

# PRACTICE MAKES PERSONS

## “The Purpose of Temptation”

James 1:9-18 | January 27, 2019

**Sermon Summary:** Trials and temptations go together, in life and in our Christian lexicon. “Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?” the old hymn asks. *Yes and yes!* we answer. While there are distinctions—in trials, painful things come to you; in temptations, sinful things come out of you—they are inextricably bound. Every trial comes with temptations; every temptation involves trial. For example, you fall ill. There’s no sin in that—but soon you’re tempted to moodiness. You resent your loved ones if they aren’t caring enough. You’re tempted to sloth: Rather than redeeming your down time, you glue your eyeballs to a screen and binge-watch. Every trial comes with temptation; every temptation inflicts a trial.

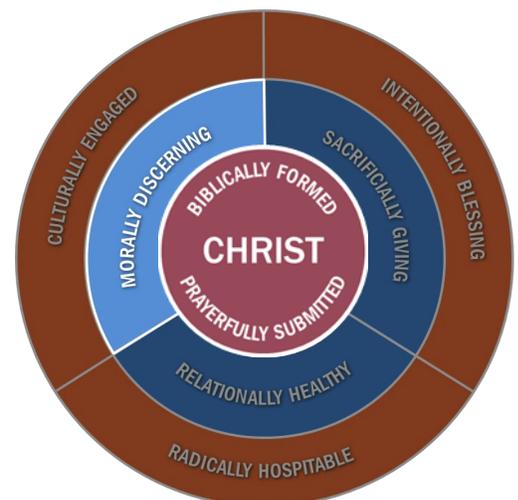
The Bible underscores this all the more by using the very same Greek word for both. “Trials” and “temptation” in James 1 are the same word. You discern the difference by context. And speaking of difference, here’s another: God has good, redeeming purposes for every trial. And Satan has sinister, ruinous purposes for every temptation. Consider these:

**1. To debase your life.** The enemy wants to knock you down a peg or two (or a thousand). He wants to knock you off your pedestal. And while pedestals are normally bad, in this case we need to be reminded that we were made for a “pedestal,” for a throne. We were made in the image and likeness of the King, to rule in goodness and love. But then came “the Fall”—the archetypal *debasement* of human life. Now we don’t know who we are. We feel either disempowered or over-empowered, like the poor and rich in James 1. The solution is to **GLORY** in the truth about ourselves: We’re seated with Christ in the heavenly realms, yet we’re involved in a spiritual battle in the heavenly (spiritual) realms. The poor need to glory in the seat they occupy. The rich need to glory in the soldierly service. In Christ the foundation of our lives is restored.

**2. To steal your reward.** James teaches that there is crown of life for all who persevere in love for the Lord. Don’t forfeit your reward by succumbing to temptation; don’t surrender your **CROWN** to the enemy. Now, the rewards of God generally fall into a category we might call “conditional grace.” They’re not earned or deserved—they’re gifts. Yet they’re not unconditional like our initial salvation. They are the fruit of God’s law being written on our hearts and the Spirit empowering our faithful obedience. But Satan would love to derail that.

**3. To break your faith.** Our sinful hearts always seek someone to blame for our failures, and ultimately we land on God. We credit our lucky stars for the good things in life but blame God for the bad. It has always been that way, ever since Adam first said, “The woman YOU GAVE ME, caused me to eat the forbidden fruit.” This is a breaking of our faith and trust in the goodness of God. Although he is more than sufficient and good enough in himself for us, we don’t see him in that light. When he gives us a million lesser blessings too, we don’t recognize them or receive them with gratitude. All we see is the one thing we can’t have.

### Discipleship Focus:



The remedy is the very thing that leads us astray: **DESIRE**. In The gospel we receive a new heart, with new and true desires for God. We need to cultivate those, turning our weakness into a strength. It's like falling in love: When you fall in love you don't just stumble off a cliff, you jump! You will yourself in love. You meet a girl and like her...and then start thinking about her all the time. You try to cross paths with her as often as possible. You begin to serve her; you make her smile and joy the source of your own. Start doing that with God.

And then don't blame God for your temptations but credit him with your blessings. Cultivate gratitude for all he is and gives as a bulwark against wayward desires.

**4. To ruin your witness.** A fourth sinister purpose of temptation is to obscure God's glory by sully your reputation and ability to reflect his glory. If the enemy can get people saying, "Why would I follow Christ if Christians act like that?" or "How life-changing can the gospel be if church people are just like everyone else?" then he has won. After all, he may have lost you to Christ, but if he can make you a compromised Christian he might not lose anyone else through you.

But God desires the opposite. James 1:18 says we're given new birth in order that we might be a kind of **FIRSTFRUITS** of all God created. In other words, we're a sign of salvation, a harbinger of a greater harvest. People should see in us a winsome example of what the gospel can do; they perceive in our ambassadorship, the gracious terms of their own surrender to Christ the King. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world, the salt of the earth—but if the salt loses its saltiness, how will it be made salty again? It's worth nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot." May it never be said of us! We've been granted a new birth in Christ that issues forth in our noble mission in the world. May we remember why we're here in the midst of these trials and temptations: to testify to the saving, satisfying Christ!

### Discussion Guide

1. Sometimes Christians can take sin too seriously, always groveling in their failures; and sometimes they don't take sin seriously enough, hardly feeling a pang of conscience for their failures. Which way do you tend to be? Why?
2. James also talks about Christians who are poor and disempowered, or rich and overconfident. In the face of trials and temptations, which do you tend to be? How would you explain James' respective calls to "glory in your high position" or "glory in your humiliation" to a new Christian?
3. James promises a crown of life for those who persevere in trials and temptations in love for Christ. How do you feel about the idea of your rewards being conditional, yet also being grace? Does "conditional grace" make sense to you? How do you explain that, or reconcile it with unconditional grace?
4. Do you tend to blame God for your sins and failures, or credit God (and credit him enough) for your many blessings? Explain your answer.
5. Temptation attempts to break your trust in God and his goodness. The countermeasure is *to count your blessings* and *cultivate your desire for God*. We used falling in love as an example. Think back to what you did in the early days of your love for either a person or thing. How is that an illustration of how to grow in love for the Lord? What is one thing you can do this week to grow your desire for God?
6. As the firstfruits of a new creation, as the harbinger of the redemption yet to come, you are a testimony to the world of God's salvation. The new birth is given you for that purpose. So what is the most visible, compelling, commendable thing about your new birth? What is most God-glorifying about you? What in your life could use further renovation in order to make you a more winsome witness?