of the Spirit to say no to sin.

And that is what the test of our faith is, because he wants us to persevere to prove the genuineness of our faith. But he has to make us go through trials in order for that faith to be tested, to be proven genuine when it rejects sin, right?

[20:11] Instead, James says that the source of our temptation is our own evil desires. You know, we have been given the agency to say no, to do the right thing, but often our own desires let us down, right?

We're drawn into, oh, wow, let me think about this. You know, what sin offers? It is tempting, isn't it? Even though we know that it goes against God's will.

And so, James says, verse 14, if we allow the desire to conceive, you know, grow, and give into it, it gives birth to sin.

And if that goes unchecked, that is, it keeps growing, full grown, it gives birth to death. And for us, that means being unrepentant.

We allow our sin to grow, that leads to God's judgment, that of eternal death. And here, James is actually describing a first kind of birth.

[21:10] There are two births in this passage, which we'll get to, you'll see in the outline. But this kind of birth is the wrong kind, isn't it? Where evil desires give birth to sin, which in turn then gives birth to death.

And all of it starts with the deceit of temptation. Temptation is always deceitful.

Because there's always an enticement for you to do what is wrong, but when it's first presented to you, the temptation never makes it clear what the disastrous consequences are for falling for it, right?

Every temptation, if you think about it, portrays itself as something desirable and good for you. You know, had you really considered the full consequences beforehand, you might actually think twice before falling for that temptation.

You know, you just have to ask any man who has cheated and destroyed his family as a result. Blowing up his marriage, devastation on his children.

[22 : 17] You don't have to ask any man, just look in the papers. There have been a string of AFL players that have just done that. Let me tell you, at the point of temptation, when their desires are enticed, their only thoughts then are of how attractive this all is.

Right? The pleasure, the satisfaction they would get. It is never about, oh, don't do this, it's going to be disastrous. They never think about that.

And you know, none of this is new. Because as we read in our first reading in Genesis 3, that was how it was with Eve and the serpent. It's the same trajectory all the time, isn't it?

So first, the temptation in verse 1. Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

You know, planting that seed of doubt to tempt Eve. And then Eve said, oh, no, no, no, no.

God said you can eat anything but the tree in the middle. And if you eat it or touch the fruit, you will die. The serpent then makes light of the consequences. Right?

[23 : 25] Oh, no. You will not certainly die. Right? For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

You know, Satan or the serpent only asks Eve to consider how good it is. Good. Good. You will be like God.

You will be knowledgeable. You will know good and evil. And so as James says, the result is that sin then gives birth to death. Later on, if you read further on in the chapter, when Adam and Eve were found out and God came looking, what did they do?

They hid from God, isn't it? And they covered themselves with fig leaves. They're ashamed. And then, instead of owning up, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent.

So there was no repentance, was there? And so God's judgment was spiritual death. Separation from him and his presence in the garden.

[24 : 32] And so James now says the very same thing in verse 16. Don't be like Eve. Don't be deceived, my brothers and sisters. Don't get sucked in by the temptation.

It looks attractive, but no, it's not good. And more importantly, as I said, God has not put this trial in your lives in order to tempt you.

Instead, God has given it to you with a far greater aim in mind, which is to bless you, which James has already said, is that crown of life when we persevere under trial.

And so we need to hold out for what God has in store for us by doing what's right. Because, next line, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Now, just consider carefully what James has just said. Because what he's just said is that God has a monopoly on everything good in this world.

[25 : 37] If something is truly good, it has to be from God. Right? Think about it. Every good thing that you have in your life is from God.

There is no good thing that is in your life that has not come from God. Whatever God has given us also, by definition, is good. So, even the trials, even the things that we find difficult that God has put in our lives is actually good for us.

Conversely, something may seem good, but if it causes us to sin, it's contrary to God's will, then no matter how we want to rationalize it, that is not good.

It's pretty black and white, isn't it? What God gives is good, and what is not good has not come from God. And given God's unchanging nature, he's called the Father of the heavenly lights, whatever has been good will always be good.

And if something is wrong, then there's no amount of rationalization that you can do in your mind that will change it from something bad to good. Because God does not change his mind. But, you know, the more comforting thing is to know that because God's good gift for us is this crown of life, his purpose for our life, his promise for our lives, has not changed since the beginning of time.

[27 : 03] And now we read in verse 18 that this life comes through a different kind of birth. It says that he chose to give us birth, again, through the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits for all he created.

And here I want us to look at it at two different levels. That's the cosmic level, because when James talks about firstfruits of all that God has created, he's talking about the new creation.

And the firstfruits are these believers in James' day that have been born as a result of Christ's resurrection. The new creation has been set in motion because Jesus rose from the dead.

And as a result, this new life that has come to believers in James' time are the firstfruits of that harvest. And we who come later, we are part of that harvest too.

And so just as sin has brought death to the old creation in a cosmic sense through Adam and Eve, new life through Christ has come in the new creation because of his resurrection.

[28:09] But this also applies to us individually. That is, we have a chance to reject sin which causes or gives birth to death in our life, and instead give birth to new life or God giving us new birth through life by receiving the word of truth.

Now in next week's passage, King Lee will explain a bit more about this word of truth, how it's implanted in us and we need to do here and do it in order for it to come alive.

But for today, the warning is not to fall for deadly deception. The verse in 16 says, Don't be deceived. Deception is deadly.

It sounds like an oxymoron, isn't it? You give birth to death. Kind of, that doesn't work, does it? And yet that's what James is saying. That when we sin, it gives birth to death.

And what we should be doing instead is to allow God to give us birth in new life through the word of God. Now let me close by coming back again to Psalm 103, 15 and 16.

[29:21] We were given the sobering thought, isn't it? That humans are like grass, flowers which the wind blows away and are no more. But you know, the very next verse, we get this amazing promise, isn't it?

But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear Him, and His righteousness with their children's children, with those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts.

And so, what the Psalmist is saying, yes, you are like grass. Yes, yes, you will vanish like the rich will just get blown away.

But, for those who love the Lord, those who fear the Lord Jesus, from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear Him.

It's the same promise that says, blessed are those who persevere under trial, because when they have stood the test of faith, they will receive the crown of life, which has been promised to those who love Him.

[30:25] That is God's ultimate gift for us, the crown of life, eternal life. Much more glorious, much more beautiful, and much more valued than any of the riches that are in this world today.

The temptation is to look to the riches and fall for the deception that these things are real. Instead, we are to hold firm to God's word of truth, His promise in Christ Jesus, and persevere under the test of faith.

That's right. Father, giver of all good gifts, please help us not to be deceived by the temptations of this world, whether it's the lust of the eyes or the flesh or the pride of life.

Yes, these are the things that the world chases, but please help us to take pride instead in the crown of life, which Christ has won for us through His crown of thorns.

Keep us humble to persevere in faith through every trial in life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.