GET LAUNCHED

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY AND TEMPTATION

STUDY #5

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OVERCOMING ADVERSITY AND TEMPTATION
JAMES 1

BITTER OR BETTER

There are two realities that you will face nearly every day of your life that will either make you bitter or better.

It all depends on how you respond to them.

They are the issues of trials and temptations.

What does the Lord want to teach us?

Have you heard of the “Eden Project” in Cornwall, England?

The purpose of it was to create the “perfect” environment and to evaluate what life would be like in an environment where there is no pollution or insects—no “spiders!”

However, in that perfect environment, the trees began to grow weak, sickly and deteriorate!

The scientists were puzzled by this, so they consulted a tree expert who concluded the following...

“Your problem is that there is no wind in the environment. It’s the wind that pushes and moves the tree fibers forcing the nutrients and moisture to be drawn up from the ground. Trees need the stress of the wind or they won’t thrive!”

When James says in James 1:2, “...consider it all joy when you fall into trials,” he is not saying “feel great about illness, the suffering of your loved one” as if you are happily skipping down main street at Disneyland.

What he is saying is that we need to “think differently about” trials.

Not only because they will come to all of us (the most wonderful, loving, and giving people experience trials), but because the Lord actually redeems adversity by producing growth, MATURITY and PERSEVERANCE that would not otherwise exist in our lives.

THE CONTEXT...

James, the half brother of Jesus, was writing to the Jewish followers of Jesus amidst the diaspora (i.e. dispersion of Jews outside of Israel) who have been uprooted from their homes in Jerusalem due to persecution. (Acts 8:1)

James, chapter 5 tells us that some were even being ripped-off by employers—not being paid—and some were even murdered!

Obviously, these are serious, trials!

Trials come in many shapes and sizes...

In short, a trial is being out of your comfort zone and experiencing pain in some form: disappointment; expectations that are not met; loss; death; injustice; or misunderstanding. It’s a new season of life.

What James is telling us is that “Trials” are not a matter of “if” but “when.”

Are you in a midst of a trial at this time?
FROM TRIALS TO GROWTH: FOUR TAKEAWAYS

Here are four takeaways on the path of growth in your life.

1. Amidst trials, the Lord’s priority is first to change **you**, by changing the way you **think**!

   In James 1:2, the word “count” means to think about something intentionally and thoroughly, as if working through mathematical problems!

   The idea is to think about trials in a different way—a specific way.

   After all, there are all kinds of ways of thinking about hardship (i.e., something is wrong...there is a failure...God has removed His favor from my life...the hardship is because God is mad at me and judging me, etc.).

2. A trial is a “testing of your faith” (vs. 2) that gives the opportunity to **experience** the truth of what you believe in Christ.

   Think about the nature of a test: it moves you from just **knowing** about something to **experiencing** what you know. It’s the difference between reading a brochure about a new car verses actually taking it for a “test drive!”

   **As a Christian this is how it works...**

   We know that Jesus is True. (John 14:6)
   We know that the Lord will never leave us. (Hebrews 13:5)
   We know that He indwells us and works through us. (Romans 8:11)
   We know that He will provide our needs. (Philippians 4:13)
   We have all that we need and more in Christ. (2 Corinthians 12:9)
   We know that the Lord perfects strength in weakness. (1 Corinthians 12:8-10)
   We know that He “…has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

3. James 1:3-4: The testing of your faith produces **perseverance** (i.e. staying power) so you’re not a **puppet** of your circumstances!

   The natural response to the pressure of adversity, pain, and trials is to run away, to flee the trial.

   This is so cultural because we live in a “**short-cut**” generation!

   We want everything **now**!

   Great blessings in life (i.e. marital love for a lifetime, a healthy and godly family, godly character, physical health, winning people to Christ) will not be known by taking “short-cuts” (like cramming for a test in school).

   The word patience comes from two words: 1) under 2) pressure. There is a perfecting/completing work that only comes from adversity and having the right response to it.

   James 1:4, “But let patience have it’s perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”
The great inventor, Thomas Edison offered these encouraging words of wisdom, “Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.”

“Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.”

“I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”

“Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”

Robert Louis Stevenson once said, “Saints are sinners who keep on going.”

All this is leading to the chief point which is to go straight to the Heavenly Father in prayer.

4. James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask of God...”

In other words, if you need “the right perspective, the right application, the right help,” ask God and He will give it to you!

Knowledge is the accumulation of facts.

But wisdom is the right application of facts!

James 1:5, “...who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

In other words, it’s a guarantee that the Lord will answer this prayer!

James 1:6, “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting ...” (i.e. doubting is a lack of assurance and confidence that God will keep His promises).

The Heavenly Father does not want you to live in uncertainty because by nature it is like “...a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.” (James 1:6)

A wave of the sea is without rest, and so is the doubter.
A wave of the sea is unstable, and so is the doubter.
A wave of the sea is a puppet of the winds, and so is the doubter.
A wave of the sea is capable of great chaos, and so is the doubter.

James 1:7, “Nor let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

The double minded person is the person who, when amidst trials, is not allowing the Lord to get specific with them which means that they are not sure they want the Lord to speak into their life. This is a type of self-inflicted wound in itself—a potential wound that the Lord is fighting to protect you from!

Ask with confidence and with expectation. Take the Lord’s promises as true!

Asking God opens your heart to being receptive.

Be open and avoid limiting what the Lord wants to say to you.

The Lord wants to get specific with you!
“If we have asked God to guide us in all the steps of our lives, we should look upon our present situation as from the Lord and accept it as such. He has not given us a “stone” (He will always give what is good!) We must never suspect under any circumstances that we are treated ungenerously by our Lord. He has given us that which is for our lasting good. Our present distress may appear evil, but it is not. Every circumstance of our affliction is made subservient to our souls’ completion. God will not deceive us, for He is innately good.”

REMOVING THE DECEPTION OUT OF TEMPTATION

What is temptation?

By nature, it is an enticement that promises pleasure but delivers pain, and breakdown.

It involves the violation of one’s conscience, God’s instructions for your life and His purposes.

Temptation itself is not a sin, but rather giving in to the enticement is.

There is a difference between being exposed to an enticement (ie.“bait”) and making the choice whether to “bite into it” and to struggle with “the hook!”

The question we want to pursue is, “How do you overcome temptation?”

The reality is—temptation is not going away.

What areas in your life are you tempted in?

What areas in your life do you struggle between what is right and wrong?

What areas of your life do you find yourself wishing that you had the strength and the victory to overcome?

What areas of your life do you think, “I wish I had never done that?”

The good news is that there is forgiveness; there is hope; and there is victory in Jesus!

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

TWELVE REALITIES TO REMOVE THE DECEPTION OUT OF TEMPTATION

REALITY #1 – The Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted, but without sin. Once again reminding us that there is a difference between the “bait” and “biting” into that bait!

REALITY #2 – The fact that we are tempted tells us that there is a battle with three “foes.”

1. Internal foe (Our desires—we can be our worst enemy!)

2. External foe (The world—aberrant values/ ideas/ culture)

3. Infernal Foe (demonic)
REALITY #3 – God does not entice anyone to sin!

“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God” (James 1:13)

It’s another way of saying, “STOP ACCUSING GOD!”

James writes, “...for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”

REALITY #4 – While temptation can take many forms, below are three areas in which the early followers of Jesus experienced temptation.

1. The temptation to not consistently participate in a local church family. “…not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25)

2. The temptation to become discouraged and to give up amidst hardship, peer pressure and being the minority. “For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” (Hebrews 12:3)

3. The temptation to become consumed by bitterness due to the injustices of others defiling every area of life. “…lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...” (Hebrews 12:15) Bitterness is unresolved relational baggage that undermines one’s ability to move forward. It is a poison that one administers to oneself. But it is never a private matter alone. It always spills over into the lives of other people—children, family members, friends, or church members.

REALITY #5 – According to James 1:13-15, there are five steps to temptation.

Step 1: James 1:14 – The bait presents itself. “Each one is tempted …”

At this stage there is still a way out. There is no sin. But sin is knocking at the door

Step 2: James 1:14 – You show interest. Take it for a test drive. “You are drawn away by his OWN DESIRES.”

What makes temptation difficult for many people is that they don’t want to discourage it completely.

Step 3: James 1:14 – You’re almost hooked. “Drawn away by his own desires and is ENTICED.”

At this stage the will is weakening, the temptation is getting more alluring.

You are thinking, processing, considering.

Step 4: James 1:15 – The hook is now set. “Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin...”

The Evil thought has been acted upon; the Bait has been taken; the Sin is now conceived; the Process is in full swing; the experience of the Short-lived Pleasure and Euphoria, and then the Realization of what you have done; and then, hopefully, the GUILT—that sense of deadness and regret that comes from sin.

Step 5: James 1:15 – “And sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” The deadly effects of sin kicks in!
Like a mortally wounded person, you need immediate attention.

If you continue in this pattern, it could destroy you. You need to turn to the Lord, confess your sin, and receive a new beginning.

REALITY #6 – Temptation is a process. This means that no one “falls” overnight! No one wakes up in the morning and says:

- "I think I'll become really unhealthy today..."
- "I think I’ll be an addict today..."
- "I think I’ll just lose my job today...”
- "I think I’ll just get arrested today...”
- "I think I’ll just ruin my family today...”

REALITY #7 – You have to talk yourself into bad decisions!

“You don’t sit around looking for reasons to do the right thing. It’s the bad decisions that require creative reasoning—the human habit of self-deception.”

Given enough time and enough motivation, every one of us is capable of rationalizing almost anything.

You know why we have to “talk” ourselves into bad decisions and not have to talk ourselves into right decisions?

In general, we already know what is right! It speaks to the fact that we can be our worst enemy and to the propensity of humans to deceive themselves!

Every kind of addiction begins with similar self-deception.

- “This won’t hurt anybody.”
- “I’ll only do it once.”
- “I haven’t had any for a week.”
- “I’ll be careful.”
- “I can handle it.”
- “I can quit whenever I want to.”

Sound familiar? Chances are, you don’t have to think past last week to come up with a bad decision or two that you talked yourself into.

REALITY #8 – The Lord has not only paid the debt of our sin, but has given us power over sin.

“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord!” (Romans 6:11)

“Reckon yourselves to be dead to sin” also has been translated “consider yourselves to be dead to sin!” Take these words seriously. The word “reckon” is “logizomai,” which means assessing the fact, pressing your mind upon, calculating the importance of. It means considering myself “dead to sin!”

There is INCREDIBLE power in this. At the point of temptation say, “I’m dead to that!”

Bitterness – I’m dead to that!
Alcohol – I’m dead to that!
Immorality – I’m dead to that!
Slander – I’m dead to that!
Busybody – I’m dead to that!
Gluttony – I’m dead to that!
Exaggeration – I’m dead to that!
Cheating – I’m dead to that!
Lying – I’m dead to that!

REALITY #9 – It is always better to immediately turn from the bait than to struggle with the hook!

Temptation is best to be overcome IMMEDIATELY!

Success over temptation is a GODLY HABIT that responds immediately to the enticement.

There are not only spiritual ramifications involved, but biological ones as well. “Scientists are learning that the brain actually has grooves in it that come from repeated thinking. That is why a thought becomes an action, and an action becomes a habit, and a habit becomes a pattern of behavior that is almost automatic… Thoughts like drops of water, seek the path of least resistance. Thoughts do not edit themselves. They “go with the flow,” as it were, and are attracted to thoughts that look like them, if you will.”

REALITY #10 – You have a choice!

“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live…” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

REALITY #11 – The Bible says, “…don’t give a foothold to the devil,” because a foothold can lead to a stronghold.

Think of putting a foot in a door. It provides a little opening to a room. Similarly, a small compromise can lead to big problems!

When the 9/11 terrorists walked out of the main door that exits Passport Control at Los Angeles International Airport, they became a stronghold that resulted in an incredible devastation!

REALITY #12 – Five good reminders:

1. After a time of growth and success – be on guard for temptation!

2. Just because a temptation is persistent does not mean that it owns you and you are losing! For example, you cannot control whether a bird flies over your head, but you can control whether that bird builds a nest on your head!

3. If you have failed, then confess your sin: “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity, I have not hidden. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.” (Psalm 32:5)

4. Avoid isolation: “A man who isolates himself, seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment…” (Proverbs 18:1)

5. Go to church! Being with other Christians is like the strength of a barbecue pit, when the coals are together, there is heat, light and life, but when a coal is isolated out of the group, the coal
grows cold.