

God's Word for you today: **BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO REMAINS STEADFAST UNDER TRIAL.**

In preparation for this sermon, the word that jumped out to me was temptation. Trial, temptation, and tempt are all over this lesson from James, so I did some research on that word root. The author comments about what the opposite of temptation is, "Complete submission to God's will even in incomprehensible suffering constitutes the essence of the obedience demanded." That's what it means to remain steadfast under trial. How has that been working for you?

Perhaps the first thing we need to unpack is the opposite statement. If the man is blessed who withstands trial, then I. Cursed is the man who departs in temptation. Let's say more about that, shall we?

Now I want to explain to you the four D's of temptation. It forms a progression—one leads to the next. The first D is desire. James tells us, "**each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.**" I'm not just talking about general desires, like you desire that your daughter gets better from being sick, or that you desire that COVID ends. I'm talking about sinful desires.

In almost every case in the New Testament, this word for desires is negative. It is translated elsewhere as passions, lusts, or coveting. It's when your sinful appetite starts craving something. The world around us teaches us that you should stop at nothing to earn that blessed life. And it all seems so attractive!

If you're mad at somebody, don't you have the right to spread lies and say offensive things to him or her? If your spouse isn't treating you right, get a divorce and upgrade to a newer model. If your boss isn't paying you enough, sneak some cash from the till. If the guy in your class is attractive, really your imagination is the only limit, right? If that guy ends up getting you pregnant, well, there's solutions for that, aren't there? If the governor does something that is within his authority to do, yet you don't like it, just ignore him because you didn't vote for him anyway. Who would dare stop you from living your best life now?

Our sinful desire tempts us because we want things that appear good. We see this play out in the Bible also. Eve saw that the fruit was desirable and took a bite—never mind the fact that God said don't eat it. David saw a beautiful woman bathing—never mind the fact she wasn't his wife. Peter saw that denying the guy on the cross was more desirable than joining him up there on Calvary—never mind the fact that Peter said he'd never forsake that guy on the cross.

Our first D is desire. Every sin starts with the eyes, then it moves onto the feet. James continues, "**Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin.**" Our next D is depart.

"Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." Dear Christian friend, God has

taken you from the domain of darkness and has placed you at His side. In His presence, your life becomes a Garden of Eden wherein He gives you good gifts. Even though some days it may seem there's trouble in paradise, overall, He's placed you somewhere good.

It's good when Christians pray and regularly receive Word and Sacrament—even in a pandemic. It's good when spouses love one another. It's good when parents love children. It's good when children honor and obey their parents. It's good when citizens obey laws and orders, and work for the common welfare of our community. It's good when students study. It's good when workers work and employers treat their workers well. Are you getting the picture? When these things go well, it's a peek at paradise.

But we leave this Eden every day when we give into temptation. God doesn't need to kick us out because our destructive desires drive us to depart from this divine domicile. We do it to ourselves. Temptation is not sitting in a neutral zone with an angel and a devil over your shoulder; temptation is contemplating leaving paradise because you saw a mirage in the desert.

We desire, then we depart, next our third D is deflect. Once we leave paradise, we realize the door locks behind us and we pound at the door and want to do anything to return. We even blame God. James writes, **“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.”**

A man told me a story about his little brother when they were growing up. He and little brother were playing baseball in the street and little brother hit a home run—right into the windshield of a brand-new car driving by. Little brother quickly ran into the house to tell his dad, “Can you believe the nerve of this driver? That man drove his windshield right into our baseball!”

We know we did wrong, but we never want to take the blame. Adam says to God, “The woman *you* gave me gave me the fruit.” Aaron says to Moses, “The people gave me the gold and the golden calf just popped out!” After we depart, we find ways to deflect the blame, even onto God Himself.

Desire, depart, deflect, and finally death. James writes, **“sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”** That story I heard about little brother and the baseball was at little brother's funeral. That is to say, every unchecked sinful desire ultimately leads us to death. Every funeral, memorial service, celebration of life, Christian homecoming celebration—the name doesn't matter, the end result is always the same, every one of these is a reminder that sin leads to death. Every funeral is for a sinner. I. Cursed is the man who departs in temptation.

So what hope is there for us? Let's circle back to our theme for today: James 1:12 **“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to**

those who love him.” Giving into temptation leads to death, but enduring trials and temptations leads to life. Let me put it a different way: II. Blessed is the Man who remained steadfast under trial.

And so it is that on the first Sunday of Lent we reflect year after year on Jesus’ fasting and temptation. Blessed is the Man who remained steadfast under trial. That man is Jesus. For forty days Jesus was tempted by Satan, yet He did not give into sin. The opposite of giving into temptation is remaining steadfast. “Complete submission to God’s will even in incomprehensible suffering constitutes the essence of the obedience demanded.” Does that not describe Jesus?

Desire, depart, deflect, and death. Jesus did not desire evil nor did He give into temptation, even once. He did not depart from the path the Father had set out for Him, even though He pleaded with the Father to take the cup from Him. We even see a contrast to Jesus’ faithfulness in the Garden of Gethsemane as the disciples fall into temptation by falling asleep while praying. Jesus said to Simon, **“Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”**

We gather for worship today with hope because we know Jesus’ spirit was willing and His flesh was strong. His flesh was strong to take on all that deflected blame when we try to worm our way out of our sins, when we try to justify our sinful actions, when our desires lead us down paths we regret.

When the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh advertise your best life now but fail to deliver, Jesus is there to take on the blame. He has taken on your sins of the heart as your sinful desires drive you away from paradise. He has taken on your sins of the eyes as mirages in the desert tempt you to believe that the Father of lights is holding back on a good and perfect gift. He has taken on your sins of the hands and feet as you strayed from the paradise the Father has laid out for you. He has taken on your sins of the mouth as you deflected blame onto others wrongfully for things that were your own fault.

Desire, depart, deflect, and death. His flesh was strong to take that deflected blame and forgive it. Your sins were deflected onto the cross so that Jesus could pay the price that you couldn’t afford. Your sins caused His death, not that He died because of His sins.

Jesus withstood the test, and on the third day Jesus received the crown of life from His Heavenly Father. He rose again, overcoming those trials and temptations for you. James writes, **“Of his own will [the Father] brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”** By faith in this brother Jesus who walks alongside us, the Father has made us into His children, so that Jesus’ crown of life becomes *our* crown of life.

At little brother's funeral we heard that little brother was a sinner. But more than that, we heard the good news that little brother had an older brother. That elder brother is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ became a brother because Jesus claimed that sinner. That little brother received the crown of life through trusting in his elder brother. Sin caused death, but faith in Jesus brought life. That is God's promise to us also this morning.

III. Blessed is the brother who keeps us steadfast under trial. Desire, depart, deflect, and death. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. This day Christ offers His strong flesh under bread to strengthen us in temptation. He offers us His blood under wine to forgive us for where we have done wrong. In this meal we find our desires align with His, and rather than departing in sin, He draws us to Himself.

This Lent, we can go forward with confidence, resisting temptation and trial knowing that the blessed man walks alongside us as our brother. He overcame temptation, so that we too can see past its shiny appearance and not desire it. May we always call upon Jesus our brother who resisted temptation and gives us the power to do the same.