

The unfolding of your words gives light.

Faith That Works

An Exposition of the Book of James

¹²Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial^a; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life^b which the Lord has promised to those who love Him^c. ¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"^d; for God cannot be tempted by evil^e, and He Himself does not tempt anyone^f. ¹⁴But each one is tempted

^a 1:12 **Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial.** Once again James is sounding like his brother-Master Jesus when he spoke the Beatitudes. The Lord Jesus said:

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11-12)

Consider this next to verse two. There is joy in the midst of your trials because you know God is at work. There is also a blessedness at the end of the trials for those who endure. The word translated "perseveres" means literally "to remain behind." It is the verb form of the word translated "endurance" in verses 3-4. See also Psalm 1.

^b 1:12 **for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life.** Several crowns are mentioned in Scripture besides this *crown of life* promised here to those who persevere (also promised in Revelation 2:10 to those who are faithful to death). Others are: *the crown of beauty* given to those who acquire wisdom (Proverbs 4:9), *the garland instead of ashes* given to a repentant Israel (Isaiah 61:3), *the imperishable wreath* given to those who run a good race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), *the crown of joy or exultation* given to those who take people to heaven with them (The crown is actually the people, Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:19), *the crown of righteousness* given to those who have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8) and *the crown of glory* given to faithful church elders (1 Peter 5:4). Whether or not these are going to be visible laurel wreaths is beside the point. Our task is not to make sure we get the crown from God so our neighbor does not. The 24 elders of Revelation 4:10 cast their crowns before the throne anyway. How can you keep one of those things on your head in the presence of the one who made it possible for you have it? The crown of life is one of the heavenly crowns promised by God as rewards for believers.

^c 1:12 **which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.** Here is the key to perseverance. Those who persevere do so because they love their Lord.

^d 1:13 **Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God."** Most of the confusion on this passage would be resolved if the reader would understand that the word for "temptation" has varied meaning based on context. James used the noun form of the word early in the chapter in the context of life's multi-colored difficulties. Here he uses verb forms of the word that indicate an enticement to do evil things. God does the former (allows chastening for your good) but cannot do the latter (try to get you to sin).

^e 1:13 **God cannot be tempted by evil.** The questions arise, "What about the temptation of Christ? Wasn't He God?" The Bible does in fact say that Jesus was tempted. One way to illustrate this is to picture the human side of Jesus as a stick and the divine side as a rod of iron. The two are bonded together. His human side made Him subject to temptation (see also Hebrews 4:15) but His divine side made Him "unbreakable," incapable of sin.

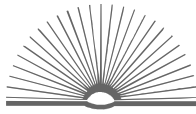
^f 1:13 **He Himself does not tempt anyone.** Some would point to an apparent contradiction between this statement and others in Scripture. Remember that the word translated "tempt" can mean either bringing into a hard time or soliciting to do evil. God certainly puts his people to the test. This very letter mentions the testing of Abraham's faith in the next chapter. The key is

James 1.12-16
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when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust^a. ¹⁵Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin^b; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death^c. ¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren^{d,e}.

understanding that God was not trying to get Abraham to sin when he asked him to offer his son Isaac is a sacrifice. He was seeking to display to the world that Abraham's faith was legitimate.

Second Samuel 24:1 says, "Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them..." On the surface it appears that God lured David and Israel into this sin. A reading of the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 21:1 shows that it was actually Satan doing the tempting. God allowed the temptation to occur as a judgment on a disobedient nation.

As the Lord Jesus gave his disciples a pattern for prayer (Matthew 6:13), he said, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Here again the word "temptation" can also mean a time of difficulty. Jesus was not implying that we should ask the Father to protect us from himself. It is "evil" or "the evil one" we want to avoid. Jesus instructed us to ask the Father to keep us out of trouble and, knowing that trouble is inevitable, to deliver us when we find it.

^a 1:14 **each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.** James is quick to point out what the Lord Jesus pointed out in the Sermon on the Mount: sin starts in the depraved heart of man, not in the plan of God. When people do evil things, unbelieving hearts are quick to suggest that a "loving God" would never let these things happen. In truth only an unbelieving heart could ever conceive the notion to blame God for all that. The trouble is our lust (*epithumia*). We normally think of lust in sexual terms, but James is talking about any intense desire. Find out what people want the very most—what they think they cannot live without—and you will see at what altar they worship.

^b 1:15 **Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin.** Life begins at conception. So does sin. When we finally get what we want the very most, we become the parent of a bouncing baby sin. Trouble is, the baby doesn't stay a baby.

^c 1:15 **and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.** Death? We can play the role of the skeptic here and look at Genesis 3. God told Adam and Eve that they would die the day they ate the fruit. The text goes on to demonstrate that they were still breathing and walking and talking after eating the fruit. Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death. I don't know about you, but I sin quite a bit and I am not dead yet. Sin brings three kinds of death. It causes man to die spiritually, rendering him incapable of pleasing God or thinking spiritual thoughts. Sin's curse on the world brought the onset of physical death—separation of the person from the body. Sin ultimately brings eternal death: inescapable separation of the sinner from the presence of God in eternal torment. This baby named Sin may have been cute at the start, but he grows up to kill his parents.

^d 1:16 **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.** James likely included this phrase as a transition between verses 12 through 15 and the next couple of verses. It is deception both to fall into sin and to think God is responsible for anything other than the good you enjoy in this world.

^e 1:12-16 As a son or daughter of Adam, you are in a battle. You may not feel like you are, but, as God warned Cain, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you. Here is the way you do battle against sin in your life.

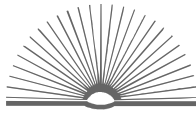
1. Endure with the end in mind. We already learned at the beginning of this chapter that the race should be joyful. That does not mean it will not be difficult. Keeping your eyes on the finish line will help you persevere.
2. Run to the character of God. Every response of the child of God to any situation must be Godward. Is life hard? Take courage that God is good, that he is in control and that he has a very good end in mind. Far better to run to him than from him.
3. Beware of your own weakness. First Corinthians 10:12 warns us not to think we cannot fall. God is infallible. You are not.

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4. Remember the consequences of sin. Professing believers who sin and take comfort in the fact that their sin did not end in death are treading on dangerous ground.

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