

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH

JAMES

RESISTING TEMPTATION

JAMES 1:13-18

04/30/2017



MAIN POINT

God never tempts us to sin, but gives us the power to resist temptation.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Discuss temptation and its reality in our world. Consider questions such as: Is being tempted a sin? Does everyone experience temptations to the same things and in the same ways? Explain your answers.

What are some of the most memorable stories of temptation in Scripture? (Think: Jesus in the wilderness, Job's trials, Joseph and Potiphar's wife) How do these stories make you feel about the temptations you face?

The temptation to sin has been present since the fall of man, when Eve gave in to Satan's temptation in the garden. However, some of James's readers were blaming God for the temptations they experienced. Perhaps temptations arose because of trials, and people accused God of causing the trials and thus the temptations. James stated emphatically that believers are responsible for any pulls to evil that their trials bring. Temptations to evil do not arise from God. No pull to evil can touch Him because He has no vulnerability. The morally perfect God who is, at heart, a loving Father does not use temptations to evil to test His people.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:13-15.

Why do you think people try to blame God for the temptations they face, as James's readers evidently were doing?

The "blame game" goes back to the beginning of creation. Read Genesis 3:9-13. Who is blaming who in this passage?

According to James in 1:13-15, who is the real culprit we are to blame for our sins?

Why are we tempted to sin? What is the chain of events that happen when we act on our temptations?

James placed the responsibility for temptations on the individual. Temptations arise from within the person but in themselves do not constitute sin. Entertaining temptation, however, can set in motion a tragic process. First, the person is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desires. Then, joining one's will with evil desire produces sin, and full-blown, unrepented sin leads to spiritual death.

Read Ephesians 6:13-18. According to these verses in Ephesians, what tools has God given us to fight the spiritual battle against evil and temptation?

What role does prayer play in accessing the armor of God? What role does the power of God play in our fight?

Now read Matthew 6:13, perhaps even from a variety of translations. In part of His model prayer, Jesus told His followers to pray that God would help them resist the temptation to sin. What does this prayer from Jesus tell us about the battle we face?

James makes it clear that in as much as God cannot be tempted, He does not tempt anyone. Jesus did not mean believers should pray, "Don't let us be tempted." Rather, believers should ask God not to abandon them to temptation that results in their succumbing to it. Followers of Jesus can expect spiritual attacks from Satan, our adversary. Jesus taught us to seek power over and protection from Satan that only God can give.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:16-18.

What do these verses tell us about God? How can these truths encourage us as we fight against temptation?

James cared about his readers and did not want them to be led astray—likely by the false notion that God was the source of temptation. The exact opposite is true: God is the source of every generous act and every perfect gift. God's spiritual, physical, and emotional provisions for believers are exactly what they need. James referred to God as the Father of lights—the heavenly bodies' Creator. God does not change. He remains constant. His intention for His creatures is always good.

What spiritual blessings does James draw attention to in this passage?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. What attributes of humanity do you see in this passage? What attributes of God do you see?

By what are believers saved (Eph. 2:8)? What is the evidence of the change God's power makes in our lives?

One of the results of God's gift of salvation in our lives is that we would produce good works (Eph. 2:10). God desires for the way we live our lives to be evidence of His grace, power, and love. What perspective does this passage give you on overcoming temptations?

When we give into the temptation to sin, how is our witness to the world impacted?

The greatest of all God's gifts is a new birth. He took the gracious initiative (by His own choice) to offer salvation to people. His purpose always has been to provide redemption. The message of truth is the gospel—the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. People who respond positively to the gospel become the firstfruits of God's

creatures. James saw Christians as consecrated to God and as the first part of a greater future harvest. We are wise when we recognize God is generous to us and when we give Him credit for all the good we enjoy. This calls for us to identify all we have received from God and to express gratitude to Him for these gifts.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What have you found helpful in dealing with temptation?

What are some specific ways you've seen God's power at work in your life when you've faced temptations? What role did prayer play in those situations?

Is there a redemptive purpose to temptation? How might God use temptation to help us grow in Christ?

Does all this talk about spiritual battle make you feel weary or motivated to fight? Is either of those feelings inappropriate? Explain your thoughts.

PRAY

Close with a prayer of thanks to God for the power He gives us to overcome the temptations we face.

COMMENTARY

JAMES 1:13-18

Outward trials frequently provide an occasion for the development of sinful attitudes within. When you don't understand these trials, it is easy to revolt against God. Who is responsible when these trials appear? May we blame God? The Bible teaches that God sends trials (Gen. 22:1; 2 Chr. 32:31). However, we must not blame him for the evil effects of the trials. God does not call us to disobedience by enticing us to evil (1:13–16), but he is the source of everything good (1:17–18). He allows trials to produce holiness and stamina in his people. We hold the blame for any evil effects of trials in our lives.

1:13–16. People sometimes complain, "God is tempting me." Two insights about God show that he is not responsible for evil. First, God cannot be tempted by evil. God has no weakness or tendency which temptation can exploit. God's holy character puts him out of reach of temptation. Evil has no appeal for God. Evil is repulsive to God. Second, God does not use evil to tempt anyone. True, God sometimes places us in situations in which we can compromise (Gen. 22:1). However, he does not do this with a view to encourage our sin but to build us up.

Verses 14–15 outline the beginnings of sin in the human heart. First, openness to temptation develops from weaknesses in the human heart. "Dragged away and enticed" comes from the language of fishing. The first word described the act of luring fish from their hiding places. The second word pictured the enticing of fish as with a juicy worm on a hook. Evil desire is the bait which hooks the human being. The Bible will not let us blame heredity, an evil environment, or wicked companions for sin. The blame rests squarely on the individual, on you and me.

Verse 15 uses the language of childbirth to trace the development of evil desire. A conception occurs when persons surrender their wills to lust. The conception produces a child named sin. When sin becomes full grown, it produces death.

Practically speaking, sin occurs whenever a person's mind approves the performance of a sinful act. Whenever the person repeatedly approves the same sin, the result is death. This is death in all its terror—a total disintegration of the personality, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It leads to a separation from God lasting for eternity. It all begins when an individual yields his will to evil. No one can blame God for this. I do it to myself.

The act of temptation itself is not sinful. Sin develops only when an individual assents to the deed and agrees that it is good or desirable. Our evil nature and disobedient wills provide an easy avenue along which temptation can stroll. Sin develops only when we invite temptation to leave the avenue and visit with us personally.

Verses 14 and 15 do not mention the role of Satan in temptation. The Bible pictures Satan as active in temptation (1 Pet. 5:8–9), but James was not presenting a complete analysis of all temptation. He only wanted to show that God was not the cause of sin. He laid the blame for sin upon human weakness and disobedience.

Verse 16 provides a solemn warning against being deceived by wrong thinking concerning the source of sin. We may apply the words either to what has immediately preceded (vv. 13–15) or the verses which follow (vv. 17–18). If we apply the words to the preceding statements, the warning is against excusing ourselves from responsibility for sin. If we apply the words to what follows, the warning is against a wrong view of God's character. Either interpretation provides truth.

Verses 2–12 urge us to endure the trials of life. Verses 13–16 urge us to resist temptations. We can ask God for the wisdom to know whether to endure the trial or to resist the temptation. God can supply both grace to endure and strength to resist. He uses our endurance and our resistance to give us spiritual maturity and growth in holiness and stamina.

1:17–18. Having learned God is not responsible for human sin, we now see that God is the source of all that is good. God shows his goodness in that he does not change (v. 17) and by giving the good gift of new life to believers (v. 18).

Every kind of good has its ultimate source in God. Gifts are perfect because they fully meet the needs of the recipients. "Gift" includes not only God's spiritual blessings, but also the many benefits which provide for the physical and emotional needs of human beings.

The last part of verse 17 makes three statements about God. The King James Version makes this clear, describing God as "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." First, as the Father of the heavenly lights God is the Creator of the stars and other heavenly bodies. Second, God does not change. This term from astronomy frequently refers to the change in light intensity from sun and moon. The sun gives full light at midday, dim light at dusk, and no light at all in the night. In stark contrast to the sun, God's character does not change. The light of his truth and holiness remains constant.

Third, God does not undergo any "shadow of turning." This term also comes from astronomy, describing moving heavenly bodies that produce constantly changing shadows on the earth. God's purposes do not have such a variation or shifting. The movements of the sun, moon, and clouds regularly cause changes in light and shadows throughout the day. God's character is always constant, true, unchanging, reliable, good, and faithful. What a God we have! As the hymn writer has said: "Change and decay in all around I see. O Thou who changest not, abide with me."

Verse 18 looks at the new birth God has given his people. God chose to give the new birth. The means of the new birth was the word of truth, a description of the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:13). The result of this new birth is that believers become a kind of firstfruits of all he created. The firstfruits represented that initial portion of the harvest offered to God before the rest of the crop was harvested. They were the pledge of a full crop to come (Lev. 23:9–11). These first-century Christians were a pledge of a vast harvest of saved people in the centuries to come.