

TWISTED TEMPTATIONS—PART FOUR  
**James 1:13-16**

(CSB) "No one undergoing a trial should say, 'I am being tempted by God,' since God is not tempted by evil, and He himself doesn't tempt anyone.<sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire.<sup>15</sup> Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.<sup>16</sup> Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters."

## INTRODUCTION

There's a story about a man who got lost in the desert in the days of the old west. He wandered around for several days until his canteen was bone dry, his lips were cracked, and his mouth parched. Then he saw a small shack in the distance. He stumbled his way to it with a desperate hope he'd find water. No one was home. But inside the shack, he found a water pump with a small jug of water and a note. The note read: "Pour *all* the water into the top of the pump to prime it. If you do this you will get all the water you need."

Now the man had a choice to make. If he trusted the note, poured in the water, and it worked, he would have all the water he needed. If it didn't work, he'd still be thirsty. He might even die. His dry mouth and near delirium from lack of water urged him to do the sure thing: drink the water in the jug to get immediate relief for his great thirst. It might not be enough water and he still might die, but he knew he would survive a little longer; maybe long enough for help to arrive. What would you do? After thinking about it the man decided to risk it. He poured the entire jug into the pump and began to work the handle. At first nothing happened. He started to get scared and thought he might have been a fool. Maybe the note about pouring the last of the water into the pump had been someone's idea of a sick joke. But with grim hope, he kept working the handle. Finally, a little water started trickling. Soon, so much water came that he drank all he wanted, gave himself a bath, and filled all the containers he could find. The note by the pump also said, "After you have finished, please refill the jug for the next traveler," so the man filled the small jug with water before he left. But he added these words to the note: "Please prime the pump. Believe me it works!"

This is our final look at Twisted Temptations. We've explored three Fateful Responses to Temptation: Underestimating the Enemy (Satan and his schemes to ruin us), Overestimating Ourselves (our ability to handle Satan or temptation), and Misestimating God (claiming our moral failures stem from God's unloving or negligent actions toward us or others). When our character is put on trial by temptation, these responses are fateful ("fatal or disastrous") because they draw us away from the quality of life God alone can give us.

James, our Lord's half-brother, wrote this letter to thousands of Messianic Jews of Israel's 12 tribes. He'd served many of them as pastor before the deadly persecution of Christians that began in A. D. 33 (three years after **Jesus'** crucifixion) "scattered [them] throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria" and beyond (**Acts 8:1-4**). This persecution served God's purposes. The good news of salvation spread more rapidly by these believers proclaiming **Jesus Christ** wherever they went. But they also struggled to adapt to new surroundings and find suitable work and homes far away from those they most relied upon for support. Many of them were new Christians. These trials put their faith in Christ to the test. James knew their difficult circumstances could *mold* them quickly as mature believers if they did not allow their struggles to defeat them. By giving in to confusion or discouragement, this could *fold* their faith rather than *mold* it.

Temptation "trials" James describes are not problems brought on by our poor choices, like poor eating or spending habits. Nor was James talking about common, everyday issues, like termites, weeds, or colds. James means the "trials" *God* brings into our lives "to prove or improve our abilities" and "to develop our character" by putting us to the test. **James 1:2-4** (CSB) urges us to keep uppermost in mind that God has *constructive* purposes for these difficult tests, not *destructive* purposes: "Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials,<sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your

faith produces endurance.<sup>4</sup> And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing." If we respond to "trials" God designs for us with love and loyalty toward Him, we pass the "test" and are transformed more into the likeness of our Savior. But we know we often don't respond well to tests. We tend to respond based on our old habits and are slow to grow in godly wisdom or conduct. A teacher gave her second-grade class a lesson on the magnet. She demonstrated to her students in a variety of ways what a magnet can do. The next day she included this question in a written test: "My full name has six letters. The first one is M, and I pick up things. What am I?" When the papers were graded, the teacher was astounded to find nearly half the students had written in the word, "mother."

How well do you handle tests in a classroom or day-to-day life? The Greek word for "tempt" in **James 1:13-16** is the noun form of "trial" in **James 1:2**. A "trial" God intends to bless us may sour into a "temptation" that curses us. If we respond *fatefully* to a God-designed trial with distrust and disloyalty to the Lord, we fail the "test" and the "trial" becomes a temptation that transforms us more into Satan's likeness. Misestimating God may be the most deadly of the Fateful Responses to Temptation. We "misestimate" God by judging Him unfairly or interpreting His actions wrongly based upon circumstantial evidence.

The Lord gives us clear directions about how best to meet our needs and experience the most satisfying life. Take **Jesus'** words in **Matthew 6:25, 32-33** (ERV): "So I tell you, don't worry about the things you need to live—what you will eat, drink, or wear. Life is more important than food, and the body is more important than what you put on it.<sup>32</sup> That's what those people who don't know God are always thinking about. Don't worry, because your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things.<sup>33</sup> What you should want most is God's kingdom and doing what He wants you to do. Then He will give you all these other things you need." But we must carefully and faithfully follow the Lord's loving guidance to benefit by His wisdom, just like the man who needed to have faith in the directions to prime the well pump if he wanted to fully satisfy his thirst. If he'd distrusted or ignored the words of this note and yielded to the temptation to gratify his need for water immediately, would he have been to blame if he suffered greatly for his rash action or died for lack of water? He may have raged against the shack's owner, blaming the owner for requiring his cooperation to get enough water. Would this have been fair? No.

"No one undergoing a trial should say, 'I am being tempted by God,'" James reminds us, "since God is not tempted by evil, and He himself doesn't tempt anyone." If we believe God is uncaring or neglectful toward us, this guilt exists only in our own minds. "[E]ach person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire." The Greek word translated "evil desire" refers to "any selfish, intense longing that becomes unhealthy or immoral." A desire to satisfy a God-given need, such as for water, a spouse, a career, or a child, can become an "evil desire" if it controls us instead of God. Greek words for "drawn away" and "enticed" were well-known in the first century as fishing and hunting terms. Our improper desires can provide baited hooks that lure us with the promise of a few morsels of pleasure, so that we are caught like a fish or trapped like an animal to our ruin. "Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death."<sup>16</sup> Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters."

The proven way to escape such ruin is by shunning Fateful Responses to Temptation: Underestimating the Enemy, Overestimating Ourselves, and Misestimating God. Instead, we seek to respond to times of testing and trial that God designs to improve our abilities and mature our Christian character in one of three Faithful ways: Flee When You Can, (have) Faith When You Can't Flee, and show Fidelity (to the Lord) All You Can. Last week, we examined Flee When You Can. Now we consider,

### **B. (Have) FAITH WHEN YOU CAN'T FLEE**

God knows temptations are the entry door to every sin. The further we stay from temptation's door, when possible, the further we stay from sin. "Flee" is God's normal command concerning temptation, "Flee sexual immorality" (**I Corinthians 6:18**, NKJV). Sadly, despite God's warnings, we often won't flee

behavior that is ruining us unless we are scared enough or desperate enough to do so. A driver was pulled over by a police officer for speeding. While the officer wrote the ticket, she noticed several machetes in the car. "What are those for?" she asked suspiciously. "I'm a juggler," the man replied. "I use those in my act." The woman officer grew so curious that she asked if the man would step out of the car and show her. Wanting to impress this officer in hopes of getting a lesser ticket, the driver popped out of his car, grabbed the machetes, and started juggling them—first three, then four, and finally seven at one time—overhand, underhand, behind the back; putting on a dazzling show and amazing the officer. Just then, another car passed by. Its driver, beer in hand, did a double take, and said, "Oh my goodness. I have got to give up drinking! Look at the tests they're giving now for sobriety!"

But many temptations are unavoidable, like other people's annoying habits, opportunities to overeat, enticements to overspend money, or lures to neglect God-given responsibilities in how we use our time. Our faith when dealing with daily temptations is to be twofold: 1) We trust **Jesus'** indwelling Holy Spirit can free us from the power our old, sinful nature had over us and 2) from the power Satan once had over us. **James 4:7** (NIV) says when we submit ourselves to God's authority as Christians, Satan comes under our authority: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Isn't that a nice switch: Instead of us being fearful of what Satan might do to us, he's fearful of what we might do to him.

Augustine (A. D. 354-430) became the greatest Christian teacher in the first 1,000 years after the Apostles. But he struggled long and hard with sexual temptation even as a Christian. He'd lived unwed with a number of women for 15 years, prior to his conversion at age 32. **Romans 13:12-14** (NLT) helped him realize **Jesus** would powerfully support Augustine's efforts to avoid this temptation if he would rely upon the power of **Jesus'** indwelling Spirit to resist it: "The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living.<sup>13</sup> Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see. Don't participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy.<sup>14</sup> Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires." These verses encouraged Augustine to say to himself, when tempted to plunge back into his old sensual life, "You fool. Do you not know that you are carrying God around with you?" There's a legend of Augustine being confronted one night on the street by a former mistress. He turned and walked in the opposite direction. Surprised, the woman cried out, "Augustine, it is I." Augustine called back to her, "Yes, but it is not I."

### **C. (Show) FIDELITY (to the Lord) ALL YOU CAN**

"Fidelity" is "loyalty to promises, to duty, and to people." It's the quality of one who "never betrays a trust." Temptations and trials have a way of allowing us to demonstrate, in effect, if our commitments and loves are what we say they are. **Proverbs 20:6** (Good News) makes this very point: "Everyone talks about how loyal and faithful he is, but just try to find someone who really is!" If our loyalty to the Lord is put to the test by our prayers being denied or delayed about things very dear to us, if doors of opportunity close we don't want to close, if we experience a health crisis, if loved ones are suddenly taken from us by death, if circumstances force us to live where we don't want to live or to do work we don't want to do, or if it seems our fondest dreams will never come true (among many other discouraging events we could name), God wants us to be loyal to Him, to not lose faith in His love and care for us, despite suggestions of others and despite all appearances to the contrary. My sister was once accused by other family members of mishandling our parents' finances, after my Dad had given her power of attorney to care for them in his last years. Facts and figures supposedly proved her guilt. I told the accusing relatives their facts and figures were wrong. I knew my sister too well. I knew her fidelity to the Lord and to our parents would never allow her to be guilty as charged. I stood up for her. I never doubted her. A year later, the true culprit was found and my sister was proven innocent! Do we "misestimate" the Lord by judging Him unfairly based upon circumstantial evidence, or do we demonstrate the fidelity toward Him He deserves?

## CONCLUSION

About 15 years ago, Patti, a young Sunday School teacher, addressed her church on a Sunday night. Everyone expected she'd give thanks for her fine husband and the recent healthy birth of their first child. Instead, she announced she'd been crying her heart out on the floor of a New Jersey apartment exactly four years earlier. She'd been saved while in the drug scene. The lure of her old friends and old habits kept her enslaved. She faithfully attended church, worked with the youth group, and witnessed to others about **Jesus**. But she also smoked marijuana daily and stayed in a relationship with a man in another apartment. Then she became pregnant. This threatened to expose the hypocrisy of her double life to all the world.

The boyfriend insisted upon an abortion. Her sister insisted upon an abortion. Her staunch Catholic parents, to whom she turned for support to have the baby, said she deserved having her life ruined if she did not have an abortion. She wanted to have an abortion to keep the evidence of her ungodliness from her church. But one night she told herself she either "believed in Christ" or she didn't. Despite the way she'd been living, she knew the Lord was real and it was time for her to choose to live fully as a Christian. She pledged full fidelity "to the God of the Bible, not the God I had made up in my head."

This did not change her immediate circumstances. She remained, in her words, "pregnant, alone, deserted by family, and rejected by the one I had loved." Yet because she responded faithfully to the Lord rather than fatefully (which would have also been fateful for her child), she gained her first taste of the life-transforming "peace with God" she'd sought for all her life. When she rejected the temptation of the "easy way out" of the despair that seemed certain to ruin her life (which Satan wants us to believe is "the only way out"), God gave her the "true way out" of her struggles: living in His embrace. He provided an obstetrician who refused to charge for her prenatal care and delivery. Her church embraced her with loving support to escape her old friends and old habits. Sarah, her healthy baby daughter, was soon placed with a loving, childless Christian couple. Patti's Christian character attracted a godly man who pledged love to her in a Christ-centered marriage, from which a new baby was born. Every time we step away from God's will, regardless of how tempting circumstances may make this choice seem the most appealing, we are stepping away from the peace and satisfying happiness only God can give us.