

# Enduring Temptation



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## 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?

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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?

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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 assurances 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?**

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## When Lust Conceives

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

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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?

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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*<sup>®</sup>, 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*.

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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?**

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## Slow to Speak

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

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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.*

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**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?**

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## Saved by Receiving

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

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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* (*ryp-aros*) 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?

## Heidy's Hope: Part 2

JUAN CAICEDO SOLIS

The demons in Mirella struggled against the family members who took her to the Seventh-day Adventist church. During the struggle Mirella fainted. When the family tried to carry her limp body through the church door, they could feel a powerful force pushing them away. Inside the church the congregation prayed while deacons tried to pull the family into the church. Finally, they managed to enter the church. They laid Mirella on the floor in the pastor's office.

The pastor told Mirella's family, "I do not have any powers to fight against the devil and his spirits. But I can call on the One who has defeated sin and the devil, Christ Jesus our Lord." He urged the family to confess their sins and call on the power of God to overrule. Then the pastor knelt beside Mirella's still form and prayed. He invited the holy angels of heaven to join in the battle for her soul. Then with a strong voice he commanded, "With the angel host beside me, and with Christ already the victor, I command you, Satan, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to get out of her!"

Mirella screamed loudly and began to speak, but the pastor repeated the command, "In the name of the Lord, get out of her!" The girl became quiet and lay on the floor, still unconscious. When Mirella opened her eyes, she stood up and rushed into the arms of a family member, clinging to his neck in fear. Heidy placed her hand on Mirella's shoulder. "You are safe," Heidy said. "Christ has freed you from the claws of Satan!"

The girls rejoiced in their newfound peace and made preparations for baptism. But the day before their baptism, Mirella began speaking in a strange voice, saying, "I hate Pastor Juan! I hate him!" The evil spirit had returned to try one last time to control Mirella. Someone asked the spirit why it hated Pastor Juan, and the spirit answered, "Tomorrow he will force me to leave this body, and I have no place to go!" With increasing anger, the spirit said, "I will kill Heidy and Mirella before they are baptized!"

Then the spirit forced Mirella to grab a knife and try to cut her own wrists. Several people wrestled the knife away from Mirella while the others prayed. In the name of Jesus, the devil left her.

The next day at their baptism, Mirella testified that horrible monsters had held her so tightly that she could not break free. But when the people prayed in the name of Jesus, a stronger hand broke Satan's grip and set her free. It was the hand of Jesus, the only one more powerful than the demons.

"Never leave the safety of Jesus," Heidy told the congregation. "Jesus is the only One who can free you from the bonds of Satan."

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