Good morning Faith Church. This morning we continue our studies in the book of James. We have come to an important message in this book series. The first three messages of the series were about the trials of life, something we can all relate to. We learned God allows trials into our life to bring us to spiritual maturity, something 1 Peter describes as worth more than gold. While many of us can’t figure out why our life became so bumpy once we came to Jesus, James tells us it is because God loves us that he allows trials in our lives to mature us. Trials are God’s chosen instrument to bring us to spiritual maturity. God will not leave us in our spiritual diapers but will use trials to grow us up.

The title for the first portion of our James studies is “Trials and Temptations.” We studied trials, but we haven’t spoken a word about temptation. Today, that will change. Before we jump in, I want to teach you the relationship between trials and temptations. The Greek word used by James for “trials” is almost identical to the Greek word used in James for temptation. In fact, they are the same word in the Greek. One is in the noun form, the other is in the verb form.

What does this tell us? A trial is what I experience on the outside of my life, temptation to sin is what I experience on the inside while I am going through a trial. While not all temptations come from trials because temptation to sin can come from our own sinful hearts and it can come from the world’s system and values pressed into our life; James is talking here about a particular breed of
temptation. Temptation that happens in our heart when we go through trials in our life.

For example, if you are in a financial trial, the temptation to sin might be the overwhelming desire to keep the extra $20 the self check-out machine gave you by mistake at Wal-Mart. You may even want to justify it in your mind by calling it God's provision for your needs. Another temptation in a financial trial is to doubt God's goodness and love for us when we are in those times. Let me explain the relationship of these particular types of temptations to our trials another way.

If you are going through a trial, and as your pastor, I asked how I could pray for you, I am sure you would ask me to pray God would take away circumstances that brought the trial about. Doesn't that seem to be obvious? For example, if you are in a financial trial because you don't have a job, I am sure you would ask me to pray for a job because that would take the trial away.

If you are in a relational trial because you are single and want to be married, I am sure you would ask me to pray God would bring a wonderful Christ loving person into your life who could become your spouse.

If you are in a trial at work because your co-worker is completely irritating, I am sure you would ask me to pray they would act normal. According to James, that is not the most important thing I can pray for you. The great danger in a trial is not the wrong being done to me, but is is the wrong that could be done by me. Avoiding that is more important than anything. Let's look at our text and I will explain what that means.
James 1:13-18

These are some very important verses so rather than jam them all into one week, we are breaking them up into two weeks. We will only cover verse 13 and 14 this morning, but they go together as a unit.

Every trial offers one of two paths.

Earlier in James, we learned trials are tests allowed into our lives by God for the purpose of our spiritual maturity. We are to embrace our trials as allowed by the good hand of God. They are the anvil upon which God pounds the melt of our heart to shape us into the character of Christ. Persevering through a trial leads us on the path of spiritual maturity.

Trials ➔ Testing ➔ Steadfastness ➔ Completeness + Maturity

In this passage, James tells us not everyone will follow that path. There is another option. When we face a trial on the outside of our life, we will also face temptation on the inside of our life. If we give in to our temptations, it will lead us down a different path. A path that will not end in spiritual maturity, but sin and death.

Trials ➔ Temptation ➔ Sin ➔ Death

So when we face the trials of life picture two different paths in front of you. One leads to life, the other leads to death. Giving in to temptation will leads us on the path of destruction and death. which is not a pretty
Verses 13-15 warn us against following the path of sin and death, verses 16-18 encourage us to follow the path that leads to spiritual maturity and life.

This morning, we are exploring the source of temptation in verses 13 and 14. Next week, we will look at the steps of temptation so we can put sin in slow motion and learn how it works in our life so we can step it before we walk so far down the path of sin and death that it is too late.

**Playing the Blame Game is a dead end road.**

This week was Cindy’s birthday. We celebrated it as family because everyone loves mom. As you might suspect, after what I told you about flowers last week, I was sure to give her roses for her birthday, and they were not on discount when I bought them! Around 9:00 in the evening, I learned there was something she wanted for her birthday I didn’t buy. Shortly after 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday night we drove to Wal-Mart to buy chocolate cake. Like most of you, I love chocolate cake, but I don’t like to eat it before going to bed. It gives me a nasty sugar buzz when I am trying to sleep. But because it was Cindy’s birthday, we came home from Wal-Mart with a cake. We cut it in pieces for the family and I began trying to resist. Twenty minutes prior, my resistance was rock solid, but as I watched the rest of my family dig in, my commitment began to waver. Guess what I did? I gave in and ate a piece of chocolate cake. Immediately after eating it I began to feel bad.
about breaking my promise to myself. You know what I did in my mind to make myself feel better? I blamed Cindy. It’s not my fault for eating the cake. She is the one who insisted on buying it at 9:00 in the evening. I gave her beautiful roses and a card, if she hadn’t insisted on cake, I wouldn’t have eaten it!

What was I doing? I was trying to make myself feel better by blaming Cindy for my own choices. This is called the Blame Game and we all play it. People who are poor sometimes steal and they say it is not their fault for stealing, they blame their actions on their poverty. Alcoholics are masters at the Blame Game. They claim they wouldn’t drink so much if work wasn’t so stressful. They wouldn’t drink so much their home life had more excitement in it. They wouldn’t drink if their friends didn’t drink. It is everybody else’s fault they drink but their own.

Maybe you don’t drink, but you struggle with anger. A husband yells at his wife and then say, “The only reason I yell at you is because you make me so mad. It is your fault I yell.” Sometimes it is our language. “I wouldn’t swear so much if life didn’t have so many problems.” My foul language is not my fault, it is all the problems in life that are making me speak this way. I see the blame game all the time in divorces. “I wouldn’t be asking for a divorce if she would just treat me better, it is her fault I am filing.” We are masters at blame shifting as soon as something goes wrong in our lives, it is everybody else’s fault but our own.

This isn’t a new thing. The Blame Game has been happening from the beginning with Adam and Eve. Look what happens as soon as Adam and Eve sin.
The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Genesis 3:12 (ESV)

Who did Adam blame for his sin? Eve. It's always the wives fault guys. We abrogate responsibility for leadership in our home just like Adam did and we blame our wife for our sinful choices. There is an old proverb that says, “When Adam was away, Eve went astray.” Nice proverb, unfortunately, it is not true.

Where was Adam when Eve grabbed the forbidden fruit? Right there! What did Adam do when his wife offered him forbidden fruit (or should I say 9:00 pm chocolate cake)? He gave in, but he played the Blame Game and said it was his wife’s fault.

Eve didn’t fare any better. She is also a good player at the Blame Game.

Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” Genesis 3:13 (ESV)

Eve blames the serpent. I have a question for you. Did the serpent put Eve in a Jujitsu submission hold and force her to eat the forbidden fruit? Of course not! Eve ate the fruit on her own. It was her fault, not the serpents.

We ultimately blame God our sin.

When we play the Blame Game and say it is not our fault we give in to temptation, we ultimately blame God for our sin. Think this through with me. When we say it is not our fault we have a short temper because God made us that way, we are saying God is responsible for our outbursts of anger? When we say we wouldn’t steal if we weren’t so poor, we say it is God’s fault for not providing for our needs. Every time we sin and we blame shift it to somebody or something else, we ultimately blame God for our sin. It is God’s fault for giving
me that wife. It is God’s fault for letting me grow up in that home. It is God’s fault for giving me a short fuse. It is God’s fault for giving me such strong hormones that I can not control myself when faced with temptation. Every time we play the Blame Game we ultimately claim God is responsible for our sin.

The first thing we need to know is that God is NEVER at fault for our sin. He is NEVER even behind anything that draws us to sin.

*Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God.”*... James 1:13 (ESV)

God never tempts us to fall into sin. So we need to stop blaming other people, other things and ultimately we need to stop blaming God for the sinful choices we make in our life. James is adamant about this.

**God can not be tempted, therefore, he can not tempt.**

...for *God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.* James 1:13 (ESV)

There is a unique word here in the Greek and it occurs only once in the Bible. When it says *God cannot be tempted with evil,* in the Greek, it literally says God is *untemptable.* There is no possibility of God even being remotely enticed toward sin. Because God can not be tempted, the possibility of tempting us towards sin is completely not part of his nature. The Bible says God is “Holy, Holy, Holy.” There is nothing but nothing with more absolute purity and separate from sin and temptation than God.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 1 John 1:5 (ESV)

Jesus Christ is the same way.
For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Hebrews 7:26 (ESV)

Since the character of God is always good, this means all his purposes for us are good. God is NEVER behind any temptations we face. God allow us to face trials but they are always crafted to build our faith, they are never intended to lead us into sin.

**What about times when it looks like God is behind temptation?**

Some you who are biblically adept can think of times in the Bible where it appears God is behind temptations to sin. Let’s look at some of these and see what we can learn.

**Didn’t God incite David to number Israel?**

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.” 2 Samuel 24:1 (ESV)

If you remember the story, it appears God was behind this temptation of David to conduct a census of Israel so David could boast in the numerical strength of Israel as his safety and security instead of trusting in God as the true protector of the nation. Was God behind this temptation toward pride that David gave in to?

There is a parallel passage in 1 Chronicles which tells the same story from a slightly different angle.

Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. 1 Chronicles 21:1 (ESV)

So God was not behind this temptation, Satan was, he was the one who wanted David to fall into the sin. From God’s perspective, it was an opportunity
for David to glorify God, from Satan’s perspective, it was an opportunity to reject his trust in God.

**What about Job?**

This is similar to the story of Job. God allowed Satan to bring trials and adversity into Job’s life. Satan was trying to use the trials Job went through on the outside of his life to tempt Job to sin by cursing and rejecting God on the inside of his life. The good news is Job passed the test, he didn’t fall to the temptation while in that trial.

**What about Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness?**

We see the same thing with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Matthew 4:1 (ESV)

The Holy Spirit led Christ into the wilderness. The word for tempt here is the same word we have in James. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to go through a trial. No food for forty days and nights is a trial, I can barely go forty minutes without food. While God’s intent was for the trial of hunger and isolation in the wilderness to be a trial that would mature Christ spiritually, from Satan’s perspective, his purpose was to tempt Jesus in hopes that he would sin under the pressure of the trial. As we know, Jesus passed with flying colors.

**My sin is my fault.**

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. James 1:14 (ESV)
Who is responsible for my sin? I am!

James describes this in fishing terms. For those of you from Pure Fishing, this is your verse. The terms *lured* and *enticed* are fishing and hunting language. It is the wiggling of a rubber frog across the surface of the water and enticing the fish to put the bait in his mouth. Who puts the hook in the fishes mouth? The fish puts the hook in his own mouth. You can’t force him to put the hook in his mouth, all you can do is try to entice him to bite it. Once he does, it is too late and he is dragged away. So the honest truth is the one ultimate responsible for catching the big fish is not the fisherman, but the fish himself. He chose to put the hook in his own mouth.

It is the same way with sin. Don’t blame Satan or anyone else for our sinful choices, all Satan and his demons can do is drag the lures across the surface of the water but it is our own lust that drives us to bite Satan’s bait. The problem is not with the temptation on the outside but with our own lusts on the inside. That is why we sin. We can play the Blame Game all we want but it just isn’t true, we are the ones who choose to sin. Nobody forces us to do it. It is our own lusts that are the problem.

**Will I ever face temptation that is too strong to resist?**

Some of you are wondering if there is a time when the trials we face are too difficult for us to resist and the temptation we face we must give in to. According to the Bible, that will never happen.
No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

Here is that same word from James and it is used in the noun and verb form. God promises to not let us face a trial that is beyond our ability to handle. God filters the trials we face so every one of them is no stronger than our ability to resist. So God promises that the issue with beating the temptations we face is never our ability to resist the temptation but our desire to resist the temptation.

**Why do I fall to the temptations I face?**

I want to give you two reasons, one is practical and the other is intellectual but both are essential.

**I stroke my lusts.**

Let’s go back to how temptation works. Satan could not make Eve bite the Apple. We can not make a fish bite a lure. Satan can not make us sin. All Satan can do is appeal to the lusts within us. The longer the lust is appealed to, the harder it is to resist. The longer the fish is watching the bait, the more he is wants to bite it. The longer we are stroke our lusts during times of temptation, the harder it becomes to not give in. At any time does Satan force us to sin? No, all he can do is stand on the side lines and appeal to our lusts. So if we want to avoid temptation, the best time to avoid it is when it first appears. The more we entice ourselves toward sin and our sinful lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and the pride of life, the harder it becomes to resist.

**My source of significance is determining the course of my actions.**
My source of significance will determine the course of my actions. What is your source of significance in life? Last week, we talked about money and we learned that more important than having money or lacking money is who we are in Christ. That is the source of significance in our lives. We are who we are in Christ. Truth be told, we let money and many other things give us a sense of significance in our lives. When we do, we will fall to temptation every time.

I have talked with young Christian women who end up dating and marrying men who do not have Christ as their treasure. Why do young women do that? Because their sense of significance is marriage more than who they are in Christ. It is more important for them to be married to somebody than to be married to nobody and just have Jesus. The source determines the course.

There are Christian business men who know they should be home with their wife and children but night after night they work late and take calls from clients around the clock. Many times the reason is their sense of significance in life is their career more than Christ. The source determines the course.

There are plenty of students who no longer attend church because they are too busy with studies and sports to make study and worship of God a priority. The source of significance in their life is their academics or their varsity sport, not Jesus. Their source determines their course every time.

How do we face temptation and beat it? Next week we will look at sin in slow motion and learn how sin works in our life so we know how to stop it every step of the way. But this morning we learned where we have to begin if we are going to beat temptation. Until we recognize my sin is my fault and the source of
all my temptations are my lusts, nothing will ever change until I admit I am the problem. Let me give you some action steps for this week to apply what we learned.

**Steps of Action**

**Repent of blame shifting.** - This week, catch yourself every time you do it. It is the original sinful response to sin. Repent of it. Take this seriously. Until we own our sin, we can never change our sin. Even when we are tempted to sin, admit the temptation to yell at your little brother, to stretch the truth, to speak a snide remark, to think of a person in an inappropriate way is all my problem from enticing my sinful lusts. Until I can call my sin, my sin, things will never change.

**Trust God’s character.** - I talk to people every week going through a trial and they find it hard to trust God’s character. They don’t believe God can do anything to glorify his name and do us spiritual good in tragedy. They feel life is out of control. Trust me, God has not lost control. It is just from our limited perspective we can’t see how God could do us any spiritual good and bring glory to his name through it. We have to trust God’s character. *Our trials are allowed into our life for us to bring God glory, to mature our faith and to gain us an eternal reward.* That is a promise of God we can trust in. God never tempts us to sin.

**Resist the lusts of the flesh.** - Our own sinful lusts will always tempt us during a trial. Satan will tempt us during a trial. Remember, Satan can’t touch us. He can’t make us do anything, he can only entice our lusts so we choose to sin. When someone says, “The devil made me do it.” The truth is I made myself do it because I stroked my lusts. Resist the temptations to sin and resist them.
early when they are easiest to avoid. Remember, the most important thing someone can pray about for you in a trial is not the removal of the trial, it is falling to the temptation to sin you face in the trial. It is walking down the path of sin which leads to death, that is the most important think we can avoid.

**Satisfy my soul with Jesus.** - When it comes to resisting the lusts of the flesh, it never works to just say no to the pleasures. The only way to win that battle is to replace the lusts of the flesh with a greater pleasure. That greatest pleasure we can ever experience is God’s love for us through Christ. He forgives us completely. He loves us undeservedly. His plans for us are completely good. His love for us is unchanging. The most fulfilling and satisfying relationship we can ever have is with Jesus, not the person we marry. The most satisfying intimacy is total transparency in our life with Christ, and he still loves us. Better than sports, than a job than a marriage, than children, than money, than success is Jesus. He is love for us is the only thing out there that is more satisfying to us than the lusts of our flesh. It can’t get any better than him.

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