

Enduring Temptation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *James 1:12–21, Ps. 119:11, Gen. 3:1–6, Titus 3:5–7, Rom. 13:12, Eph. 4:22.*

Memory Text: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (*James 1:12*).

We all have experienced it. We resolve not to give in to temptation, but in the heat of the battle, our resolve melts and—much to our own sense of shame and self-loathing—we fall into sin. Sometimes it seems that the more we focus on not sinning, the more powerless against temptation we feel, and the more hopeless our condition appears. We wonder if indeed we are saved at all. It's hard to imagine any serious Christian who hasn't wondered about his or her own salvation, especially after having just fallen into sin.

Fortunately, we can have victory over the temptations that so easily ensnare us. None of us, no matter how enveloped in sin, is hopeless, for our “Father of lights” (*James 1:17*) is greater than our propensity to evil, and only in Him and through His Word can we have victory.

That's the message from the verses we will study this week. Sure, temptations are real, sin is real, and the battle against self is very real. But God is real, too, and through Him we can more than overcome the temptations that brew inside us, just waiting to take us down.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 18.

The Root of Temptation

Read James 1:13, 14. Why is it important that God does not tempt anyone? Where does temptation originate, and how can this knowledge be helpful in our own struggle with sin?

James is emphatic. Not only is God not the author of evil, He is not the source of temptation either. Evil itself is the source of temptation. According to this passage, the problem lies within us, which is the main reason it's so hard to resist.

Thus, the battle against sin begins in the mind. As much as many might not want to hear it, the truth is that we choose to sin. No one can force us (*Rom. 6:16–18*). Sinful desires, inclinations, and propensities do constantly capture our attention. By using common hunting and fishing terms, James 1:14 describes these inward promptings. Our own desires lure and entice us, and when we give in to them, they finally hook and entrap us.

Read Ephesians 6:17, Psalm 119:11, and Luke 4:8. What common theme is seen in all, and how does that relate to the question of victory over temptation?

In the passages in James, he clearly separates temptation from sin. Being tempted from within is not sin. Even Jesus was tempted. The problem is not temptation itself but how we respond to it. Having a sinful nature is not, in and of itself, sin; however, allowing that sinful nature to control our thoughts and dictate our choices is. Thus, we have the promises, found in God's Word, that offer us the assurance of victory if we claim them for ourselves and cling to them in faith.

Dwell on the idea that sin is always our own choice. (After all, if it weren't our own choice, how could we be condemned for doing it?) What things can we do on a daily, practical level that could help to keep us from making the wrong choices?

When Lust Conceives

Read James 1:13–15 again. When does temptation become sin?

Several Greek words are used in this passage to describe how sin begins, and all of them are connected with giving birth. When a wrong desire is nurtured, sin is “conceived,” like a baby in the womb. “Sin, when it is completely grown, gives birth to death” (*James 1:15, author’s literal translation*).

The picture is paradoxical. The process that is supposed to give life results only in death (*compare Rom. 7:10–13*). Sin, like cancer, takes over and consumes its host. We all know this, for we have all been ruined by sin. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them.

Read Genesis 3:1–6. Eve’s experience vividly illustrates the conflict with sin. What steps led her into sin?

At its root, sin begins with distrusting God. Satan, using the same successful method by which he deceived a third of the angels (*Rev. 12:4,7–9*), raised doubts in Eve’s mind about God’s character (*Gen. 3:1–5*). Approaching the forbidden tree was not sin, but taking and eating the fruit was. Even so, wrong thoughts seem to have preceded her sinful act (*Gen. 3:6*). She adopted Satan’s suggestions as her own.

Sin always begins in the mind. Like Eve, we may think about the supposed “benefits” of wrongdoing. Then our imagination and feelings begin to take over. Soon we seize the bait and fall into sin.

Often we wonder how it could happen. The answer is easy: we let it happen. Nobody forced us into sin.

“By earnest prayer and living faith we can resist the assaults of Satan, and keep our hearts unspotted from pollution.

“The strongest temptation is no excuse for sin. However great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul, transgression is our own act. It is not in the power of earth or hell to compel any one to sin. The will must consent, the heart must yield, or passion cannot overbear reason, nor iniquity triumph over righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, “Christian Privileges and Duties,” *Signs of the Times*[®], October 4, 1883.

Every Good and Perfect Gift

“Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (*James 1:16, 17*).

Although sin gives birth to death, God is the Source of life. He is the “Father of lights” (*James 1:17*), a reference to the Creation (*Gen. 1:14–18*). God gives us birth to a new life, which is the greatest gift we can get “from above” (*compare James 1:17 with John 3:3*).

Like Paul, who speaks of salvation as the result of God’s grace (*Rom. 3:23, 24; Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9*), *James 1:17* calls salvation a “gift.” More so, in the next verse, James makes it clear that salvation, this new birth, is the result of God’s purpose and will for us: “In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth” (*James 1:18, NRSV*). That is, God wants us to be saved. It was His will, from even before we existed, that we should have salvation and a new life in Him now and for all eternity.

How does James’s depiction compare with the description by Paul and Peter of the new birth? See *Titus 3:5–7, 1 Pet. 1:23*.

Jesus, Paul, Peter, and James all connect salvation with the new birth. God’s whole purpose in the plan of redemption is to reconnect sin-battered and broken human beings with heaven. The rift was so big and so wide that nothing humans could do could have ever bridged it. Only God’s Word in human form, Jesus, could reconnect heaven to earth. The inspired Word (*2 Tim. 3:16*) is uniquely able to breathe spiritual life into those whose hearts are open to receive the gift.

In short, our “Father of lights” so loves us that, even as underserving as we are, He gives us “every good gift and every perfect gift” (*James 1:17, NKJV*), the best of all gifts being Jesus and the new birth that He offers.

What are the gifts you’ve been given “from above”? Why is it so important to dwell on them? What happens when we don’t?

Slow to Speak

Read James 1:19, 20. What important point is James making there?

God's Word is powerful. But so are human words. How often have we spoken words that later we wish we could take back? Unfortunately, just being aware of how hurtful wrong words can be, and how destructive anger is, does little to help us get ourselves under control. Left to our own devices, we can never really change. That is why we need to listen more to God and let Him work in us.

“When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 58.

By contrast, problems arise when we stop listening to God and to each other. Whether in the home, at work, or in the church, arguments ensue when listening stops. When that happens, talking begins to accelerate and anger builds. This slippery slope of sinful communication, like the uncontrolled inward desires of James 1:14, 15, can never produce the righteousness of God.

That is why James juxtaposes God's righteousness with human wrath. As long as we rely on what bubbles up naturally from our sinful nature, the creative power of God's Word is blocked, and our own unhelpful or even hurtful words arise instead. No wonder that right after talking about all that our “Father of lights” does for us by the gift of a new life, James tells us to be careful with what we say.

What do the following passages teach about words? *Prov. 15:1, Isa. 50:4, Eph. 4:29, 5:4, Col. 4:6.*

Think about the last time someone devastated you with his or her words. The depth of emotion you felt should show you just how powerful words can be, either for good or bad. What can you do to help keep your words under control? Why is it so important to think before you speak?

Saved by Receiving

Read James 1:21. What role does the “word” have in what James is saying?

This verse concludes all that has been said so far about faith and salvation. It is an appeal to put away all impurity and separate ourselves from wickedness. The command “put away” (*RSV*) is used seven out of nine times in the New Testament for detaching oneself from the evil habits that have no place in a life submitted to Christ (*Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22, 25; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:1*). It can also refer to the taking off of clothing (*Acts 7:58*), so that the taking off of our “filthy rags” of sin (*compare Isa. 64:6*) may also be implied. Indeed, the word *filthiness* (*RSV*) occurs in James for the “filthy clothes” of the poor in contrast to the sparkling clean clothing of the rich (*James 2:2, NKJV*). Like Jesus, James decries the human tendency to be so concerned with outward appearance, because God is concerned above all with the condition of our hearts.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word *filthy* (*ryparos*) is used in only one passage: Zechariah 3:3, 4, where Joshua, the high priest, represents sinful Israel. God takes away the high priest’s filthy garments and clothes him with a clean robe, symbolizing Israel’s forgiveness and cleansing.

This scene is very different from the popular Christian image we sometimes see of Jesus putting a clean white robe over the sinner’s dingy, soiled garments. Who would do this in real life? Nobody puts clean clothes over dirty ones. Likewise in Zechariah, the filthy garments are removed before the clean robe is put on. This doesn’t mean that we must be without sin before we can be clothed in Christ’s righteousness. If that were true, who could be saved? It also doesn’t mean that we cannot be saved or return to Jesus if we fall back into sin. Instead, it means that we must completely surrender to Him, choosing to die daily to our old sinful ways, and allow Him to create us into His image. Christ’s perfect robe of righteousness will then cover us.

Read again James 1:21. How deeply are you seeking to apply what it says here to your life? What does it mean to “engraft” the Word into your heart, and how can you do it?

Further Study: Read about sin and the power to change in Ellen G. White, “Repentance,” *Steps to Christ*, pp. 23–36, and summarize the key points.

“The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

“If you have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ, tell of His goodness. Do every duty that presents itself. Carry the burden of souls upon your heart, and by every means in your power seek to save the lost. As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. The graces of the Spirit will ripen in your character. Your faith will increase, your convictions deepen, your love be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 67, 68.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think more about the reality of the power of words. Why are they so powerful? How can language be easily manipulated? How often is *how* we say or write something just as important, or even more important, than *what* we say or write?
- 2 Of all the gifts that you have been given “from above,” which is the greatest one, and why?
- 3 Read over James 1:12–21. What is the essential message there? What hope and promises are there for us?
- 4 Lust brings forth sin, and sin brings forth death. Why, with such high stakes before us, do we not have the victories that should be ours? What are the ways in which we rationalize sin, and why is that always a dangerous mind game to play?
- 5 Read the last Ellen G. White statement found above. What crucial counsel is found there, especially for those who might be wavering in faith?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *James 1:21, 22*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: (1) Understand that no one is so evil that he or she is hopeless in God’s eyes. (2) Discern how God uses the “sword” of His Word (*Eph. 6:17*) to provide a “way of escape” (*1 Cor. 10:13, NKJV*) from sin.

Feel: Appreciate and nurture a love for God and His Word.

Do: Choose to apply God’s Word to his or her own life by reading, memorizing, and using Scripture to thwart temptation.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Understanding the Hope and Power Jesus Offers

A What are the differences between being controlled by sin and being controlled by Christ and His righteousness?

B What is the “sword of the Spirit,” and how can we use it most effectively in our battle against temptation?

II. Feel: Appreciate and Nurture Love for God’s Word

A Why is it, for many, easier to spend an hour watching television or surfing the Internet than it is to spend an hour reading the Bible?

B How can we foster a love for God’s Word in our own hearts and in others?

III. Do: Sharpening the Sword of the Spirit

A Given that temptations often assail us quickly and unexpectedly, how can we instantly be ready to resist them effectively?

B What benefits come from spending quality time with God and His Word each day?

► **Summary:** God provides everything that we need to step away from the slavery of sin. The most powerful tool He gives us is the “sword of the Spirit,” which is His Word. He urges us to keep that sword sharp and ready by hiding His Word in our hearts so that we might not sin against Him (*Ps. 119:11*).

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *James 1:21, 22*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: No one is so evil that he or she is hopeless. Our “Father of lights” is greater than our propensity to evil, and through Him and His implanted Word, we can have victory.

Just for Teachers: Many people in this world feel hopeless, powerless, and like pawns in the cruel game of life. Even Christians can despair when they feel their spiritual life stagnating and when they experience defeat as waves of temptation wash over them. The good news is that our God does not leave us as victims to drown in a sea of sin. He has provided lifeboats for all who are willing to use them. In this lesson, seek to connect your class with the power of God’s promises in their everyday lives. Encourage students to implant those promises in their hearts in order to gain the victory over the temptations that assail them.

Opening Activity/Discussion: A nickel per verse—that was the deal young Barry’s mother made with him and his brother. For every Bible verse memorized, they were five cents closer to their goal of buying a big Snickers candy bar or Sugar Babies, a soft, chewy milk caramel candy. In order to reach their goals faster, the boys combed through their Bibles, looking for the shortest verses to memorize! But one day, memorizing Scripture became more than just a way to buy candy.

“ ‘When I was 13,’ ” remembers Barry, “ ‘I memorized Proverbs 1:10, “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” That very day, two young men from my neighborhood asked me to “help them get back at someone.” I felt the power of Proverbs 1:10 reverberating in the corners of my spirit, and on the strength of that verse, I refused to go with them.

“ ‘They didn’t just get back at someone, they murdered someone,’ ” Barry said. “ ‘Their sad saga was played out on the evening news and the judicial conclusion was life in prison. One of the gentlemen, in fact the gentleman who asked me to go along said, “But, I didn’t do it, the other guy did it.” But it didn’t make any difference; they both received the penalty of life in prison. This means that had I gone along with them, even if I had stood there quoting Scripture, I would have received the same penalty’ ” (Barry Black, quoted by Arcadia Kust, “Senate Chaplain Barry Black Speaks at Christ Church of Oak Brook,” *Doings Weekly*, July 23, 2012, <http://burridge.suntimes>

.com/news/13950434-418/senate-chaplain-barry-black-speaks-at-christ-church-of-oak-brook.html).

Because of the power of that verse and of his determination to claim and follow it, rather than living out his life behind bars, Dr. Barry Black serves as the sixty-second chaplain of the U.S. Senate.

Consider This: Imagine what might have happened if Barry Black had not memorized Scripture or had ignored it the day he was invited to “help get back” at someone. How different would his life have been? What have you read in your Bible that helped you the very day you read (or memorized) it?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson focuses on the power of sin within us and how to resist it.

Bible Commentary

I. The Key to Winning Over Sinning (*Review James 1:13–16 with your class.*)

We read in James 1:14, 15 how evil desires lead to temptation, how cherishing these desires leads to sin, and ultimately, how continued sinning leads to death. The carnal heart wants to find a way to keep sinning and still be saved. But God says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it!” (*Jer. 17:9, NKJV*), and “Do not be deceived” (*James 1:16, NKJV*). Fortunately, James follows up this gloomy picture with good news, in verses 17, 18, which describes the best gift of all—being born again through “the word of truth.” As with the first creation (*Ps. 33:6, 9*), the new birth takes place by means of God’s Word (*compare Rom. 10:17, 2 Cor. 4:6*). The Inspired Word (literally, “God-breathed” word in 2 Timothy 3:16) is uniquely able to breathe spiritual life into those whose hearts are open to receive the gift. The Bible is God’s revealed truth. Jesus said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (*John 17:17*). Satan wants to short-circuit our connection with heaven by leading us to doubt the Bible and by complicating its teachings, just as he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden (*see Gen. 3:1–5*).

Consider This: Ask the students to think about their own experience and then

ask, “When have you felt weak and when have you felt strong in fighting temptation, and what makes the difference?”

■ *Realistically, how much time do you spend studying God’s Word and how much time watching TV or surfing the Web? How does the relative balance impact your experience as described in the previous question?*

Read *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5, pages 467–476. “Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own. . . . No sin can be tolerated in those who shall walk with Christ in white. The filthy garments are to be removed, and Christ’s robe of righteousness is to be placed upon us. By repentance and faith we are enabled to render obedience to all the commandments of God, and are found without blame before Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 472.

Questions for Discussion:

❶ What is the robe of Christ’s righteousness in the above quotation?

❷ In light of these comments and such passages as Matthew 24:14, how important is our *life witness* in the finishing of the gospel work?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: On our own we are utterly helpless against sin and the temptations that come to us every day. But, fortunately, we are not alone in this struggle, and God has equipped us for the battle, arming us with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (*Eph. 6:17*). Emphasize to the class the importance of applying this lesson to their own lives.

Activity: Most often, temptation does not come to us as a written invitation; it often shows up without warning, hardly giving us time to think before we respond to it. That’s why memorizing Scripture can be such a powerful tool, putting an answer on the tip of our tongue to quickly send Satan’s temptations away. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You,” wrote the psalmist in Psalm 119:11, NKJV.

Some people memorize Scripture fairly easily; others find it difficult. Whether you find it easy or hard, try visiting Scripture Typer at <http://scripturetyper.com>. Scripture Typer is a wonderful and fun way to memorize Bible texts of your choice. This free site provides a number of helps in memorizing Bible verses and also has links to memory groups—like-minded individuals from around the globe who are memorizing Scripture together. In addition to the features on its Web site, Scripture Typer also offers a free app that is available for Android and iPhone users.

If you do not have access to a computer or other electronic device or if you do not have Internet access, you can still use some of the same principles used by Scripture Typer to help you memorize. Write out the verse you want to memorize, either on a flash card or paper. The more often you write out the verse, or say it aloud, the more quickly you will memorize it. Entire chapters and even books have been memorized in this way.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Here is an opportunity for the members of your class to show their creativity. The possibilities for this activity are nearly endless—ranging from using a computer with sophisticated graphics to handmade scrapbooks. It’s also an intergenerational activity that members can enjoy doing with younger or older members of the family. Encourage class members to not only make a book for themselves but another one to give as a gift.

Activity: Make a personal promise book, filled with the portions of Scripture that are especially meaningful and helpful to you in resisting temptation. Use your best creativity in making your book beautiful, using pictures or other illustrations. In addition to your own book, you may want to create a promise book for someone you know who is struggling and present the book to him or her as a special gift. This activity is one you may enjoy doing with another member of your family or with a group of friends. Whether you use a computer with graphics or a homemade scrapbook of promises, make it a special resource that you will enjoy looking at again and again.

Alternately, mark a Bible, highlighting or underlining your favorite promises of hope and empowerment. Keep it handy to strengthen your faith during temptation or give it as a gift of encouragement to someone going through a difficult time.

If the above resources are unavailable, try setting your favorite scriptures to music. Or learn scripture that has been set to song. Pray for an opportunity to share, through music or through recitation, your favorite texts with those with whom you come in contact.