

Wisdom for Living

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Date: 13 October 2024

Preacher: Matthew Garrett

[0 : 00] Well, I'm really glad to see the Tverskis showed up today and packed about two pews there. The Carlisle clan plus Douglass's, there's another couple of pews.

The Garrets haven't done too bad today either. Couple of pews over here. And for those of you that come in the groups of one and two, we're just so glad to have you here today.

Hallelujah. Good to see all of you today. Today, we are going to continue our study in the book of James. We're just getting started good. This is only our, well, the second section of the first chapter. And we'll be going through the book of James over the next two or three months or so. And James is an incredibly practical book. You see this slide of a guy here says James, pearls of wise living. The book of James is just about every day, how should you live? If you're a Christian, how should you live? So it's got stuff in there about controlling what you say and controlling your temper and how you should treat other people and about how you should spend your money.

[1 : 13] And part of why churches are always reaching out to help people in need is because James said things like, true religion is to help widows and orphans.

And so it's just a very practical book on how to live. I don't know who it was. Some well-known, I don't know, celebrity or something in the past had this kind of funny one-liner, just said, I can withstand anything except temptation.

Well, today we're going to talk about James's advice on dealing with temptation. So before we get into it, let's ask God to help us.

Lord, we've all got temptation in our lives, temptation to turn against you, temptation to go our own way, temptation to sin. And we need your help.

So, Lord, we're going to read this passage together, and we're trusting you to speak through our hearts and help us, help us, God, to be more like Jesus and open our understanding.

[2 : 23] It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So we're going to start with James 1, verses 13 and 14. Mark, if you'll put that up there. Hope you can read that.

My other slides, I've got bigger print up there. But I'll read that for you. So James says, When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me.

For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

It's kind of a strange thing to say that God is tempting us. What a strange thing. I mean, why would he? Why would God want us to sin?

He doesn't. Obviously, he wants us to be Christ-like. So there's just no way in the world. It's totally illogical to think that God would be tempting us. Instead, James is saying, no, your sin comes from within.

[3 : 28] Again, it's that desire that's in you that begins the problem. But sometimes we'll blame God. Like I heard about a guy. He decided he was going to lose weight.

He said he needed to lose about 30, 40 pounds. And so he swore on this special diet he was going to follow. And one of his weaknesses was donuts.

And so one day he was heading for an appointment and he remembered he was going to have to go right by Dunkin' Donuts. I said that for Callie, our Dunkin' Donuts expert here.

So anyway, he prayed as he was driving toward Dunkin' Donuts. He prayed. He said, God, if you don't want me to eat a donut today, please let the parking lot be full.

So I can resist the temptation. So he gets there. And well, it took seven times around the block.

[4 : 30] But on the seventh time around, there was a parking space available. So he pulled in and he parked. And then he says, God, I'm only going to eat one donut. Just one.

But you know, they're a lot cheaper by the dozen. So about eight donuts later, sitting in his car with sugar all over his lap, then he says, God, look what you made me do.

So, you know, that's kind of how we think sometimes. We put an impossible request before God and then kind of ignore every opportunity to follow his path.

But notice in this scripture, James didn't say, if you are tempted. What did he say? When.

In other words, right off the bat, he's telling us, if you're alive, you're going to be tempted to sin. I have a friend who's 90.

[5 : 29] I have several friends that are 94 years old. But one in particular asked me all the time to pray for him about temptations that he deals with.

And I'm thinking, 94, how bad can your temptations be, really? I mean, but he said, I discussed it with him once. He said, trust me, even at 94, there's still urges and desires and attitudes and things that I'm dealing with.

So when you're tempted, it will come upon you. Now, James is going to go on here to explain that he doesn't see sin as like just a one moment, one thing.

He sees kind of three steps in a process. So let's look at the next verse. Let's go on and look at 14 and 15. So we'll reread a part of 14 there.

And so each one, each person is tempted when he or she is drawn away by their own desires and they're enticed.

[6 : 35] Let's stop there just a moment. Just a little research on this is that the Greek words for your desires and for being enticed are the same Greek words used for when you're fishing.

Now, I'm going to pick on my grandson Levi for a minute. Do you like to fish? This boy lives to fish. He loves it.

Can you ever get tired of fishing or are you always ready to go? All right. So now, what is the best kind of bait that you like to use? Okay, a fake worm.

So these words to desire and entice, these are Greek words for the special baits, lures that you use when you're fishing.

And so our desires are like the way we are attracted to things that might not be good for us. Is that hook really good for that fish? No.

[7 : 36] But it stirs up that fish's desire. And so the devil puts things before us that will stir us up.

Now, as we keep reading, when the desire has been fully conceived, we've been thinking about this desire a long time.

It will give birth to sin. And then if our sin, if we continue in it, when the sin is full grown, it will bring forth death.

So really then James says there's three steps. First, you have a desire that you know is not right. Your conscience tells you it's not right.

The Bible tells you it's not right. You know in your heart it's not right. But you have this desire. And if you keep thinking on it and contemplating it, it will probably lead you to sin.

And then if you stay in that sin long enough and let that sin keep growing, it will at some point lead to death, destruction, chaos, poverty, sadness, heartbreak.

[8 : 42] All of the terrible things that can happen can come to us if we will stay in sin for a long time. Now, I came across a really good example of this in nature.

Next slide, Mark. This plant is a type of fern called a cobra lily. It is a fly-eating plant.

And it doesn't look a lot like a cobra. Good name for it, right? It even looks like it's got a little tongue that sticks out. Well, now, I don't know if you can really see that second picture very well.

But a fly, this plant gives off a fragrance. Humans are hardly even aware of it. Flies find that fragrance to be irresistible.

And they'll come and land on what looks like the cobra's tongue. And the smell leads them right up to a little hole right where the tongue goes into the head part of that plant.

[9 : 46] And that fly will crawl right in there. And then they say when he gets in there, you probably can't see it real well. But the top of the plant has a lot of light, like almost little windows in it.

And they say inside the top of it, it's dazzling, sparkling, beautiful inside there. So the fly comes in, it smells wonderful, it looks wonderful.

And the fragrance is stronger the further he starts going down. So then I've got a little diagram that I found on the internet of how that plant looks on the inside.

So I don't know if you can see it, but first the flies get up in the top. And they're attracted to keep going down, down, where the fragrance gets stronger. And the walls of this plant are covered with thousands of hairs that are all pointing down.

And the fly is crawling over them. They let you go by with no problem. And as you get down, it gets smaller and smaller. And at the very bottom, there's a liquid that is a digestive compound of some kind.

[10:57] And when that fly gets down so close that he begins to realize, hmm, I don't believe I want some of this. As he tries to turn around and tries to fly, the hairs that are sticking out interfere with his ability to fly.

And if he tries to crawl, he's got to crawl against all of these little spikes that are sticking down. And then the walls are real slippery at the bottom. And if he's gotten that far, there's no turning back. He slides and falls down in there. And then the plant eats him. Isn't that weird? The man, animal eating plant.

There are a few plants that eat flies. That's one of them. And it digests him and he's gone. That's a really good picture of sin. Sin looks so fun, so good, so attractive.

We think, wow, that's going to be really what I want. And we get into it. And at first, it still seems that way. Those first tastes of sin are rather sweet.

[12:09] But you stay in it long enough. And it starts turning to death and destruction. You know, I could have come up with so many examples for this, but I thought, yeah, I think I've got a lot of young people.

I knew my whole crowd was going to be here today. I'm going to tell one for the teenagers among us. But this story works for any sin, any age. Let's imagine there was a young teenage boy.

And maybe he's about, I don't know, 16 or something. And a friend invited him over to spend the night. So he asked his parents. And they say, sure, go ahead. And he comes back home.

And after a day or two, he says to his folks, I need to confess something to you. When I was over at their house the other night, there were other guys there, too.

I didn't know they were going to be there, but they were there, too. And we all ended up getting drunk. And I feel terrible about it. We shouldn't have done it. But everybody was doing it.

[13:14] And it was like I had no choice. Well, always sin kind of seems like that. It seems very attractive at the time. We often feel like, gee, I don't even have a choice.

I'm just being sucked into this. But afterwards, we'll have a lot of regret when we sin. Now, in this young guy's case, if he stays in that path long enough, any adult in here that's been alive any time at all, you have met somebody or there's someone in your family.

You know someone who has stayed in that alcohol path for a lifetime. It has become, you know, from problem drinker to alcoholic. And you know their story.

That the death that comes at the end of that sin. The goodness. If that teenage boy keeps going back and hanging out with that same crowd and begins to develop that addictive personality, addictive attachment to alcohol.

Oh, my land, his grades will start falling. That's the first steps of death. He'll end up getting in some traffic situations. And they'll end up revoking his driver's license at some point.

[14:37] If he's blessed enough to get married or whatever, at some point, his wife and kids are going to leave him. If he keeps on drinking, if he keeps on drinking, at some point, it's going to kill him. We have known some people right in this church.

A lifetime of drinking. And it just finally ate their liver completely up and they died from it. And thank God at any time we can be forgiven.

Thank God with his help we can turn back. But there is a progression in sin from desire to sin. And if you continue in the sin, I don't care what sin it is, it's finally going to result in death.

Your death may be somebody else's. Well, then the question would come up. Is it a sin to be tempted? And the answer is no.

We're all tempted. And it's not a sin to be tempted. You will be tempted. Even Jesus was tempted. Let's see a verse of scripture, the next one.

[15:45] Here's our proof that Jesus was tempted. It's in Hebrews 4, 14 through 16. We have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven.

Jesus, the son of God. So Jesus is our high priest and he's gone ahead of us. We don't have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.

But we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are. Yet he was without sin. That's really good news, actually.

That Jesus was tempted in every way that you have been. Yeah, I just gave an example of alcohol abuse. Wine flowed at the parties when Jesus was young.

You know, he hung out with a lot of sinners. Do you think that the prostitutes and all he hung out with, that they never had any temptation to slip into sexual sin?

[16:47] No, Jesus knew that temptation. Do you think he never had the temptation to use his abilities to gain power, to gain fame? Do you think he never was tempted to be for greed that all of the money he could have made, he could have been the king of this world?

I mean, he was tempted in every kind of way you've been tempted. Do you think he didn't ever want revenge when people said terrible things about him? You think he wasn't tempted to get revenge? Every way you've been tempted, in every way it says, just as we are. And yet, the good news, he never sinned. Praise God, he never sinned.

He had the advantage that he was God, but he was showing us the right way to live. And because he was tempted without sin, he can help us to overcome our sins.

I love this next verse, which is right before Jesus is born. An angel said to Joseph, Mary will bear a son.

[17:53] This is Matthew 121. Mary will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus. The name Jesus means God is our salvation.

Our salvation comes from God. You'll call him Jesus. He will save his people from their sins. How does Jesus save us from sin? Really, in three different ways.

He saves you from the penalty of sin. I love this. Three Ps. I never make stuff like that up. You know, really, these great preachers always have three points in every sermon, and they start with the same letter.

I've never figured out how to do that. But I got this from somebody. Three Ps of how God, through Jesus, saves us from sin. First, the penalty of sin, meaning the moment that you say, Lord, forgive me.

I want to follow you, Jesus. The penalty, the punishment for your sins is gone. It goes. It's transferred to Jesus at the cross.

[18:59] You are no longer condemned to hell when that happens. That punishment is put on Jesus. He takes it for you. So, the penalty of sin for every believer is already gone.

There's no condemnation to you, Romans says. The next thing is a work in progress. He is currently saving us from the power of sin.

I hate the power that sin has over me. I hate it. But he's working in our lives that we're tempted, and we're struggling against it.

And sometimes we're falling back and sinning, and he's giving us another chance to do over, to try again. And as we keep doing that, we grow stronger, and we are slowly overcoming the power of sin in our lives.

There's many examples of that. You have sins in your life that used to really bother you that don't anymore. You've had some success and some growth, and that power is no longer there.

[20:07] When I was a brand new believer, I still had a lot of temptation to get drunk, to party all night, to smoke weed.

I mean, I really had strong temptations. I don't have that temptation at all anymore. It didn't happen overnight. It was because the Lord continued to help me, and sometimes I slipped back and sinned again, and went back to him and said, Oh God, forgive me.

I do want to live for you. And then that power, Jesus gave me that power over sin. It's not complete yet. It's called sanctification.

It's a lifetime process. But praise God for the third one. I am looking forward to that day. He's going to deliver us one day from the presence of sin. As the old song says, when we all get to heaven, there will be no sin there.

There will be no temptation. There will be no Satan. There will be no desires in your heart that go against God. So, we've already been freed from the penalty of sin. We are currently being freed from the power of sin.

[21:14] And one day, we're going to be completely free from the presence of sin. Praise God. I'm looking forward to that day. Now, somebody here might say, But Matt, my temptations are worse

than yours.

You don't know how tempted I am. You don't know how I have tried to quit that and I couldn't. Or this thing that bothered. You just don't know. Well, there's a verse of scripture about that.

Next slide. 1 Corinthians 10, 13. The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. How about that?

If you say, my sin temptation is different, liar, liar, pants on fire. There's no, your temptations are no different from others and what they experience.

But God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. And when you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you can endure.

[22 : 19] So others have had the same temptation. No matter what that is that bothers you, you're not alone. There's others struggling with it too. And we can help each other as we sometimes share our struggles with one another and pray for one another.

We can help each other in this struggle against temptation. I love the part where it says He shows us a way out. If you're a Christian and you're dealing with a sin, a recurring sin, and most of us are, God will show you a way out.

Now, our problem is we don't like to take it. I think about the boy, just since I gave that example earlier, I made it up. A teenage boy got drunk at his friend's house.

Where was the way out? Well, if this lad was a Christian, we'll just say, suppose he was a Christian. So, where was the way out for him? Maybe he already knew the kind of guy that he was going to go over to his house.

And maybe he already knew, you know, that guy, he kind of, every now and then he gets into his dad's alcohol cabinet. And I don't want to be over there.

[23 : 33] So, that was his first opportunity to say, you know, I don't think I'll come to your house. Thanks for inviting me. Instead, let's go to a movie together. And then afterwards, I mean, he doesn't have to reject the guy's friendship.

But maybe the way out is he already knows this could be a bad situation. So, he keeps from getting in it. But let's say he didn't know it. Let's say he got over there in all innocence and two or three other guys showed up that he didn't know who would be there.

And they tended to be troublemakers. And now one of them says, hey, folks have already gone to bed. Don't I remember your dad's got a liquor cabinet around here?

Doesn't he have some beer in his refrigerator down there in the basement? Let's go have a little fun. Now, the next way out is for him to say, you know, guys, that's not going to be that fun.

Let's go play that video game. You know, let's do that. That's really fun. Now, it's going to be really hard for him to do. Because his sinful desire is that he wants to be popular.

[24 : 38] He wants them to like him. And so his sinful desire is, I've got to make sure that people like me. We've all got that sinful desire, don't we? We all, one of our sinful issues is, we worry more about what you think of me and I think of you than we worry about what does God think of us.

We tend to fear men more than we fear God. And that's a sinful situation in our minds. So he could say, let's do something else. And then finally, if they're drinking, when they break out the alcohol, he has another opportunity.

He could speak up and say, you know, guys, it's getting late. I think I'm not going to spend the night after all. I'm heading on home. And if he's not old enough to drive yet, oh, it would be hard to do.

Because they'd say, oh, what are you, just a baby? What kind of baby are you? You scared to drink? But he could say, you know, I just want to go on home.

I'm going to call my folks to come get me. He had opportunities and ways out. And I'm telling you, any sin that you're having trouble with, if you'll meditate on it and say, God, how can I not do this?

[25 : 50] God will show you some ways out of it. And then pray not to fall into that. So, how to deal with when the temptation comes.

The next slide. When temptation comes, there's three or four steps. First of all, like this picture here, you should think about. Now, let me say that this is not, let me back up a moment.

This is not the kind of temptation that you weren't expecting it at all and suddenly, bam, it's on you. And you've got to make a decision right at this minute. Am I going to do this or not do this?

Boy, that's the time. Hopefully you can keep yourself out of those situations. But this is something that maybe there's a situation at work. I'll make up another one.

You've realized that there's some kind of supplies or something at work that you could easily start taking home and you could sell it on the side and make an extra 50 to 100 bucks a week.

[26 : 53] And they've got so much of that at work, nobody will ever miss it. And you start thinking, man, what could I do with an extra 100 bucks a week? And they'll never know.

They got so much of that here. Who cares? Now, that's the kind of temptation. You know it's wrong because it's stealing. And so this is where this would really work well.

First, you're tempted to do this. Look back and remember how good God has been to you. Look how he's met all your needs. He's provided everything for you.

If you need that extra 100 bucks a week, talk to God about it. He'll help you find a way to meet that need, if it's a real need. And then, this is really important.

Not only look back, but look ahead at where this sin leads to. Think about what the wages, the pain, the death that's going to come out of this sin.

[27 : 52] In this guy's case, what if he does get caught? Can he's going to get fired? Is it going to be worth it? Is it going to be worth it to lose the job?

Also, what if it's a kind of a sin that... Oh my goodness. Here's one very common to folks.

I would especially say among married folks. You're happily married. You've been together some years. You've got several kids. But there's this person at work who's kind of cute.

Who's been flirting with you. And you're starting to be tempted by that person. Look ahead and think to yourself. If I get involved with this person romantically, who is not my husband or wife.

When this comes out, and it will. When this comes to light and we get caught. What is that going to do to my husband or wife?

[28 : 55] What's that going to do to my kids? What's that going to do to my church family? What's that going to do to my reputation? What's that going to do to the people who trust me?

Am I going to be able to stand to even look at myself in the mirror? Sometimes you've got to really look at where a sin is leading you. And think about, is it worth it?

Is it worth it? What I'm going to lose? I've known a lot of people that slipped into that sexual sin I was just describing.

And it ended in them ending their life very alone and very sad. And their own children wouldn't speak to them. Look back at how good God's been.

Look ahead at what this sin is going to cost you. And look up to God for help and say, Lord, help me not sin in this way. And then escape as fast as you can.

[29 : 55] Get out of that situation as fast as you can. Whatever that situation is, try to avoid being there. Well, that can help us to say no.

But, I was talking to somebody very recently who said, what happens when we do sin? The person said, I'm a Christian, but I really messed up.

I sinned. What do I do? Let's look at the next slide. It's right there in the Bible. If we confess our sins, this is a word written to Christians. This is not for non, it's true for non-Christians, of course, but this is for Christians.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just. He will forgive our sins. He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Peter came to Jesus.

He said, Jesus, is it a good thing if I'll forgive somebody seven times? And what did Jesus say he should do instead? He said, no, you should forgive them 70 times seven.

[31 : 06] Well, he didn't mean pull out a notebook and keep up with 490. And that's 70 times seven. And then on the 491st time, you can slap the guy in the face.

He said, that's not what Jesus meant. He meant keep on forgiving. Because that's how God is. God will give you 490 plus opportunities to do over again.

If you'll just keep saying, Lord, I sinned. Dear God, I don't want to do this again. If you're a Christian, you hate your sin. When you hate your sin, you're a being with God.

He hates it too. You're on God's side. He's on your side. If you were not a Christian, you would sin and it wouldn't bother your conscience a bit. You wouldn't care. And so what?

So what? I got over on somebody. Good for me. So what? That felt good. I took advantage of something. Good for me. But when you're a Christian, you say, God, forgive me.

[32 : 06] Help me not to follow this path. That's part of how you know you're a believer. And so when you sin, God will forgive you.

Something else that can help you is if you have a trusted fellow brother or sister in Christ that you really trust. They're not going to blab their mouths.

This is somebody you can talk to and say, I've had trouble with a certain sin here. Can you pray with me? Talk to me about it. Help me. Whatever. Whatever. And, you know, the scripture says, confess your faults one to another that you'll be healed.

And there's power in that, too. Well, we're getting down close to the end of the sermon. Next verse. We only got three verses here to look at. In verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1, James says, don't be deceived.

Don't be fooled. Brothers and sisters, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like a shifting shadow.

[33 : 15] What's he saying not to be fooled about? He says, you're going to have a tendency to think that God is not fair. That, you know, that's what Satan told Eve.

He said, oh, you mean God doesn't want you to get to taste the best food he's ever made? You know, the devil can put doubts in your mind about how good is God.

Does God really care about me? Does he, how come I'm going through this? He can put those thoughts in your mind. Don't be deceived. Every good thing in your life, God has sent to you.

Every good thing. Is it an appetite for good food? That's a gift from God. Is it an enjoyment of riding horses? That's a gift from God.

Is it an enjoyment of music? My grandson, Jorge, there has a gift for being able to write lyrics for rap.

[34 : 13] That's a good thing with great, wonderful benefit. It's a gift from God. You all have different gifts. Some of you, you just really know how to work with people.

I see Jody back there. She just got a natural gift for teaching. Beautiful, wonderful. It's a gift from God. I remember when Mark went without work for about a year.

It was tough. But now you got a great job and you enjoy it and a better education. And that was all a gift from God. In all of you, you're in a family, most of you.

Or you've been in a family. And it isn't always perfect. Perfect. But that family is a gift from God. Don't ever think God's against you.

He's your friend. He's got your back. He's with you. He wants to bless you. He wants you to be happy. You say, why did he make up so many rules? He only came up with guidelines to lead to your happiness.

[35 : 18] He didn't want you to kill yourself. He wanted you to live. And everything that the Bible teaches us on how to live is for our good. So then let's look at the last verse we'll look at today.

Because he's good. Here's his best gift. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth. God sent Jesus into the world.

And that through the word, Jesus is the living word. And the word of truth, the scriptures that tell us about Jesus. God gives us this gift of the word.

And through it, and then by faith in Jesus Christ, he gives us birth. We go from being dead to being alive. We go from living in darkness and confusion.

And not knowing which way to turn to walking in the light. We're like a caterpillar that becomes a butterfly. God gives us this new birth.

[36 : 19] God gives us this new birth. When we turn to him in faith. We can't earn our forgiveness. See, it says he gave it. It's a gift. All we have to do is trust Christ as Savior.

Turn to him. And then as you deal with temptation, okay, he's at work. He's at work. He's giving you the power over sin. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Well, Lord, here we are, and we've heard your word. Help us to apply it. Lord, we're all struggling with sin of different kinds. Thank you that you don't condemn us if we follow Jesus.

Thank you for taking away the penalty. But Lord, help us now to overcome our sins and to be more and more like Jesus. We want to be like Jesus Christ because that's what you've called us to.

We want to be good to each other and good to other people and be honest and dependable and be people of integrity and do what we say we'll do and keep our word.

[37 : 29] And God, we want to do all of that. We don't want to be liars. God, help us. We don't want to be people who seek revenge.

We don't want to be people who hold a grudge. We don't want to be people who deal with addictions and fall into all these things. And we don't want to be people who are constantly angry

and flying off the handle.

Lord, we want to be like you. God, we turn to you now for help. You're a good father and you've given us every good gift. God, come now and live your life through us.

And Father, we ask you again. We confess we are sinners. We ask you to forgive us. In Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing a hymn.

And if the Lord in any way has spoken to you about anything that you would like prayer with, I'll be down front. John will be here if you want to. And you can speak with us. And we'll be glad to pray with you.

[38 : 31] Will you do the communion first? Will you do the communion first? Let's do the hymn just because I just said this. All right.