

## “How to Win over Temptation”

**Text: James 1:12-18**

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Illustrations:

- Pornography at Westwood

Temptation is one of humanities oldest problems.

- It goes all the way back to Adam.
- We all eventually face it.
- Sometimes even when we know it's right to say “no” it's difficult to say “no”.

Oscar Wilde once said, “I can withstand anything except temptation. The only way to get rid of temptation is to give into it.”

Let's read what God has to say: **Read James 1:12-18**

**Pray!**

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The Bible talks about two kinds of testing. One is called trials. The other is called temptation. The Greek uses the same word for both. Sometimes it's translated “trials”, and sometimes “temptations”. Sometimes a situation can be both a trial and temptation. To distinguish them:

- Trials are designed by God in order to help us grow.
- Temptations are designed by the devil in order to cause us to sin.

James 1:12 – *“Blessed is the one who endures temptation: for when they are tried, they shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him.”*

- It starts off by saying “blessed” or happy. Happiness comes from having your life under control, so that there is no bad habit that is devastating you. When you know how to say “no” to temptation it produces happiness in your life.
- It also says there is a “crown of life”, a prize for enduring temptation. In the Greek it means literally “life itself”.
- James says, when you overcome temptation, you begin to really live.

The question is, “How do I handle temptation? How do I say no when I want to say yes?” **James gives us five principles.**

## I. BE REALISTIC

A. James 1:13 says, *“When you are tempted...”*

1. Let's face it, all of us are tempted, even Christians.  
It's just like trials, temptations are inevitable.
  - Every day we are tempted.
  - You never get too old for it.
  - You never overcome it by getting too spiritual.
  - The more you grow toward the Lord, the more you're going to be tempted.
  - Reality is all of us are tempted.
2. There's a misconception that says, once you're born again you've got it all together. You've arrived, so fake it and wear a mask and pretend like, “How could anybody do something like that?” We're all tempted.
  - a. 1 Corinthians 10:13, *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to humanity.”* We all have the same temptations, same struggles, same problems.
  - b. New Christians being disciplined principle
3. It is not a sin to be tempted. It is a sin to give in to temptation. Jesus was tempted but He never gave in. He was perfect.

## II. BE RESPONSIBLE

A. Accept responsibility. Don't blame others for your problems. We love to blame people, even God.

1. Vs. 13, *“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.”*
2. God does not tempt, but we love to blame others.
  - a. Will Rogers said you could summarize American history into two great movements: the passing of the buffalo and the passing of the buck.
  - b. We are in a society of irresponsibility.
    - Blame society,
    - blame the government,
    - blame the environment,
    - blame heredity,
    - blame your parents,
    - blame your spouse,
    - blame the devil,
    - even blame God.
  - c. Some people say, “It must be God's will or He wouldn't have let it happen.” That's blaming God.

d. A man said, "God told me to leave my wife and go marry someone else that I met at church." That's called blaming God. God does not tempt. Don't make bad choices and then blame them on God. God is not going to tell you one thing and have the Bible say something different. God never contradicts His word.

B. Don't blame God and don't blame other people. Be responsible.

### III. BE READY

A. When temptation comes be ready. Peter says, "*Be on your guard.*" Jesus said, "*Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.*" Paul said, "*Put on the whole armor of God.*" Be ready. Be prepared.

B. Vs. 14 & 16, "*Each of you is tempted when you are dragged away by your own evil desire and enticed ... Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters...*"

1. We need to be ready and prepared for temptation.

Temptation does not warn you in advance. It catches you by surprise.

C. How do you prepare for temptation? How do you get ready for it? By understanding how it operates.

1. 2 Corinthians 2:11, "*In order that Satan might not outwit us, we are not unaware of his schemes.*" God wants you to know how the devil operates, how he tempts. The devil tempts the same way today as he has for thousands of years. It's very easy to discover his process. Temptation is a process, never a one-time act.

D. James outlines the four steps that the devil uses in order to tempt you.

1. Vs. 14, "*Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desires*"

- **The first step of temptation is desire.** It starts on the inside. Most desires are OK. You couldn't live without desires: a desire to eat, drink, sleep, the sexual desire, to accomplish. God gives us these desires. They are good desires. **But any desire out of control becomes destructive.** Satan loves to take routine desires and turn them into runaway desires. You are consumed, obsessed by it: food, work, having fun, sex, money. Legitimate desires but when they are out of control they become a problem. It always starts with desire.

2. **The second step is deception.** "*You are dragged away and enticed.*"

- The word "enticed" is a fisherman's term which means "lured by bait". The secret of great fishing is the bait. The right kind of bait for the right kind of fish.
- What kind of bait does the devil use on you? He knows your button. He knows your weakness. He knows what turns you on. He knows what you will fall for. He hides his hook in his bait and the bait appeals to our weakness.

- People say, “I know what I’m doing. I’m not going to get hurt. I know how far to go.” Deceived.
- 3. Disobedience** *“Then after desire has conceived it gives birth to sin.”*
- What begins in your mind results in an action. It starts in your imagination. The battle starts with your thoughts. It moves from your thoughts into actions.
  - First the devil gets your attention. He knows if he can get your attention he will eventually get you to commit the action.
  - People say, “What’s the danger in a harmless fantasy?” What starts in your mind eventually comes out in your life. What you flirt with, you will fall for.
  - TV advertising. They try to get you to imagine something. They know if they can get it in your imaginations they’ve got you.
4. Desire leads to deception. Deception leads to disobedience.
- Disobedience leads to death.** Vs. 15, *“Sin, when full grown gives birth to death.”*
- That’s the tragic consequence of giving in. That’s what losing the battle causes – devastating results. What is death? The exact opposite of living. The wages of sin is death – spiritual separation from God.
  - James says we are free to choose any way we want to live. God gave me the freedom of choice. But I am not free to choose the consequences of the choices. I am free to have my kicks, but I am not free to eliminate the kickbacks.

#### IV. BE REFOCUSED

- A. All of a sudden in vs. 17, James switches gears. He starts talking about the goodness of God. *“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 seems to be refocusing our attention on something else.
- B. If temptation starts in our inner thoughts then changing what we think about is the key to overcoming it. **This is the principle of replacement, the key to overcoming temptation.** The key to overcoming temptation is not to fight temptation but simply refocus your thoughts. Change your attention to something else. Change your mind. Refocus. Philippians 4:8, *“Think on these things, things that are good, positive, just, honest.”*
1. **Focus your mind on the goodness of God.** Turn your attention. Get your eyes on the goodness of the God on His word. It’s a choice. *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* Get God’s word in your mind and refocus. Quit fighting the feeling. You can’t fight a feeling. But if you ignore it, you weaken it.

- C. **When temptation calls, drop the receiver, and forget it.** When you refocus, it may mean physically removing yourself from the situation. **If you don't want to get stung, get away from the bees.**
1. Maybe you need to **change the channel** on the TV.  
     Maybe you need to **walk out of the movie.**  
     Maybe you need to **change jobs.**  
     Maybe you need to **change a car pool.**
  2. 1 Corinthians 15:33, *"Bad company corrupts good character."*

## V. BE REBORN

- A. Vs. 18, *"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."*
1. James is not talking about physical birth. He's talking about being spiritually born. A rebirth. Starting over with God.
- B. The single most important principle in breaking bad habits and getting control of your life is to let God have control of it. Get Him in your life so He can start changing your character. You don't have enough power in your own willpower. You need supernatural power. You need Jesus Christ in your life. That's what it means to be reborn. It means you get a fresh start on life. Ask Christ in. Ask Him to give you the power you need to do what you know is right to do anyway. You need His power in your life. That's the starting point. Then you'll have more than just your own power.

What are some resources you need in order to fight temptation:

1. **Fellowship with other Christians.** We were not meant to fight the battle ourselves.
  - Get involved in a Bible study, a small group where you can share, meet some friends, then begin to share on a gut level. When you are able to talk about a problem you are able to get control of it.
2. **Get into God's word.** The Bible is our secret weapon against temptation. It is the truth. Jesus said, *"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."* Fill your mind with this book. Study it, memorize it, meditate on it. Knowing the truth will keep you from being deceived.

The payoff is not being controlled by anything but the Lord and you begin to enjoy the abundant life.

Prayer:

You may be struggling in an area which has been bothering you for years. What is your weakness? What is your hot button? Where does Satan bait you? Say, *"Lord, you know what it is. I've got a tendency to ...exaggerate, be double-minded, not stand up for what I know is right but be wishy-washy, always worry about what other people think, become sarcastic and say some hurtful things to my wife/husband. I'm insensitive to the needs of my spouse. I tend to be selfish. There is something in my life that is out of control. My*

*time is out of control, Lord. My spending is out of control. My weight, my exercise. I just keep falling in this same area and I feel bad about it." Just confess it to Him. He knows your frame. He loves you. He's not going to condemn you. He wants to forgive you, wipe the slate clean. He wants to start over today. That's why He brought you here. Say, "God, I want to be realistic about this. It is a problem in my life. I drink too much ... or whatever." Admit it to Him. Accept responsibility. Don't blame your parents, your spouse, your boss, anybody. Admit there is a weakness. There would be no outside temptation if there were no inward drive that matches it. Be ready. "Lord, help me to study Your word so that I'll know how the devil tries to get at me. Help me to recognize those areas of weakness and avoid them. Help me to refocus on You, to fill my mind with the good things, the true things, the right things, not to resist my feelings but to replace them with what You have to say." Most of all, if you've never opened up your heart to the Lord, do it this morning. Say, "Jesus Christ, I want to be reborn. I want a fresh start on life. Would you forgive all the sins I've ever committed and help me start over today." He will. That's why He died on the cross for you. Say, "Jesus Christ, come in and be the Manager and Controller of my life." He will. "Lord, You promised to make a way out of these temptations. Give me the strength." Some of you need to break off a bad relationship. Some of you are flirting in the wrong areas. Say, "Lord, help me to quit compromising. Help me to do what's right." And He will help you, if you come to Him with an open and sincere heart and say, "God, You know all about me. I can't fool You. Help me get victory over this temptation."*

"Lord, I want to thank You for those today that prayed this prayer, opening their hearts for the very first time, saying they want You in their lives. Help us as a church to help them. In Jesus' name. Amen."