

How to face trials and temptations and the blessing of endurance

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. (James 1:12–18).

James, our Lord's brother, is interested in believers' spiritual health, and this is apparent from the first eleven verses of chapter one. There the writer encourages his readers to count it all joy when they fall into various trials because such trials result in perseverance (verses 2–4). He counsels them to seek wisdom from God through prayer, and stresses the necessity of resolute faith in God (verses 6–8). Next, he instructs them about the perspective both poor and rich should adopt towards life (verses 9–11). But in verse 12, James returns to the earlier theme of trials: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation [trial]; for when he has been



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tested, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him." James says the blessed man is the one who endures, not the one who escapes trial. Note that the Greek term *peirasmos* rendered "trial" does double-duty for both "testing" and "temptation." The distinction between them is often cast in this fashion: when a trial is an inner inducement to sin, it is properly described as temptation, but when it is sent from God to strengthen faith, it is described as testing. Usually the context will determine which of the two terms is appropriate.

Two points arise from James' beatitude: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation..." First, trials are inevitable. Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upwards (Job 5:7). Trials are non-discriminatory; they may vary in kind, frequency, and intensity, but no believer is exempted. A physical illness, financial loss, or the death of a loved one has the potential to test our faith in God. Therefore, given the inevitability of trials, we do well to prepare for them. Second, God rewards those who endure trials. James states that such persons will receive a crown of life. This is what it means to be blessed. The crown of life stands for the reward God will give the righteous. Whatever image "crown" (*stephanos*) may conjure up, James is not pointing to the earthly, gold-encrusted crowns of monarchs or the garland worn by athletes after victory. The apostle Paul depicts the crown of life as the incorruptible crown: "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown" (1 Corinthians 9:25). As he contemplates his imminent departure, Paul again makes reference to this future crown: "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy

4:8). James' crown of life and Paul's incorruptible and righteous crown are one and the same.

According to James, the person who successfully bears up under trial will be crowned with eternal life. Correctly interpreted, James' statement offers no support for the erroneous view that eternal life can be earned. It is better to see James as alluding to Jesus' own words: "But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). Eternal life is always a reward of grace. Although Christians are called to persevere, perseverance is always by divine power. We are kept by divine power, not our own. Still, it is truly stupendous to think that God provides both the motivation and power to endure, and at the same time, graces those who persevere with the gift of life.

Now, someone could argue that by using eternal life as an incentive for perseverance, James encourages Christians to live self-centered lives. To put it crassly, does James counsel, "look out for yourself. Persevere because of what you will get"? I do not think so. The motives for enduring cannot be reduced to the single issue of attaining eternal life, however desirable this may be. Believers, for example, are commanded to do everything—including enduring—to glorify God. Furthermore, the reward of eternal life is nothing more than eternal fellowship with God. He desires that His people should be with Him forever, so it is only fitting that they too should desire the same thing.

Having said this, it is evident that God offers His children incentives to be faithful. In the book of Deuteronomy, for instance, the Lord placed before Israel blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Closer to home, Paul announced to believers in Philippi: "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). He considered the upward call of God as an inestimable prize to gain. Even our Lord Jesus was motivated by the prospect of heaven: "...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

So God has placed before those who love Him the crown of life as an incentive to persevere. It appears that God wishes those facing trials to have the comfort of knowing

that whatever is borne patiently and graciously in His name, will receive a great reward. No trial endured, no sacrifice rendered, not even something as commonplace as offering a cup of cold water to one of God's children will escape His approbation. Because of His unalterable Word and His unchanging character, this reward is certain.

Have you ever felt like quitting the race? Are the trials of life unbearable? Perhaps your present experience is one of fears within and fightings without; yet you do not walk alone. Christ has trodden this trial-strewn path, and He walks with you even now. You have accompanying you the same Rock of provision and protection which followed Israel in their journey from Egypt to Canaan. Why not draw solace from His comforting words to the Church of Smyrna? "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but

you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:9-10).

In verse 13 James offers an important qualification:

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." Every testing carries with it a temptation. James appreciates how easy it is for those being tested to believe that God is treating them unfairly, and to blame Him for their failures. It is true; God tries His people—He tried Abraham when He asked him to sacrifice Isaac, and He used pagan nations in Canaan to try Israel—but only to manifest and strengthen their faith. He never directly solicits anyone to sin. All too often, we, like our forefather Adam, are swift to shift blame. When the Lord came inquiring after Adam, his first reaction was to blame the woman, who, in turn, blamed the serpent. James explains that God cannot be blamed for sin because He is not the source of temptation. His divine character will not permit Him to be tempted by evil or to tempt anyone with evil. God, in His holy and wise counsel, may permit sin, but He is not its author. Secondary agents bear direct

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responsibility for the sinful acts they perpetuate in keeping with their corrupt natures.

If this is the case, what is the source of temptation? James says the enemy is really within us: “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (verses 14–15). We cannot argue that because God is sovereign, He must be held responsible for our sin. That would be to impugn the stainless character of God with evil. Moreover, James will not even pin the blame on Satan here. Instead, he locates the source of human temptation within our hearts. Temptation arises when a person is dragged away and enticed by his own desires. Like a baited hook, temptation seduces, and when a person lunges for it, he is hooked and dragged

away. Since temptation is conceived within us, we are to guard our heart with all diligence. The first skirmish in the battle against temptation is crucial. At the first temptation to sin our immediate response must be an unqualified “no.” If we spend time dallying and debating, we have already lost the battle, whether we are aware of it or not. If you do not say “no” at the first solicitation of temptation, you have already surrendered. Learn

to say “no” and to say it repeatedly. Be jealous about your walk with God and take great care to maintain it. Let us become better acquainted with ourselves and post a sentinel over our hearts so that sin will not find a breeding ground within us. Here is a prayer worth considering: “Lord I am tempted by many things, but let none of them master me.”


James continues: “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (verses 16–18). Although the Father of lights does not send temptation, we are not to construe that He sends us nothing. He continually bestows every good and perfect gift upon us. The designation “Father of lights” is debated. It could mean the Father of the heavenly luminaries, emphasizing that our faithful Creator provides for us. This is a likely interpretation,

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since Scripture teaches that God sends blessings upon the just and the unjust. I think, though, that James is getting at something else. It is more probable that James is not using the title “Father of lights” to mean “Creator.” After all, God’s relationship with His children transcends the idea that He is their Creator. “Father of lights,” therefore, suggests that God is the source and embodiment of purity and wisdom. It is as such that He sends good, adequate, and timely gifts to His children.

What is more, James reminds his readers that the Giver of every good gift is not afflicted by fickleness. In Him “there is no variation or shadow of turning.” He remains forever faithful. And because He is the faithful provider, believers are assured that He will supply everything necessary for them to persevere, love and serve Him.

But how can they prove that God is the Giver of every good gift? James responds, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth” (verse 18). The phrase “brought us forth” means He regenerated. This new life became theirs when the Spirit worked effectively so that they received the truth of the gospel. As a result of God’s gift of regeneration, these believers have become the firstfruits, i.e., the first part of a large harvest of Christians.

By giving believers the unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ and the resulting gift of regeneration, God provides irrefutable evidence that He is their benefactor. For this reason, the Father of lights and the Giver of every good gift should be trusted in times of trial and temptation. All that is needed for life and godliness, He has graciously provided. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. And having done all, stand. You have a faithful and generous Father, who will never abandon you. He has not failed you once during your sojourn with Him; He is not about to fail you now. He has given you His greatest gift, Jesus Christ, to assure you of His readiness to give you everything you need for physical and spiritual health. So trust in the Lord with all your heart; wait for Him, who willingly and joyfully showers you with every good and perfect gift. 

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