

13: ESCAPING THE HIDDEN TRAP OF TEMPTATION

"THE TRAP"

JAMES 1:13-15

This Week's Core Competency

Self-Control – I have the power, through Christ, to control myself. Titus 2:11-13 *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

When I think of self-control, two modern slogans come to mind: "Just do it" and "Just say no." The first one originated with Nike. According to Nike company lore, one of the most famous and easily recognized slogans in advertising history was coined at a 1988 meeting of Nike's ad agency, Wieden and Kennedy, and a group of Nike employees. Dan Wieden, speaking admiringly of Nike's can-do attitude, reportedly said, "You Nike guys, you just do it." The rest, as they say, is history. The campaign targeted Americans regardless of age, gender or physical fitness level to encourage their involvement in some kind of athletic activity or another, obviously so they would purchase Nike stuff. It didn't take long before everyone, jocks and couch potatoes alike, was wearing the company's fitness gear if for no other reason than just to make a fashion statement.

The second one originated with Nancy Reagan.

Just say no.

– Nancy Reagan

"Just say no" was an advertising campaign, part of the U.S. "War on Drugs" during the 1980s and early 1990s, to discourage children from using illegal drugs by offering various ways of saying "no" to peer pressure. Eventually, it was used to "Just say no" to violence and to premarital sex. The slogan was created and championed by the First Lady during her husband's presidency. Like "Just do it," the slogan was coined somewhat by accident.

Apparently the Mrs. Reagan used it for the first time when she was visiting Longfellow Elementary School in Oakland, California in 1982. When she was asked by a schoolgirl what to do if offered drugs, the First Lady responded, "Just say no."

I like these slogans because they speak to the two sides of self-control. On the *positive* side, "Just do it," and on the *negative*, "Just say no." The Bible is replete with examples of characters that *just did* the one or the other—so many in fact that it's hard to pick one or two examples. Take David. When he was told that he was not able to go out against the Philistine because he was just a boy, he replied, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1Sa 17:37), and then he just did it. He courageously rid Israel of public enemy number one.

And what about the "three Hebrew children" who refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's gods? "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?" the king asked, and then warned, "Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute,

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zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (Da 3:14-15). To whom the three replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not—here comes the "Just say no" part—"we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (vv. 16-18). Self-control—there's no trick to it. The Holy Spirit will enable you to "Just do it," or "Just say no."

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

James 1:13-15

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Cf., another translation of vv. 12-15

12 Happy are those who remain faithful under trials, because when they succeed in passing such a test, they will receive as their reward the life which God has promised to those who love him. 13 If we are tempted by such trials, we must not say, "This temptation comes from God." For God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But we are tempted when we are drawn away and trapped by our own evil desires. 15 Then our evil desires conceive and give birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (GNT)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "tempt /ed / ing" in vv. 13-14.
- * Box "for" indicating *reason* in v. 13.
- * Bracket "by evil" in v. 13.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 14.
- * Circle "evil desire" in v. 14.
- * Underline "dragged away" and "enticed" in v. 14.
- * Box "then" indicating *logical sequence* in v. 15.
- * Bracket "has conceived" and "gives birth" in v. 15.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Many English translations join verse 12 to verses 13-15 to form a paragraph. Why would they do this? (See note on paragraph division.)
2. What's the difference between being *tested* and being *tempted*?
3. "No one should say, 'God is tempting me.'" Why not?
4. Explain the *contrast* in verse 14.
5. In verse 14, "evil desire" is literally "desire." How do we know James has "evil desire" in mind?
6. And "desire" is *singular* (cf., v. 15) not plural: "evil desire" not "evil desires." What difference does it make?
7. In verse 15 "dragged away and enticed" might be translated "lured out and baited." Describe the imagery James is using.
8. He uses different imagery in verse 15. Identify it and describe its explicit *progression*.
9. **Discussion:** One commentator suggests that Proverbs 5 and 7 may lie behind the imagery of verse 15. Read Proverbs 5 and talk about any elements it has in common with verse 15.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

James was written to Jewish Christians from Jerusalem who were scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch following the persecution that broke out after Stephen's death (see Ac 8:1-8). They faced all sorts of trials because they were Christians and needed to know how to respond to the circumstances that tested their faith. The first thing our Lord's brother told them was to treat their unpleasant situations as an occasion for joy, not sorrow, because the trials they faced, rightly responded to, would produce perseverance, and perseverance would in turn ultimately produce maturity. And if they didn't know how to respond to their trials, all they had to do was ask God for wisdom, and he would give it to them graciously without finding fault with them for asking. But they had to believe and not doubt either God's willingness or his wisdom. Regardless of their humble circumstances, brothers in such predicaments were to rejoice in their identity and hope in Christ (1:2-11).

Verse 12 serves as a *hinge* between the previous section (vv. 2-11) and the following section (vv. 13-18). While most English translations attach it to the following paragraph rather than the previous one, the NIV treats it like a stand-alone *transitional* paragraph. It contains James's own beatitude. He tells his readers, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial." Concerning what our Lord's brother has in mind, one commentator writes: "As in v. 2, 'trial' refers to any difficulty in life that may threaten our faithfulness to Christ: physical illness, financial reversal, the death of a loved one. James's wording suggests that he is not thinking of any particular trial, but of the nature or essence of 'trial'" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC, 70). The one who perseveres through such trials will be rewarded with "the crown of life." This "crown" is not likely the gem studded gold one that we probably think of first when we hear the word but the laurel wreath given to the victors in athletic games that people in the Greco-Roman world would have thought of first. Those who persevere are not rewarded *with* life, i.e., they are not given eternal life for persevering. Rather, they are rewarded *for* life, i.e., they are

given an unspecified reward for persevering. Paul uses the same word in 1 Corinthians 9:25: "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever" (cf., "victor's crown" in 2Ti 2:5).

In the following paragraph James issues a warning (1:12-15). He tells his readers, should they try to escape their trials by doing something wrong, that they cannot justify themselves by accusing God of tempting them. One commentator's translation of verse 13 clarifies its connection to verse 12. Instead of the NIV's hard break, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me,'" this writer suggests the transition, "In time of trial no one should remark, 'God is tempting me'" (Ralph P. Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 48, *James*, 33). After all, no one can get God to do what is evil because he is impervious to evil. Unlike us, he never has to talk himself out of doing evil nor talk himself into doing good. Neither does God try to get anyone to do evil. To suggest that he does runs headlong into the *impossibility* that God is somehow okay with evil, or even worse, delights in it.

According to James, people entertain evil because they are led astray by their own evil desire, not God. Metaphorically speaking, their desire "lures" them and "baits" them; desire and desire alone beckons them to sin. According to one commentator, "The point of emphasis here is to fasten moral responsibility on the individual" (36). When a person takes the bait, changing metaphors, James says, "desire has conceived" (v. 15). There is a progression to the whole ugly affair. "First, temptation comes (v. 14), then desire like a human mother, conceives and 'gives birth to sin . . . Then sin, the child of evil desire, develops till it 'is full-grown' and ready to produce offspring. When it conceives, it 'gives birth to death'" (Donald W. Burdick, "James," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12:172). Sin, then, is the progeny of the union of "desire" and human willingness, which makes self-control the contraception.

The Message of the Passage

*When you're spiritually tested and you're tempted to sin,
don't blame God and don't give in to evil desire,
because sin full-grown ends in death.*

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about how God revealed himself to you . . .

–Write about how God wants you to change you . . .

–Write about how God wants to use you to change your world . . .

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 13 **paragraph division** "Verse 12 is the hinge between vv. 2-11 and vv. 13-18. Older commentators (and most English versions), noting the shift in subject that occurs between vv. 11 and 12 and the introduction in v. 12 of the 'test'/tempt' language that dominates the next several verses, attach the verse to vv. 13-15. But the trend in recent years is to attach v. 12 to vv. 2-11. This trend reflects the current literary approach to the Bible, with its interest in the various devices that ancient authors used to organize their material. One of these devices, *inclusio*, uses common words or ideas at both the beginning and the end of a discrete section of material. As the verbal resemblances we pointed out above reveal, vv. 2-4 and v. 12 appear to form just such an *inclusio*. But v. 12 has obvious connections with vv. 13-15 as well. The Greek word for 'test' in v. 12, *peirazo*, is the same word that is translated 'tempt' in vv. 13-14. Using this term as a link-word, therefore, James makes the transition from testing to temptation. God, James has said, promises a blessing to those who endure trials. Every trial, every external difficulty, carries with it a temptation, an inner enticement to sin. God may bring, or allow, trials; but he is not, James insists, the author of temptation (v. 13). Enticement to sin comes from our own sinful natures, not from God (vv. 13-14)" (Moo, 71-72). The NIV makes verse 12 a transition paragraph.

v. 13 **tempted** The NIV indicates that verse 13 is only and all about temptation. However, as one commentator writes: "No solid line should be drawn between v. 12 and v. 13, as if James drops the topic of testing to take up the issue of temptation. His concern, rather, is to help his readers resist the temptation that comes along with the trial. For every trial brings temptation. Financial difficulty can tempt us to question God's providence in our lives. The death of a loved one can tempt us to question God's love for us. The suffering of the righteous poor and the ease of the wicked rich can tempt us to question God's justice, or even his existence. Thus testing almost always includes temptation, and the temptation is itself a test" (72). One commentator's translation reflects the transition: "In time of trial [cf., "When tempted" (NIV)] no one should remark, God is tempting me" (Martin, 33). "The Greek noun *peirasmos* can refer either to an outward circumstance of trial or to a temptation to sin. The same is true of the verb form as well. Whereas the noun is used in vv. 2-3 of 'trials' and 'testing,' in vv. 13-15, where the verb occurs, the obvious reference is to temptation. That this is the meaning is indicated by the words 'evil' (v.13), 'evil desire' (v.14), and 'sin' (v. 15)" (Burdick, 172). The bottom line: God may test us, but temptation is of our own making.

v. 13 **by evil** Cf., 1Jn 1:5. "God is incapable of tempting others to evil, because He is Himself absolutely insusceptible to evil; i.e. our belief in God's own character, His perfect purity and holiness, makes it impossible for us to suppose that it is from Him that our temptations proceed; so far from himself tempting others to evil, which would imply a delight in evil, he is by his own nature incapable of being even solicited to evil" (Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James*, 2nd ed., 50-51).

v. 14 **evil desire** Lit., "desire" sing. (ESV, NRSV); cf., "desires" (NKJV, NET). The Greek word *epithumia* "is an ambivalent term in NT vocabulary. Sometimes it has good connotations (Luke 22:15; Rom 15:23; cf. Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:2) but more often it carries a pejorative sense of 'evil desire, lust, false ambition' (Rom 7:17-23; Gal 5:16-21; 1 Thess 4:5; Eph 2:3)" (Martin, 36). "The context here makes it clear that James uses it with its more typical NT sense: fleshly, illicit desire. The word often carries for us a sexual connotation (and it has this sense in the NT), but it usually has a broader meaning, including any human longing for what God has prohibited . . . Other Jewish writers used the word in a similar way; cf. Philo, in his tractate on the Decalogue (par. 153): 'For all the wars of Greeks and barbarians between themselves or against each other . . . are sprung from once source, desire, the desire for money or glory or pleasure. These it is that bring disaster to the human race'" (Moo, 74; cf., 1Pe 2:11; 1Jn 2:17).

v. 14 **dragged away, enticed** "These two verbs are taken from the sphere of fishing and hunting. Although 'dragged away' is a possible translation of *exelkomenos* (BAG, p. 273), when it is coupled with *deleazomenos* ('enticed'), it may better be rendered by 'drawn out.' Mayor lists a number of examples where the word describes the 'drawing of the fish out of its original retreat' (p. 51). James pictures man's 'evil desire,' first, as attracting his attention and persuading him to approach the forbidden thing and, second, as luring him by means of bait to yield to the temptation" (Burdick, 172).

v. 15 **conceived** "James shifts metaphors to describe the havoc that desire can wreak in the spiritual life. Aided by the fact that the underlying Greek word is feminine, James pictures desire as conceiving and giving birth to sin. And sin, once in existence, if it become full-grown, produces death" (Moo, 75). "The figure of wisdom in chaps. 1-9 [of Proverbs] and particularly the contrast with the loose woman in chaps. 5 and 7 may lie behind the imagery here: note that Pr. 7:22, 23 uses the picture of a snare and an arrow, most appropriate in terms of the words used in Jas 1:14" (Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, NICNT, 84).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

It's all around us! We can't avoid it! Temptation lurks each moment, luring our thoughts and hearts away from God. Sometimes temptation is easily identifiable, sometimes it's hard to recognize. Use the following scenarios to have a conversation with your child about temptation. (1) Jamie is attending a sleep over with several friends. At bedtime her friend chooses a scary movie to watch. Jamie knows her family's rules about watching scary movies and she also know God would not want her putting those things in her mind. But, she's worried about what her friends would think if she said something and, in a way, she wants to watch it. What should Jamie do? (2) If you read 10 books throughout the year at Jack's school, you get an award on Awards Day. It's close to the deadline and he has only read 7 books. Some of Jack's friends are listing books they haven't read to get the award. No one would know if he did. He could just list them on his reading form. What should Jack do?

Helping your kids think through various temptations and how they would respond will help them when they are tempted. Remind your children that if they will stop and pray **FIRST**, God will help them resist temptation.

What Does The Bible Say

Read: James 1:13-15

1. Does God tempt you?
2. What are we tempted by?
3. Is everyone tempted?

What Do You Think

Look at the phrase "his own evil desire" in verse 14. Temptation always attempts to turn our hearts away from God, but people are tempted by different things. List some ways you have been tempted to sin.

What R U Going To Do

Sit down with your family this week and read Genesis 2 - 3. This passage describes the temptation of Adam and Eve and the consequences for their sin. Re-enact this scene with your family and talk about how Adam and Eve must have felt after they gave into temptation.

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Self Control - Taking charge of myself with Jesus' help

Memory Verse

1Co 10:13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so you can stand up under it.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.