

VI. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“Trials, Temptations and Triumph”
Book of James
James 1:12-15
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October 13, 2013 – Morning Sermon

We are in our sixth study in the book of James. We will be looking at James 1:12-15 but I want to start by looking at the content because it is important at this particular point to maintain context. So I will start by reading James 1:2-11 which says *[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. [5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [6] But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; [8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. [9] Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, [10] and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. [11] For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.*

The grass does wither. The flower does falter but the Word of the Lord abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

I'd like to start off by asking you some questions that will be answered from the text itself. Here is the first question. Why does the believer sin? I want to focus on that because that is who James is talking to when he says 'my beloved brothers.' We don't want to sin. God has given us a different movement in our heart. Paul said "The good that I would do I don't do. I find myself practicing the very evil I don't want to do." Why do we sin? James will answer that for us today very pointedly. I know I'm forgiven of my sins. I know that Jesus has paid for all of my sins but why do I sin? I know in this world I'll never be sinless. I know all of that but I don't want to sin. I know I'm not going to be sinless until I get to eternity but I do want to sin less. So why do I sin and how can I sin less? How can I grow in grace with obedience to Christ instead of disobedience and sin?

How can I remove those sins of commission where I have committed sins against God's Word? How can I get rid of those sins of omission? I remember the little Sunday school kid that was asked "What's a sin of commission?" The kid answered, "That's when you disobey God's Word." "What's a sin of omission?" "Those are the ones where you didn't get a chance to disobey that you wanted to." That's not what I'm talking about, the sins of omission. Sins of commission are what we have done in disobedience. The sins of omission are what we have left undone that God has called us to do. An example of a sin of commission would be adultery or murder or telling a lie. A sin of omission would be a sin of not pursuing purity or pursuing life or telling the truth in love. So how can I begin to grow in grace and say 'no' to sin in my life? That also is in this text we're about to look at.

This is Pastor James, the blood brother of Jesus, who denied Jesus until he was converted after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Then he kind of became the rock star preacher. He is the pastor of a mega church in Jerusalem of thousands and he writes a pastoral letter to his “beloved brothers.” That is the way you need to read this. This is a letter of Gospel wisdom to his people who have professed Christ. Twenty one times in the book of James he says ‘my beloved brothers.’ His theme is this. He wants you to know that you’re in a sin-cursed world but even though you live in a sin-cursed world his theme clearly comes through.

The theme of James is the Gospel life is a life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin-cursed world informed by the God-sent gift of “wisdom from above.” He is assuming you have made a profession of faith and you have a Gospel foundation. Christ has saved you from your sins. You have a Gospel motivation where the love of Christ compels you. You are in a sin-cursed world and you want to live a Gospel life so he says you need to see life rightly. You need Gospel wisdom so that has been his theme. So he wants you to be engaged in Gospel ministry with joyful maturation and you would do so because you’re being informed with Gospel wisdom that leads you through the trials of life.

Like a pastor this man has seen it all. If you don’t want to see all the negative things in life then don’t get these three careers – policeman, baseball umpire or a pastor. A baseball umpires never pleases anybody. If I had known the things I was going to hear, be challenged with and deal with I probably wouldn’t have been a pastor. But don’t let that frighten you because I’ve heard it all so if you ever want to come to me with something don’t hesitate and we’ll talk about it. James is a pastor and he is hearing it. He has sinners saved by grace in a sin-cursed world and he says “Let’s just take this thing on.” You are in a sin-cursed world and trials are not an interruption in life for they are your life. The interruption is when you don’t have a trial. That is just a little blink in life.

So he gives us Gospel wisdom maxim number one that we have summed up from these opening seventeen verses. Maxim one is the multi-faceted and inevitable Trials of Life are designed and sent by the sovereign grace of God to both “prove” and “improve” your Gospel life. When I was talking about steadfastness here I said it was the Greek word hupermeno but it’s actually hupomeno meaning that when you’re under assault you’re going to remain fast. There will be this heroic endurance where God’s grace is going to sustain you and you will stand your ground. Then you’ll be completed and perfected. The first thing you’ll see is that you lack wisdom so you’ll starting praying for wisdom with single-minded, believing prayer and the Lord begins to give wisdom so that you stand fast. So that you prove what you know and where you are in Christ. You also need to improve and so the trial shows you what you yet need to know and where you need to go in Christ. So in the last four studies we have nailed that Gospel wisdom maxim down.

So now I’m asking you to take the period away after the Gospel maxim number one because before we end these first fifteen verses in this study I have one thing to add to what the trials do for us. The trials not only become an opportunity to reveal what you know and where you are, reveal what you don’t yet know and where you need to go but it also reveals something else that is very important. That is what we’ll look at in this study.

James 1:12 says [12] *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.* Here are the trials of life. That's the Christian life. The trials become tests and now the test has come. By God's grace with your Gospel foundation, motivation and wisdom that has come to you, the trial has come and you have stood your ground. As one preacher said "You have super stood your ground." You have been steadfast under the trial. Now this trial that has become a test has now become a trail of life. You are growing in grace and out in front of you is the crown of life. He uses the be-attitude language – how blessed is the man.

He is also using Psalm 1 says [1] *Blessed (truly happy) is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. [4] The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. [5] Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; [6] for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

How blessed is the steadfast man of God's grace for God's glory. He is not only alluding to Psalm 1 and the be-attitude but he is also alluding to what we call the Be-attitudes that Jesus taught on the Sermon on the Mount, of what God's grace does to the character of a converted man or woman. Now that he has given this blessing here is what has happened. You have remained steadfast. You are now growing in grace. You who have been delivered from the power, penalty, persuasion of sin and you are being delivered through the trials of life from the practice of sin. You will be delivered from the presence of sin on that day you get the crown of life.

This text has three startling metaphor, word pictures. The first one is that when you get to the finish line and you step into the new heavens and the new earth you get this crown of life. It's not a jewel studded gold crown, but it's a wreath that was given to the victor of a battle or the wreath that was given to the athlete that had finished the course. That was the wreath that you'll receive. The Christian life here is a marathon. When you get to the end and God has grown you through the trials of life, now you get the crown of life. You didn't earn it through your obedience. In fact, notice what it says in the text.

James 1:12 says [12] *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which **God has promised to those who love him.*** What is it that brought you through the trials of life that you remain steadfast? It was because you loved Him and that brought you through the persistence of imperfect obedience throughout your life. Why do you love Him? It is because He first loved you. His grace took hold of you. Now you love Him who loved you. So with the challenges of life He has brought you through it. He has been perfecting you and growing you. You have grown in your intimacies of prayer as you see that you lack wisdom. You have learned single-mindedness and He has been refining you through grievous times of trial, through the infatuation of the praise of men but He has been growing you through that.

That is what the marathon is. You don't have to finish first. It's just that those who love Him finish and they want to finish well. You don't have to finish the fastest or first. I jog for exercise or some would say I slog. I don't run at a specific pace. The

other day I was jogging and this guy was walking past me going the opposite way and he said to me out the side of his sneering voice “You know if you don’t go fast enough it doesn’t do any good.” I thought “I’m going fast enough and this is doing all the good I need right now.” The point is that you’re maintaining the pace until the end, finishing well. There is the crown of life.

Who gets it? It is not perfect people. It is finishers. Why do they finish? It is because they love Him. It’s not their finishing that gets the crown. Jesus won the crown and you. You love Him because He loves you. With your imperfect, persistent obedience you have now come to Him who came for you and there is the crown so the trial is a part of the trail to life forever. God is using it to grow you.

Having said that there is also the fact that the trial is not only a test that’s a trail to life, but it can also be a trail to death for believers. James is talking to believers. James 1:13-15 says [13] *Let no one say when he is tempted (same word for trial), “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.* [14] *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.* [15] *Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

We have already seen one word picture in this text that is startling and poignant which was the word picture of an athlete or victorious warrior that gets the wreath. Here James uses two more of these people on another trail. Here is the trial and here is the test but as the test/trial comes it becomes a temptation and a trail to death. How did that happen? What happened for it to become a trail to death? When the trial comes there are two possibilities. There is the trail to life or the trail to death. How did it become a trail to death? When the trial came the test turned into a temptation because of something inside of us that is translated evil desires. Some of your Bibles translate it lust. When the lust marries the temptation here is your word picture. It gives birth to a sin. When the sin is fully grown it gives birth to death.

Let me walk through this again. First of all James gives the word picture that it becomes a temptation because it lures you. It entices you. It entices something inside of you. It entices the *epithymia* in you – *epi-* meaning over and *-thymia* means desire. James 1:14-15 says [14] *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire (epithymia).* [15] *Then desire (epithymia) when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death (ESV).* It doesn’t just mean desire. The NAS (New American Standard) tries to get at it by calling it lust. The NIV (New International Version) which I think may be on target here calls it the evil desire. It literally means ‘over desire.’

Desire is not sin. God has given me an appetite for food, drink, work, sex, knowledge. He has given me all kinds of desires and they are not sinful in and of themselves. The problem is when I have an *epithymia*, an over desire, a ruling passion that rules out everything else. When the test comes and I have this *epithymia*, the over desire marries the temptation and out of this illicit relationship is an illicit child called sin. If that sin is not cut off, when it gets fully grown it brings death. Now what’s the death? The death isn’t that you lose your salvation. We are saved by God’s grace. Just as much as my perseverance doesn’t earn my crown, it’s the gateway to my crown and neither does my faltering the test mean that I lose my salvation.

What if the person is an unbeliever? Here is the problem. They are lashed to the mast of their evil desires and idolatry. If that is where you are today then you are lashed to the mast of a sinking ship, but there is a Savior who came and who will cut the chords and fasten you to Himself. There are those of you who have been freed from that mast of the sinking ship of idolatry but yet there are uncovered passions that are yet to be dealt with in your heart and soul and the temptation has uncovered it. The temptation married the over desire. The two came together because you were convinced that you just had to have it and that brought sin. If sin becomes full grown it will bring death.

How many men do I know that are saved but their ministry got killed because of an unguarded moment in a counseling room? How many people do I know that love the Lord who have been forgiven of all their sins but an unguarded moment and a drunken wreck happens where someone dies and they lose their arm? Are they forgiven? Yes. Are they headed to glory? Yes, but there was a consequence even in the life of a believer. The arm is gone. Can God still use that in their life? Absolutely and it is because He is sovereign, glorious and can draw straight lines with crooked sticks. How many men and women in an unguarded moment where another man or woman made them feel like something, lost a marriage in an illicit relationship? How many parents have forfeited the trust of their children through the unguarded moment when the temptation married the over desire, sin conceived and there was the death of trust in the relationship? That is the other trail that is there – the trail of death.

I would like to outline for you some basic things that you and I need to see. James gives you this picture of this athletic life with this warrior victorious crown in front of you which is the trail to life and then over here is the trail to death. The trail to death which is because of sin which happens when the test is turned into a temptation because our over desires, our ruling passions that have not yet been conquered by the grace of God where we did not kill them, married and the child was sin. Sin when its fully grown brings chaos, destruction and death.

Now Jesus is trying to tell you that He married you. Our relationship with Him is one of intimacy. You and I have a holy bed of matrimony with Christ but in that unguarded moment you said ‘no’ to Him, the Lover of your soul and you said ‘yes’ to a bed of adultery. The prophets, dare I say it, they say it repeatedly, “my people went whoring after another lover.” James gives you a picture of this. This is spiritual adultery that you’re doing. It’s not just a momentary whim sewing my oats. It is a conviction that has been unearthed in your heart and soul, that unguarded experience of sin, which was the avenue of life brings death. James wants you to see that it is a lethal, illicit love affair that you have just engaged in.

What is our natural response when that happens? We want to be the victim. We blame our parents, the neighborhood we grew up in, or the genetic determining factor in our life. We automatically want to play the victim and that’s what the text says. When they have faltered and their epithymia has married the temptation and its produced sin, instead of cutting the sin off and repenting out of love to Christ, they then have a default position. “I’m a victim. It’s God’s fault. It’s the test’s fault.” So the response is to blame God or the response is to blame God’s character. James says that this is preposterous. He says first of all it’s not God, the Tester or the test. The test has revealed something. It didn’t cause something.

The character of God cannot be tempted therefore He does not tempt you to sin. He has sent the test but it is not a temptation. The test became a temptation because of what was in you. Why does the sun harden the clay and melt the wax? It is because there is something inside of it. Why does the same sun cause one bush to grow and the other one to wilt? There is something in the root system. You are looking out there and say it's God's fault or the test's fault or somebody else's fault. When in reality he says you need to look inside. It has uncovered something in your heart. That is where you need to look.

How do you deal with it? I want to enumerate five things that will help us. The first one is every trial is a test and every test has the potential to become a temptation. There are multiple trials that are multi-faceted. There are trials of adversity and prosperity. Let's use the rich man. The rich man has money. He is prosperous. He is insulated, isolated, exalted and everybody comes to him. When everyone comes to you and exalts you because of the prosperity in your life you pull the card that say "I don't believe it." I am what I am by the grace of God. I don't believe this is mine because I'm a harder worker or smarter worker. No, I have served the Lord with faithfulness but everything I have from beginning to end has been a gift of God's grace so I don't believe your adulation of me.

When the poor man is marginalized and put aside and declared his race isn't right or his position isn't right, your this or that isn't right then he pulls the card that says "I don't believe that." I will boast in the Lord. I'm a trophy of grace and a joint heir of Christ. I belong to Him. I am His and He is mine. So here come the multiple tests. Some of them have grief, pain and suffering. Some of them are infatuated compliments. Whatever they are and whenever they come we apply Gospel wisdom and at that moment it reveals who we are, what we know, what we yet need to know, and where we need to go. The trial has become a test but it has the potential to become a temptation if it uncovers a passion that has become more alluring than Christ Himself.

The second point is that God tests with trials but does not tempt to sin because He cannot tempt anyone to sin. It is not the test or the neighborhood you grew up in. I know all those things influence us but you are not an animal governed by its appetite. You are not a program, automaton, from a culture. All those things influence us but first he wants you to see that you are made in the image of God. It wasn't the test or the situation. The test has uncovered something within you. You made that choice out of something – wisdom of the world – that was guiding you and it wasn't God through the test that was the problem. God cannot be tempted and God does not tempt to sin.

One time I remember being away from the pulpit at Charlotte and I called my secretary at the office to ask "What is the man preaching on this Sunday?" She said "He is preaching on five things God cannot do." I said "Oh no! I have a lot of work to do when I get back." There are not five things God cannot do. In fact, there are a lot more than five things that God cannot do because there is one thing that God cannot do and that one thing is that He can't quit being God. Being God means He cannot be tempted and being God He does not tempt. That is what James is telling us. The issue is not out there. The issue is to look inside of you as to why the test became a temptation and an illicit love affair that led to sin.

The third point is every trial is a test and every test will lead to a trial of life or a trial of death. There is no neutrality here. The trials will be tests for those who apply

Gospel wisdom through the pain or the suffering or the infatuation of adulation, whatever it might be, there will be a joyful embracing of it because it reveals who I am, it reveals what I know, it reveals what I yet need to know that I can ask the Lord for it and it reveals where I yet need to go. But for those where it has become a trial of death it reveals a third thing – stronghold of idolatry that has not yet been conquered by the grace of God and for the glory of God.

The fourth point is the test is never the cause of our sin but it can be the occasion of our sin. I know there is this notion that we don't need tests for people to learn but whoever teaches you that don't listen. Whoever teaches you that if you come to Jesus you don't have any trials or tests, please don't listen. Preachers can promise that but God doesn't promise that. God does promise with every temptation and every trial comes a way of escape and that's in and through Him. The test didn't cause our sin. Someone ask me "Harry, why did you have a major in History and theology?" There are multiple reasons I did this but I found out that I could get an undergraduate degree, a graduate degree and a post graduate degree and never have to take but one math course and one science course if I majored in history and theology. That was my number one reason. If I were to take a math or science test there will be some clear revelation of some stupidity of what I don't know.

The problem isn't the teacher that gave the test and the problem isn't the test. The problem is test reveals something that was lacking or something that was ruling that needs to be confronted. This has not changed at all through the years. I could take you to hundreds of examples in the Bible to show you this but I'll at least give you one. It was the first one. Was there a trial in the garden? Adam and Eve were under trial. As they were under a trial that trial became a test. Then the test became a temptation. The tempter came and said "The reason God is telling you not to do this is because He knows if you eat the fruit you will be like God." That met an epithymia, an over desire. How do you know it's an over desire? She didn't want to be like God, she wanted to be God. She already was like God for she was made in His image, but this uncovered a desire in her to be God. So when she saw the tree was good for food, a delight to the eyes and the boastful pride of life, an over desire, she took the fruit, ate and gave to Adam. He ate and then God comes and says "Did you eat?" They say "No, no, no. I'm a victim. It wasn't me. It was the test. God, the woman gave it to me. You gave me the woman. I have a dysfunctional wife and a dysfunctional God. That determined my sinful choice." The woman says "The devil made me do it." So there is always this default to be the victim of our environment, our genes and I understand this but ultimately I'm made in the image of God and the choice I made reveals something in my heart and life.

The fifth point is the singular cause of our sin is always our "evil" desires. Why do you sin? It is because there is something inside that you have to deal with. One preacher rightly said "You don't just tell Christians to say 'no' because that is not why you said 'yes.'" You didn't just say 'yes' I'm going to rebel against God. The trail that leads to death also becomes a trail to lead you back to life. Here is the test. The test became a temptation because there was an epithymia, a driving passion and that led to sin. Now here's the sin. I don't want this sin to grow up and bring death. I want to cut it off. I want to learn from this. I want to deal with this and reverse the trail. So you go back and kill the parents. You go back and say "I just found a ruling passion of idolatry in my life. I need to kill the old man. I need to work backwards but wait I'm not

through.” It’s not just work backwards and kill the old man because you don’t want the sin. You don’t want the sin because it is an illicit lethal love affair and you want to get back to the Lover of your soul.

Yes this can bring death to marriage. Yes it has consequences that I don’t want. There is another reason to say ‘no’ but I can’t just say ‘no’ I have to go back to what is ruling in my heart – the unguarded place, the stronghold of idolatry that was guiding and ruling me. I want to say ‘no’ to that. The best way to say ‘no’ to that is like the tree in my backyard. I love this tree. It is absolutely beautiful but I hate it in the winter. I hated it so much that I cut it down two weeks ago. The reason I did is because it never gets rid of its leaves in the fall. In the Spring when I am wanting joy and life it is throwing leaves all over my yard because it is a tree that doesn’t lose its leaves until something greater pushes it out. That’s the way you get rid of sin at the root. You get rid of the false lover by seeing your true Lover – to those who love Me.

That is how the steadfastness comes, in an unrequited love for Christ and there is no room. Let me give you a human example of this. I want to be faithful to my wife for many reasons and certainly out of love to Christ is the ruling reason but there is another reason. God, give me such a love and obsession for her that I don’t have room for anything else. Everything else gets pushed out and away and I can flee the temptation because it has no call. I have a satisfaction that is there. That is what James is telling you. These false lovers are pushed out so that the test is embraced with joy instead of becoming a trail to death because you have seen the true Lover of your soul.

Let me take the Gospel wisdom package and put it back together for us. The multi-faceted and inevitable trials of life are designed and sent by the sovereign grace of God to both “prove” and “improve” your Gospel life and to uncover the strongholds of idolatry yet to be conquered by the grace of glory and the glory of grace. The trail to death uncovers the trail to life because it guides you back to the strongholds of idolatry that cause the trial and the test to become a temptation. So you don’t just say ‘no.’ We want to say ‘no’ but the reason you say ‘no’ is because you have a bigger ‘yes’ because Jesus is the Lover of my soul. It is my exhilaration in Him that then causes me to then move forward with an imperfect but persistent obedience in life.

The test has uncovered a lurking paramour who wants an adulterous relationship with my life and I want to say ‘no’ to the illicit child of sin that comes from the illicit bed of adultery where my over desires marry the temptation. I want to flee the temptation, kill the over desires and the best way to do it is to see the true Lover of my soul. Do you know why I have the crown of life? It is because of the glory of grace and the grace of glory. From glory my Savior set aside His crown and went to a cross for me to take a crown of thorns so that by grace I can be brought to His glory and receive from Him a crown of life. I want that picture to drive out the evil and not just the sin. The sin is the illicit child and I want to kill the parent. I want temptation to be a trial and flee temptation. I want to kill the evil desires because the Lord is the Lover of my soul.

Evil desires can not only lead you to bad things, evil desires can lead you to badly want good things. God has given you a heart for marriage, for children, for work, for sex and all those desires. They are Godly desires and so the sin is not just wanting a bad thing but it’s also wanting things too badly. If I don’t have a marriage partner I’m going to fire You God. I’m going to fire You when my children don’t come, think or be what they ought to be. I’m going to fire You God if I didn’t get that promotion. I’m going to fire

You God if I don't get that adulation. God, You're fired! You are done away with because this is more important to me than You and You're not enough.

What happens to the believer when they see that is they recoil and say "That is not true. I don't know how that unguarded moment happened. Let me see my Savior!" Now I can delight myself in the Lord and He'll give me the desires of my heart because my heart is full of Jesus, not over desires that will kill me. It's not just desiring bad things but it's also desiring anything too badly. Christ is enough. Listen to the intimate, romantic language of this hymn and then I'll close in prayer.

Jesus, Lover of my soul, Let me to Thy bosom fly. The sacred marital bed of intimacy with Christ drives out the paramours of illicit love affairs and its illicit children and its grandchildren of death. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. This text is so rich. I feel like a pressure cooker that just doesn't have enough room to get it out but I thank You that it's not up to me. Your Holy Spirit will do Your work with Your Word in the lives of Your people. If there is anyone who is reading whose problem is not a stronghold of idolatry that needs to be expelled by the love of Christ but their problem is they are under the lash of idolatry and they need to see Christ in all of His glory, from glory to grace to take them by grace to glory. Dear friend, come to Christ. The ships of idolatry will bring death, not the death of things but the death of your soul. Please come to Christ. Say "Jesus I come." Father, for Your people, thank You for the tests that not only show where we are, what we know, what we don't know and where we need to go but it also shows us the strongholds of idolatry that have not yet been conquered by the grace that came from glory and the glory that will take us to grace untold. Father, please help us not to just say 'no' but to say 'yes' to Christ the Lover of my soul, who wore the crown of thorns that I could have a crown of life and one day be away from even the presence of sin, I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.