

The Complete Christian Understands Temptation

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[0 : 0 0] to our service this morning. I'm looking forward to singing that song we were singing during the uplifting of the offering. That has to be one of my favorite songs. We'll sing that round communion. We sang that because I don't know if everybody knows that, so it was great that the singers and the musicians played that for us.

But we'll sing that again round about communion. Turn with me, please, to the book of James. The book of James. We are continuing a series of studies that we began just a few weeks ago in the book of James.

And can I mention to you the evening service? It's nice to see a good number out last Sunday night as we began a new series on the life of Jacob. An ordinary man, one of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God's plan of salvation is wrapped up in him as it's wrapped up in each one of us. And he comes from a dysfunctional family. And we'll look at his family in more detail tonight. And maybe you'll be able to associate with that thing.

Yep, my family's a bit wacky as well. But the Lord is sovereign and he leads us and guides us through all of these things together. He is sovereign over every area of our life.

[1 : 0 3] So let's read together the book of James. James, as you know, is a brother of Jesus or the half-brother of Jesus. And he's the head of the church in Jerusalem. He's writing to the church that's scattered because of persecution.

They're going through a hard time. And the very first chapter is dealing with the issues that they face. Trials and temptations. We've just been singing about that.

And we're looking at the whole area of temptation this morning. So let's read together from verse 12. Verse 12.

Then, after sin has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it's full grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear 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 shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

[2 : 3 7] Let's ask for the Lord's help now as we come to his word. Our loving Heavenly Father, we do praise and thank you for your work of grace in each one of our lives. We thank you, Father, for the new course that our lives are now set on.

It is not simply to the grave and nothing else, but our eyes are heavenwards to that celestial city. And yet, Lord, until we reach there, Lord, life is a struggle.

Life is difficult. Lord, there are so many trials and tests that come our way. Some we are victorious over. Others we seem to fail in. And Father, we do just pray, Lord, as we come to your word now, to look at the Christian life, to look at the temptations that come to us as Christians, that we might understand them.

So, Father, lead us and guide us, we pray. Our desire this morning is that we would be better disciples of Christ, that we would put our feet in his footsteps. So, Father, lead us and guide us.

Help us to live as he lived and think as he thought. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I've pastored quite a few churches, as you know, and I must confess, one of the things that I really like is when you look at your congregation or your members and you've got quite a few gifted people in your church, whether they're doctors or lawyers, people that you can use, accountants or whatever, plumbers, mechanics, electricians, you name it, hairdressers, although some of us don't have any need for that.

[4 : 04] But if you've got people that you can use, it is very good. In one church, I remember, I had a few doctors and even a neurosurgeon, and that was quite useful.

Doctors are one of the professions, I must confess, that drive me a wee bit nutty, where jobs are quite similar, pastors and doctors. But I look at their job and I sometimes envy their role.

Because after all, to my mind, it seems easier than a pastor's in some ways, is that you don't have to go around and visit, they don't have to go around and visit everybody, people come to them.

And the visit only lasts about 10 minutes, and then it's over. And all they do is they prescribe you a tablet. And I thought, I wish I could just prescribe folk a tablet.

That would be so you take this tablet, although we prescribe verses, and off they go. And I thought, that's an easy life. And I know it's not, it's anything but if you're a GP or a doctor, just the pressure that you're under as well.

[5 : 06] But our jobs are the same. Our jobs are to make people better, to make them healthier. And a doctor is to make us healthy. That is their role, to make us healthier individuals.

But as a pastor and as an elder in the church, our task is to make people holy. If you've got a sore back, we don't help you with that. But if you're not walking with the Lord, right, if you're downcast and depressed, maybe for spiritual reasons, then our job is to make you holy.

Now, why am I telling you this? Is it for sympathy? Probably. But it's more to understand why James is saying the things that he's saying.

Throughout this letter, there are over 50 imperatives. Do this. Don't do that. And behind that is that God's people would be holy, that they would walk with the Lord, that they would be like Jesus.

And that's what we're doing as we look at the book of James. We're continuing a series of studies in the book of James. And you remember we've called this series The Complete Christian, based on verse 4.

[6 : 11] We never read this this morning, but chapter 1, verse 4, let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

God's desire, James' desire, is that we are complete, that we are mature Christians, holy, healthy Christians. And that's why he writes as he does.

And he gives the reason for this. And we read this this morning in verse 18. He's not just trying to put Christians on a guilt trip. He's trying to explain growth.

In the image here we have, you're born again. But look at verse 18. He chose, God chose, to give us birth through the word of truth. We heard the word preached or read or whatever, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. So if you're a Christian, although it might be true to a certain extent, I have decided to follow Jesus, the decision, first of all, came with God to call you to himself and to give you new life, to make you alive in Christ.

[7 : 19] As a result, you have this potential to grow as a Christian through the word. And that is something that's very much real for us every day of our Christian life, that we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of God, to grow as Christians, to become complete and mature, not lacking anything.

And we've, the recap up till now is, we have looked at these Christians who are struggling, they're going through trials of various kinds, and James tells us that the mature Christian understands certain things.

And what we have seen up till now is that we understand trials right at the very start. Consider it pure joy. Verse 2, my brothers, when you face trials of many, why?

Why should we do this? Because we know there's a purpose in it all. God is molding us and shaping us, and his desire is to make us more like Jesus.

His desire is always to bless us, that we know joy and that we know peace, that we don't fret as we go through life. So we understand trials and difficulties, that God has a purpose for them in our life.

[8 : 29] Mature Christian also knows that it's one thing to have that as a theology. How do we order ourself right? And James says, he anticipates this, so he says, if you lack wisdom in the midst of these trials, ask God, and he will lead you and guide you such that you'll think right and such that you will do right.

And he does this. And then he deals with another topic regarding their trials. There's this area of wealth. And he says, believers, verse 9, in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.

It's a radical statement. But basically, the Christian looks beyond the grave to that crown of life that James mentions here. We know that we might not be rich in this life, but we are building treasure in heaven.

That is what we strive for. Your bank account here might be healthy, but maybe your treasure in heaven is not so healthy. Your bank balance here might be impoverished, and you might be almost in debt, but you might be rich in terms of heaven's glory through the good deeds that you do, through just serving the Lord, through living a life worthy of the gospel.

So, we've looked at those things. Now, James talks about this area of temptation. Now, it's not a new topic. He's linking it to what he said the last time.

[9 : 51] When he said in verse 12, Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, having stood the test. And he then wants to drive home to them the difference between testing and temptation.

The two of them, they will come our way in every— you'll experience this on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday, and maybe even before the day is out, you will experience testing and temptation.

They come to us every day in various ways. But testing and temptations are two very different things. They come from different sources, and they have a different purpose.

The testing of our faith— you just mentioned this in verse 12, which will lead them on to temptation— the testing of our faith is an opportunity to grow in the Lord.

They come from God. Our tests, the tests in our life, come from God. Their desire is to cause us to grow, to go on with Him, to go deeper with Him.

[10 : 56] The temptations come from the devil, and their desire, his desire is that we go back the way, that we don't grow, that we shrink, and that we don't make progress in the Christian life.

Indeed, we go back the way. The devil knows God. He's a theologian. He knows all about God. He knows who He is. He also knows about man, and He knows how best to get us to do this.

The Lord tests His people. He did this with Abraham and Jacob, and He did it with Hezekiah. He does it with His people throughout the Bible and throughout today.

And His desire is always to strengthen our faith. The devil is out to weaken our faith and cause us to go backwards. Therefore, James, now, in the midst of this, the temptation is for them to blame God for everything that's happening to them.

And James wants to mention three things, and we'll mention this in the sermon. Temptations don't come from God. They come from our own evil desires, and then He has something to say about the new birth.

[12 : 04] So first of all then, let's look at temptations do not come from God. He makes it very plain. James is a very plain talker. When temptation, when tempted, sorry, verse 13, no one should say, God is tempting me, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.

The reason some people think that God is to blame when we go in through a difficult time and we crumble and we fail and we let the Lord down, we say, well, the Lord is sovereign.

The Bible encourages us to believe in the sovereignty of God in every area of our life, and therefore it's a very easy step if you have a high view of the sovereignty of God to say, could He not have done something?

Did He not realize I was at the end of my tether? Why didn't God do A, B, C? And it's a very easy step to then say, God, really, is, we might not blame Him a hundred percent, but His fingerprints are all over what's been happening, and we can easily say, Lord, it was too hard.

In some ways, it was Your fault that this has happened. And, as we see, that temptation doesn't come from God. His desire is to test us and to cause us to grow in Him.

[13 : 25] But, although James doesn't mention the devil here, he'll mention him later on in the letter, but he attributes sin, and we'll look at this in our next point, to us because of our own natural inclination to sin.

But behind sin is the devil. Behind the temptation is the devil. It's been going on ever since Adam and Eve, they sinned in the garden.

Eve blamed the serpent, and Adam blamed Eve and God. It was the woman you gave me, to be with me in the garden.

And people are doing this today. The natural man blames God. If he believes in God, blames God for so much. But even as Christians, it can be very subtle. Sometimes we can accuse God of not helping us when He should have, and so forth.

And He was tempting us when really that's not the case. We do have a real enemy in the devil. Paul mentions this. We struggle not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, against spiritual forces.

[14 : 35] Therefore, we are told to put on the whole armor of God. I read an interesting wee article this week about that, about the devil and how he tempts us. And in the garden, he does various things.

And maybe you can relate to this in your own thinking process when you sin against the Lord. The devil turns commands into questions. God issued a command.

You eat meat of all the trees, but you cannot eat of this tree. The devil comes and he takes the commands of God and he turns them into questions.

When God has really made things plain in His Word, the devil would come and say, does God really say that? Is it really wrong to gossip?

Is it not really? Are you not really being quite spiritual, sharing these spiritual requests? And he will often come and at what is a clear command, he will turn it into a question.

[15 : 33] Are you sure about this? Is this really a command? Is it really serious? He also emphasizes the prohibition over freedom. He distorts what God has said.

He distorts when God says, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden into you shall not eat of any tree of the garden. God gives freedom, but the devil's not interested in this.

He's only interested in the negative. And sometimes the devil will very much come to us and suddenly put doubts in our mind and say, God's just trying to limit your freedom and so forth.

And his motives are not quite true. Be liberated. Do what you want to do. Why should you be restricted? And Eve saw this and heard this and thought, that's right.

Why should I just eat of these trees and not this one particular tree? So he comes with confusion. He comes to distort what God says. He comes to question God's motives.

[16 : 40] and he basically denies God. You will not surely die. And this is the way temptation comes to us. With these lies and deceit and you're okay to do this.

Everybody else does it. You can gossip. You can do whatever. You can do things the way you want to do them. And James really wants to emphasize here that God cannot be tempted by evil.

And that's what he wants to impress upon on verse 13. This is based on the very character of God. I'm reading Exodus just now. I'm sure you're maybe up to Exodus in your daily readings when the bush was burning and Moses goes, I want to see this sight.

Why is the bush burning but not consumed? And the Lord says, take off your feet. Take off your sandals, sorry, for the ground you're standing is holy ground. Leviticus, be holy because I am holy.

Isaiah in the temple and the cherubim and seraphim flying, taken up with the holiness of God. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.

[17 : 57] His eyes are too pure to look upon sin. Our God is a holy God. It's based on His character. He can have nothing to do with sin. John, the apostle John says, God is light.

In Him there is no darkness at all. So, if God is holy, He doesn't tempt anyone because He cannot be tempted by sin.

It says to you, for God cannot be tempted nor does He tempt anyone. When God tests His people, it's to test them. It's to trust them. He's not to trap them.

And if we pass the test, we grow on to mature any temptation in any circumstance that comes your way. You're faced with a choice.

You can go against God and His Word and this leads to you going back and not growing. But if you do the Holy Spirit and God comes to test you, what will you do? And you get the victory over this.

[18 : 56] It will do into a very different person. one of the best illustrations I had many, many was like sin is like walking through a field of corn. If you've ever done that, especially if nobody's walked that way, you have to brush things aside, but you make a path.

But if you had to go back there the next day, and then the more people, if you ever go hill walking or whatever, if somebody's made a path, you choose the path. Somebody else has made, the easier it becomes.

That is true with sin, but it's also true with holiness. We'll be looking at this in a few weeks' time. Forming habits in our life. We sin because we are habitual sinners that just kick in.

If somebody upsets us, we are used to reacting in a particular way. We say things. Habit. And that's a hard habit to break. That and other things. Materialism.

Things that create and we pass the test, it becomes a bit easier. The more these things become easier, the more you grow. You become a better person. But as long as we keep failing the temptations and giving in to temptation, and that is what James wants to emphasize here.

[20 : 04] God might test, but he doesn't tempt. The desire is to cause us to go back. Secondly, James mentions temptation, rather than coming from God, comes from desires.

Our own evil desires we are enticed. And he uses, James loves illustrations. He uses two illustrations of what happens if you yield to temptation. He talks about fishing and illustrations that he uses.

So first of all, verse 14, fishing. He says, but each person is tempted when they are dragged away and enticed. They're enticed by this wee worm that they see and they think, well, that's...

And they go after the worm and then they realize underneath this worm is a deadly hook. And they fish, isn't it? They're minding their own business. Some fishermen are quite cunning. We fly and it's there and it's in...

We're enticed by this. Temptation's very attractive. It promises so much. Do better. You'll feel righteous. This is the right thing to do. And this is a battle that we face all the time in our...

[21 : 06] of being lured away. And that is what's happening here. There's nothing wrong with the temptation. It will come to us. Being tempted is not a sin. But giving in to that temptation is following that wants to emphasize here.

He's not blaming Satan. He's blaming us. He says there's something in us, our inclination. Jeremiah says the heart is deceitful above all things who beyond stand it.

So, in temptation, it's always desirable. There's always a reason why we give in to it. Able to make our wives, to be like God. We never yield to temptation, to our hurt.

The devil makes it enticing, comes and confuses us, and we follow this. But this response leads to alienation, leads to a lack of joy and peace.

And then childbirth. Same outcome. Verse 15. Then after desire has conceived, fully grown, gives birth to death. His illustration is one of producing a child.

[22 : 12] Temptation gives birth to conception. conception. This gives birth to birth. Something is born, and this grows. Conception, and look at that first of all.

The book of Proverbs, it comes to you. That's a very popular picture in Proverbs, when a man surrenders to lust, give birth to sin.

And it's a very common thing. It gives birth to sin. You get your fingers burned every time. Every time. You cannot yield to temptation.

And temptation, it leads to sin. But when sin is fully grown, unless it is checked, it gives, fully grown, it gives birth to death. The wages of righteousness is life, but the wages of sin is death.

Wages end in death. The fish takes the bait, ends in death. The, the, the, the childbirth went to death. And James tells us we need to wake up to that fact.

[23 : 09] Verse 16, don't, don't be deceived. Don't be deluded by sin and think that it's okay. It's only called respectable sins.

Those are the greatest dangers. I think when we think of sin, we're talking about stealing. Okay. But there's a lot of respectable sins that we have in church. It might be gossip, it might be do.

We know others do it, and we know we all do it, and therefore it makes it okay. When really we need to, whenever we go against God's word, even in the smallest way, it brings death.

Paul says the same thing. Romans 7, for sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me. Death. Verse 15 of Romans 7, I do not understand what I do, for what I want to do, I do not do.

And what I do, for I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is in my sinful nature, for I have carried it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do, this is not.

[24 : 10] And if I do not do what I want to do, it is no longer I who do it, it's sin living in me, that there's always sin in our life. We are never perfect this side of glory and this sanity just to rebel against God.

Each of us are unique, and tests that you will experience won't be my tests. I remember meeting a guy once who, his of all things, he was writing wrestling, it consumed him, he would watch wrestling all day, every day, and I thought, what a temptation.

That's probably the least thing I would ever be tempted by, is wrestling. And it's different from me, that I might fail in it, but you might have the possibility under God, he's given you a specific, he says, do this, yes, you'll have to persevere through it, but if you do, you will grow, it will be easier the next time, your character will be changed, but if you yield, and the temptation will never go away, it will always be there until you begin to get the victory over this.

Your trials, your testing, your temptations will be different from mine. You might be tempted in areas I will never be tempted in, you might not be tempted in, we are all unique. Alec Mottier says this, the same circumstances which are to go forward are on the other hand temptations to go back.

Every circumstance, this option to go forward or to go back, and that's what we need to look at. But it's not just, it's easy to think of that, isn't it? It might well be times of prosperity when things are going, and the Proverbs said this, he knew this, give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with the food that is needful, and I you, and say, who is the Lord?

[25 : 56] Even when things are going well, that is often a greater temptation. I miss my quiet time, it's no big deal. Things are going well, you're obviously blessing me, we're obviously okay, and off you go.

Subtle forms of temptation, when your health is good, when everything's good, and you're not praying. I remember I had one difficult, really took off, I lived in the presence of God, I didn't leave His presence, because I says, Lord, you're going to have to help today, every waking hour of the day, Lord, help me with this.

During the difficult times, you're less likely to rely on the Lord, Lord, help me with this, help me, your prayer life is better. So beware of times of prosperity, beware of times, Bible's dry, you will go through those times, your worship is stilted, you're turning up, but the joy's not there, and the devil will try and distract you with other things.

Well, forget God, here's the telly, here's restaurants, He will tempt you with other things, to take you away from the joyless things. Beware of the spiritual, dry times, that's a very severe time of testing.

Beware, when you feel confident, that was Peter, wasn't it? These people might deny you, Lord, I won't deny you. Only did he deny the Lord three times, he did it in such a short space of time.

[27 : 13] The Lord knows, so beware of self-confidence. So here are two things James wants to emphasize, temptation's very real, God, the desire is to get us to go back, it comes from within us, this desire, the bowling ball, if you've seen that in a kid's talk, that naturally wants to wander away from God.

There's this hope, and that's what we finish with, temptation and the new birth. And one's for the habitual sinner, seen in the new birth. Look at verse 17 and 18, we've mentioned the letter, but verse 17 is the context.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the things like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word, that we might be a kind of first fruits, that leads to death.

He says, he just mentioned this, but now he talks about a birth that leads to light, that comes from above. We often quote every good and perfect gift, when the Lord gives you a new car, or a new dress, good and perfect gift, this is the best gift that he mentions in the next verse.

It's spiritual life, the life of God poured into the soul of man. And the self, the pathway is sin, is temptation, sin and death.

[28 : 28] But now that God is transformed, and that is this perfect gift, this good, and this is the gift. We'll gather around the Lord's table, we'll see this, this cup and this, this bread reminding us of his bread, that their sins have been dealt with.

What a gift this is. The gift of salvation, the gift of grace, the gift of the Holy Spirit. That's what makes all the difference. He makes all the difference to us.

Ezekiel 30, it's a new spirit in you. I will remove from you the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh. I am the Lord, Jeremiah 24, and in Jeremiah 31.

They will all know me the greatest. That gift is God transforming us, causing, not just forgiveness, it's not, the gospel's more than forgiveness.

The gospel is about transformation, signification as well. God molding us, changing us from the inside out. It's not that we get a new power, new batteries, put in us, the more struggling.

[29 : 32] The natural man can't do this. Desire, new desire to watch and pray. Jesus says, remember, watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. Fish is weak.

And then we are to pray, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil. The natural man doesn't pray. Throughout Edinburgh today, there are not hundreds of people, despite, lead us not into temptation.

But Christians might be praying this, because we know the power of, it's he who is in us than he who is in the world. We also have the promise of God's leading in us as well.

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man. And God is faithful, he will you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

That is the answer. We can't say, well, he made me do it, Lord, a big boy made me do it and ran away. It was them. If only they hadn't pushed my buttons, I wouldn't have done this. Whereas the simple fact is, it's there.

[30 : 33] I think I've told you a wee illustration about somebody carrying the milk comes out and spills everywhere. And you say, well, how is the milk spilled everywhere? And you say, well, and it went everywhere. It's not me. And this person says, the milk went everywhere because there's milk in the glass.

It wouldn't have gone anywhere. And it's the same. And when folk provoke us or circumstances provoke us, all they're doing is bringing out the milk happens to be there. And it's the same with the devil. The devil has to have something to work on.

Materials God can create out of nothing. The devil can't. But where he sees weakness, where he sees milk, act in such a way that just might bring this out. It is not that person.

I'm amazed when I speak to Christians and even with them, it was their fault. If they hadn't done that, I wouldn't have done what I did. So deal with them, Lord. We might be the one that just pushes the button wrongly.

But that is what happens. And to take this way, and often the Holy Spirit will come and say, John, don't go down that road. The opportunity to take a different route.

[31 : 36] Love your enemy. Do good to those who spitefully use you. Do stop praying. Don't stop coming to church. When all these other things are tempting, don't run after them.

All these things. He gives us that prompting by the Holy Spirit. Now, whether we take it is up to us. Live our life for us. But he is there.

So how does this work in practice? Imagine your struggle. Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down in your anger and give no opportunity for the devil. You hear that? I'm going to take this other route.

Imagine you're struggling with gossip and you hear, and you read the words, let no good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

You hear that, but now I'm going to do this. Governed by the word of God. Jesus, when tempted, used the scriptures. The Holy Spirit mind. So the more scripture you know, the more you will respond right, the more you will grow.

[32 : 35] Long learning. And over time, habits, new habits are formed. With this, I'll finish. Please. I read an article this week. I went on to search on Twitter for something.

It said, to help me find and respond to important information, but there at the top of the results in high-definition picture of a woman. It was a time when that image would have been a sore temptation, but not this time.

Within my eyes, my hand had reacted. My heart had said no. My eyes had turned away and my hand had reacted and my hand had reacted and my hand had reacted and my hand had reacted and my hand had reacted and my hand had reacted and my hand had reacted. It was amazing. It was instinct.

It was a gift of God. I transferred the devil. It was a moment to give thanks and praise God. In this area, at least, he said, God, hand me a new desire with a new matching instinct and I give him the glory.

It's as real as that. It's as exciting. You pass the test. The easier it becomes in that particular area, he might test you. In another of these areas, we begin to, if we respond correctly to the test under the power of the Holy Spirit, be transformed.

[33 : 43] So tests and temptations are different. Different sources. The trials come from God. Temptations come from the devil. May the Lord help us to walk through our life.

We're going to stand and sing. It's an old hymn by William Cooper. Oh, for a closer walk. I just love this. I love the words. It's more a prayer than a song.

Let's use this as our prayer. Father, we pray that that would indeed be the desire of each one of our hearts for that closer walk, Lord, that we have looked to in the past.

But Father, help us, Father, to walk humbly with you. Recognize the difference between trials and testing and temptation. And Father, we do wise decisions in all that we do under the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lead us and guide us, we pray, in this area of our lives. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.