

**James Series #3 – “The Testing” Pastor Tim Dodson**  
**Jesus Fellowship of Believers, Menomonie WI**  
**April 6, 2014**



*12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.*

The idea...or the use of the term "blessed" within the Christian faith is an often overused and misunderstood concept. Because blessedness is not herein connected with ease, freedom from trial, or absence of temptation. The idea behind blessed is indeed a happiness... a 'blissfulness,' but the conditions for such...the parameters of such do not encompass a dynamic of ease, or rest, or freedom from adversity. James' angle on this is that people are "blessed" because they have achieved a state of happiness and contentment in life that is beyond all cares, labors, and even death...*despite* adversity. Such comes only through a new alignment of life's priorities, passions, and motivations. It is through seeing and understanding life through new eyes. It comes by a "transformation by the renewing of your mind" ...learning of God by study and experience. (Romans 12:2)

James tells us that those who are "Blessed" are those that endure the temptations that Satan, the world, and especially our flesh seem to dish out so unrelentingly. Resisting temptation, refusing to surrender to the desires of the flesh is the simplest and clearest litmus test of our love for Christ. It is the very real manifestation of our level of love, or the lack of it, toward our Savior and His Word. Jesus said it quite succinctly in John 14:15 "If you love Me, *keep My commandments.*"

Now "*endure*" means more than just making it through the immediate situation. It has in it the idea of a long term successful triumph over the temptations of this life. For those who truly love Him, this triumph is not only possible, but truly is the very proof of how much we love. For whether we want to admit it or not, our indulgence in sin is manifesting our *lack of love* toward our Savior, and negates the title "Lord of our Lives." Our sins are thus only proof of our love of self.

There is not any one of us that do not struggle with this issue. No one fails to experience temptation in this life. But the answer to triumph over sin, is not through "grit-your-teeth" discipline, but it is effectually a side-effect of our love for Christ. If we are truly in love with Him, then obedience is naturally manifested. In fact, the *more* we love Him the *more* we obey. That's just the factual way it works, no matter how much we want to deny it! And therefore it is simply impossible to endure temptation in any consistent and enduring way without a very real love for Him. When we focus on Him, sin becomes more and more a less desirable alternative.

Wayne Detzler says: *True Christian perseverance is not tied to tenacity. It is rather the work of God the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. The starch in a saint's spine is shown by Scripture to be nothing less than the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.*

"...for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life." This statement must be dealt with, and dealt with honestly. While we know from the whole of scripture that no one can take our salvation away, we also know that many folks live much of their lives attempting to fool others and as well as themselves that they are indeed reborn but eventually such is proven to not really be the case at all. Obviously James is herein saying that the crown of life...*our eternal life with God*, will not be a reality until we have been tested and we have "passed." That undoubtedly makes many of us quite uncomfortable. It's hard to rest when you don't know where you stand. That's why the doctrine of eternal security is so critical to our understanding. However, if the "heart of man is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9), then how can we know for sure where we stand?

The Bible repeatedly speaks of the fruit that we produce, or *fail* to produce. And we are told that we will 'know a tree by its fruit.' That a cherry tree doesn't grow apples. If we are saved...if we are indeed born again, then we can expect certain attributes to rise to overt prominence in our living. This fruit will appear and *remain*. This is how we know where we stand in Christ. That doesn't mean we will ever achieve some level of perfection or will ever attain a sinless life. Because we factually will not. But we will be overall growing in sanctification and maturing in our faith manifest. Robert Louis Stevenson said that "Saints are sinners who keep on going."

The fact is, we *will* be tested...we *will* be tempted. David reflects in Psalms 17:3 "You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress." Through it all we then are able to reflect upon our life's progress to ascertain whether we need to make changes to draw closer to Christ, or that perhaps we must consider that we aren't reborn at all, and still living...albeit it somewhat blindly, in the flesh, and therefore still lost. And through it all, this promise still stands: *once I have been approved, I WILL receive the Crown of Life*. But for sure, a person must first be "proved" before being "approved". Paul called upon Timothy to "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed...*". The testing is not for GOD to discover what you are, but for YOU to discover what you are...

How will this "testing" take place? In what way will we be tried? James makes sure we understand that God is not somehow tempting us to do evil to see if we can 'make the grade." God does not "tempt" man to do evil. He doesn't have to. Such temptation naturally arises from within the heart of man and is yet allowed to exist by God in our free-will realm. God allows choice in order to provide the environment for true love. The alternative is force, and that is not love and that is certainly not the nature of our Creator.

Within the original word rendered herein as "tempt" is the word "test." Jesus Himself was not immune from such as we read how he was "tested" in the wilderness. But Jesus lacked the corrupt nature that we possess, so He was not drawn to sin from within Himself the way we are. He was "tested" directly by Satan who already has done a number on mankind as a whole. Being a 'fallen' creature, Satan doesn't often need to tempt me directly, as I have that issue well in hand by myself. My temptation generally comes simply from within myself...my "*flesh*"...my *fallen* nature. But Jesus was tempted...He was "tried" by Satan, and God the Father stood back and allowed it. But God is not the author of our sin, nor the instigator of temptation.

He *will* however assist in your rescue *out* of them if you actually *want* out of them and call upon Him for His help. Now be prepared! His direction at this point will not be easy to accept and often can be extremely daunting to pursue! Rarely if ever is His rescue without an uncomfortable aspect. Rarely is there an "easy way out." That's why we so often choose to reject His assistance and go with what we want instead. How often we can tend to think..."hey, I go to church...I serve, I read my bible and am part of the community, so I am ok" but then our practical "real world" manifest of life is anything but Christ-centric and Lordship driven. Note Jeremiah 7:1-10

God *allows* these testings, these *temptations* to come, but in His love He hopes and desires the best for us, and will be there for us if we call. His genuine want is that we trust in Him and triumph over our temptations and through it all to become stronger for having gone through it. God leads us into *righteousness*. (**Psalms 23:3**) (**Psalms 139: 23-24**) Our *flesh* leads us to sin. We do not have to submit to sin, nor do we have to be beaten by it. A child of God is not only given the *forgiveness* of sin upon our salvation, but has been given the *power over sin*.

So we need to understand that we cannot place the blame God for our failures. In fact, ironically we generally can't even directly blame Satan! He started it all yes, but the fact remains... the root of all sin is from within the heart of man. Mark 7:15, 20-23 tells it to us straight: "*There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man... And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.*" It's easier to take the position of "the devil made me do it" because then we can project our guilt out to someone else and not take responsibility for our actions.

All of Satan's efforts to lead men into sin are powerless to affect us unless we allow ourselves to be *drawn away by our own desires*. So the bottom line is *what IS your desire?* For it is here that the **power** of our actions reside. If we do not find evil more desirable than our love for Christ, then we will not be drawn into any sin. The *enticement* may have been originally from Satan and his boys, but it is our own *lust of the heart* that pushes us over the edge! The answer to our victory in this matter lays in Luke 9:23 "*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*"

I can spend all of my life energy on trying to not sin...and frankly wearing myself out in the attempt, or I can focus on loving God...finding ways to saddle up to Him closer...spending my time on kingdom efforts and community relationships. There are many things I can practically do to build my love for my wife and the same exists when it comes to my love for Christ. When love and the pursuit of a growing love relationship consumes me, I find I have little time or energy left to pursue the desires of the flesh. David's sin with Bathsheba could have been prevented if he had not allowed himself to even be in the place where sin's calling could be heard. He should have been in the battle with his troops, not chillin' out on the balcony with nothing to do while everyone else was out in the battlefield!

The time to fight against sin is before it actually *becomes* sin; to deal with it when it is a mere temptation. (Note: Damian Kyle with the example of the coke machine.) In the case of Adam and Eve, Achan of Joshua's day, or David with Bathsheba, all their sins began with *seeing*; the conception of sin through the eyes of man. Each had the chance as well as the power to walk away from the desire before them. However, the desire for that which was before them was greater than their love for God. Had their love truly reigned supreme toward God, then in each case the *conception* of sin would have been the end of it. And the conception of sin is not sin. Temptation is not sin.

But the problem with man is that we want to swear off chocolate chip cookies, but still hang around close enough to the bakery to smell them baking. Well Pastor...what are you saying? Are you saying I should move to another house so I don't smell the bakery? Seriously? *Yes.....seriously*. Maybe I have to lock down my computer...or maybe I have to just get rid of it and use public computers. Maybe I have to get a roommate/mentor who will hold me accountable to my comings and goings. A new job? Break off a relationship? Get some help?

“Do not err” or “do not go astray,” “do not be deceived or misled.” The language denotes a ship off course and in grave danger. The language and the warning is extreme. Paul warns us also in **Galatians 6:7** - *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.* This again reiterates the idea and the question of "what are you planting?" Many of us are spiritually planting weeds and thorns and somehow expecting a field of corn. It just doesn't happen that way on any realm.

Our text tells us that everything that comes from God is “good and perfect.” In light of this verse then, can we not go on to say that if it *isn't* good and perfect (whole and complete), then it isn't a gift from God? Isn't this verse a guide for seeking and gathering the will of God for my life and the decisions I must make for my life? How many of us have tried to force a desire of the flesh into the anointed will of God? We compromise, we push, we twist scriptural meanings, reject counsel from brothers and sisters and even deny the "still small voice" inside of us to get what we want and still hang a sign on it that says "blessed."

James' word here translated “brought us forth” is the same word in verse 15 for “brings forth” in the phrase 'brings forth death.' Thus we see that sin “brings” death, but God “brings forth” us as His "first fruits." We are the fruit of *God's life*. We are important and loved by Him. Now the choice is ours: *life or death*. Not just in the issue of cessation of life...that can directly happen due to sin, but it happens in a much more subtle and insidious manner, by stealing the "life" that He wants us to have on this planet. A life of joy and peace...a "living large." Life or death: there seem to be no other choices. In this choice lies the ultimate question: *my will or God's?* In the latter, there is no room for my will. Not in the beginning, with salvation, or anywhere along the road of living in His grace and righteousness. There is no hybrid.

Our text reads “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father...” Literally this reads “every gift good and every gift perfect from above is continually coming down”. So if it IS good, it is from God. But the question is *do you know for sure what IS good and what is not?* Because I don't. If I am in the seat of review and judgment on that matter...*what is truly good*, then God is not. I would therefore be saying I know more than God as to what is good and what is not. Because your flesh and emotions say that something is good, doesn't mean it is in the dispensation of your Father. Because you really want it, doesn't mean it is good. Just because you can't see why God wouldn't let you have it, doesn't mean it is good. James' point is that these good and perfect gifts, along with all of the many good things that God gives us to enjoy—the taste of good food, the love of our families, the beauty of His creation, and every wonderful experience in life—all of these good things come to us from a God whose very nature is good. As the Psalmist proclaims ([Ps. 119:67, 68](#)), “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word. You are good and do good; teach me Your statutes.”

See, the very cornerstone of salvation rebirth is saying I don't know what is good, but God does, so therefore I am going with what He says, not me. Not my emotions, my desires, my wants, my dreams. You must know God, not as you may conceive Him to be or wish Him to be, but as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. I've heard professing Christians say, “My God is not a God of judgment; He's a God of love.” That's nice, but your God is not the God of the Bible! He is a figment of your own imagination! The God of the Bible is both a God of judgment and of love. Or, there are Christians who dodge difficult chapters in scripture and reinvent God to be in the image of one that you would like Him to be. But that practice is as old as the earth itself: *it's called idolatry*. To dodge what the Bible says about God is to make God in your own image, which is idolatry. Are you following the real and true God today, or an idol of your own making? The results of the testing will manifest the answer to that.