

James 1:12 - 16

The Crown of Life — The Reward for Overcoming Temptation

Last week we looked at why we need wisdom — James 1:5-11. This week we will cover James 1:12-16 and amongst other things will learn about the “crown of life”. Remember our memory verses for the book of James:

James 1:2-4

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Last week: Verses 1-11 talk about the wisdom of God and how we need wisdom in trials so that we don't waste our suffering and miss the spiritual growth that God intended. This week: we will talk about the “crown of life” and how temptation comes from our sinful nature.

James 1:12-16

¹² Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Blessed is the man

James 1:12

Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

v 12 **Blessed is the man:** Like in the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), blessed means happy.

Matthew 5:3-12

- ³ “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ⁴ Blessed *are* those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.
- ⁵ Blessed *are* the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.
- ⁶ Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.
- ⁷ Blessed *are* the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.
- ⁸ Blessed *are* the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.

- 9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.
- 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Here in James 1:12 we learn that another way we can be **blessed** or happy is by enduring **temptation**. This goes against all worldly or humanistic common sense or logic, which says that the whole point of living is to pursue pleasure, whatever its form, and to always take the easy road. I mean, isn't there pleasure in sin? Doesn't the person who indulges in sin — pornography, drugs, alcohol, lying, gossiping, sex, selfishness, and violence — get some kind of pleasure from it? Yes there is and yes they do. Think about it, the world wouldn't love sin if it didn't feel good. The bible even confirms this.

Hebrews 11:25

He [Moses] chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting [temporary] ***pleasures of sin***.

So yes there is temporary pleasure in sin. However, remember that after the moment of pleasure or acceptance or gain, there comes guilt, sorrow, and the inevitable practical consequences of sin, even forgiven sin.

"Hold on" you say. "Won't God forgive me?" Yes He will. In fact, God not only forgives your sin, but He even forgets your sin.

Hebrews 8:12

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

Remember this brothers and sisters. As Christians, it's not God who punishes us for our sins, because Jesus already took the punishment for our sins when He died on the cross in our place. Instead, it's the natural consequences of our sin that punishes us in the here and now.

Numbers 32:23

But if you fail to keep your word, then you will have sinned against the Lord, and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.

Like they say with eating too much chocolate, "a minute on the lips, a lifetime on the hips." The same is true with sin. The consequences will always last a lifetime. The sin is forgiven and forgotten by God. However, the physical, emotional and spiritual consequences of that sin will effect the rest of our lives like a pebble thrown into a still or smooth lake causes ripples to go in every direction until they reach the shore. If I smoke marijuana and damage my brain and then suffer from schizophrenia — becoming saved won't reverse the damage. My sins will be forgiven, but my physical brain is permanently damaged. The same goes for my reputation — it only takes one fly to putrefy the perfume — one foolish sin can have lifelong consequences. It's grievous to me to see the pain that my sin has caused God, others and myself. I simply cannot be happy or blessed as I suffer the consequences of my own sin. God never promises to protect me from them.

Some people seem to get away with sin, but this is a delusion. God says, “be sure that your sin will find you out.” If you look beneath the surface of anyone who is indulging in sin, they are always miserable and insecure — indeed they are trapped and held captive by their sin. Truly sin is a moment of gain for a lifetime of pain.

What right does God have to cause me to suffer and endure trials?

Previously we have learned that God uses trials to cause us to grow to become more like Him. But some may ask, what right does God have to cause me to suffer and endure trials? He's God isn't He. Can't God figure out another way for us to grow in our christian walk other than suffering through trials?

Actually, God has earned the right to use trials as a method of growth. The ultimate example of course is Jesus Himself.

Hebrews 2:18

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Hebrews 4:14

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus always leads by example. Jesus overcame every temptation common to man, and even better, He has given us the same power that He used to overcome sin — the power of God in us and the divine nature.

2 Peter 1:3-4

By his divine power, God has **given us everything we need for living a godly life**. We **have received** all of this **by coming to know him**, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvellous glory and excellence. ⁴ And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to **share his divine nature** and **escape the world's corruption caused by human desires**.

Now, what was the result of Jesus' obedience? He was full of joy. People loved to be around Jesus. It wasn't just because He was perfect and never hurt anybody, but because he was always perfectly walking in the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy, amongst other things. Who wouldn't want to be around someone overflowing with love and joy? Jesus was happy. Jesus was blessed. Jesus was joyful. In fact, by enduring temptation Jesus lived the most blessed or happy life possible. So in Jesus' life we see the truth of James 1:12, “Blessed [or happy] is the man who endures temptation...”

Enduring temptation

v 12 **who endures temptation**: What does it mean to endure? It means to: remain, hold out, endure, wait for, stand your ground, to resist, to be permanent, not to be moved, continue, to wait expectantly, to wait, to tarry, to wait patiently, to wait upon, to hope, be patient under, submit to, cause to hope.

David Guzik says concerning **endures temptation**: “It does not say, “Blessed is the man who is never tempted.” Nor does it say, “Blessed is the man who finds all temptation easy to conquer.” Instead the promise of blessedness is given to the one who **endures temptation**. There is a special gift of blessedness from God to the one who can say “no” to temptation, thereby saying “yes” to God.”

God never promised us an easy life. We need to accept this and move on in life or we will become bitter towards God when things don't go our way. As we mature and become stronger in our faith, guess what, the trials will only get harder. Why? Because we need to keep on growing. Do you remember the saying, “no pain, no gain.” It's true for almost every aspect of life; education, sports, promotions in our employment, relationships, marriage, and any other thing that is worth working for. I must work at these things if I am going to get any kind of reward, recognition or improve in any way. The same is true in the spiritual realm. Remember that the opposite of working towards something is neglecting it. God knows that an easy life will only lead to complacency and laziness. We are always either going backwards or forwards: we are never standing still.

Acts 14:21-22

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² **strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”**

This is the purpose of today's message, to strengthen your souls so you can endure the promised trials: persecution, hardships, and temptation to sin.

Consider a boxer preparing for a prize fight. His coach gives him an unrelenting exercise and weights program which pushes him to his limits. The coach also says no to poisonous foods like McDonald's, lollies, chocolate, biscuits and coke. Worse still for the boxer, there are the never ending stream of rival boxers, always increasing in ability, lined up to fight him. The practice fights only get harder and harder. It would be so easy for the boxer to lose heart and give up, doubting that the coach really knows what is best for him as he endures the rigorous training program. But we all know why the coach is pushing the boxer so hard — he needs to be continuously improving his fitness and skills so he will be ready for the prize fight, otherwise he will be totally ashamed when he gets knocked out in the first round. And not only ashamed, but badly hurt.

Likewise, God is our Coach, and he uses the same tactics. Also, like the boxer, if we don't trust our Coach and His methods, then we will so easily lose heart and give up. And again, just like the boxer needs to keep his eyes on the prize, so do we. What is our prize? In this instance it's the crown of life — our eternal reward in the future, and, happiness or blessedness in the here and now as we avoid the consequences of sin and abide in our relationship with God, producing the fruit of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! ²⁵ All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. ²⁶ So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. ²⁷ I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

So, always remember that we are in training — training to be righteous and holy, strong in our faith, perfect in character — all-in-all to become perfect like Jesus Himself, with the added bonus of experiencing God's kind of blessedness or happiness in this life and the crown of life in the next.

The Purpose of Trials

v 12 **For when he has been approved:** Here James states the purpose of God in allowing temptation. The purpose is to *approve* us.

The Greek word translated **approve** means: tested, assayed, examined, reliable, dependable, respected, honoured, considered good, genuine, verified, proven worth, and purified. God purpose is that through the testing we would be revealed as genuine and strong in our faith, just like the purity of gold is tested by fire.

So what is the most important part of our discipleship program? Being in the word of God. Faith comes by hearing, studying, reading and memorising the word of God (Romans 10:17). Just look at how important it is to be growing in our understanding of the word of God.

1 John 2:14

I have written to you, young men,
Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you,
And you have overcome the wicked one.

The young men have grown up from being children. They are now strong. Just like the secret to a healthy and strong body is a good diet, so it is with our spirits. Our spirits need a steady and strong diet of the word of God if we are to have it abide in us. Only then will we become strong and overcome the wicked one.

I'll say it again, those who neglect the word of God will not be able to resist temptation. As has been said before, "this book will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from this book." So eat it and let it become a part of you, transforming you into the image of God.

The Crown of Life

v 12 **The crown of life which the Lord has promised:** This is our eternal reward for patiently enduring or saying no to the temptations to sin that we face. The crown of life is also mentioned in Revelation 2:10 as the martyrs crown. Again, this is a reward for patiently enduring trials, in this example persecution to the point of death.

Revelation 2:10

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. ***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***

Jesus will be wearing the crown of life:

Hebrews 12:3-4

Think of all the hostility He [Jesus] endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. ⁴ After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.

Other crowns that we can earn or be rewarded with are:

The crown of righteousness — for those who have loved or looked forward to Jesus appearing (for the church this would be the rapture).

2 Timothy 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Why is it called the crown of righteousness? Because "...everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). Living in expectation of Christ's soon return makes us want to please Him. We don't want to be found doing something that we are ashamed of when He comes for us, therefore we live righteously.

The crown of glory — for the faithful shepherds or leaders of God's flock

1 Peter 5:1-4

And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: ² Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. ³ Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. ⁴ And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honour.

The Correct Motive for Serving God

v 12 **To those who love Him:** David Guzik: "This describes the *motive* for resisting temptation, because of our love for God. ***The passions of sinful temptation can only really be overcome by a greater passion, and that is a passion for the honour and glory and relationship with God.***

This is so true. The only way to overcome our love for sin, is to have a greater love for God. Any other reason will only result in a temporary change as it doesn't come from the heart — there has been no change in the desires of the heart.

What are some other reasons to resist the temptation to sin? David Guzik: “Some resist temptation because of the fear of man. The thief suddenly becomes honest when he sees a policeman. The man or woman controls their lusts because they couldn’t bear to be found out and thus embarrassed. Others resist the temptation to one sin because of the power of another sin. The greedy miser gives up partying because he doesn’t want to spend the money. But the best motive for resisting temptation is to **love Him**; to **love Him** with greater power and greater passion than your love for the sin.”

Spurgeon: “So that those who endure temptation rightly, endure it because they love God. They say to themselves, ‘How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’ They cannot fall into sin because it would grieve him who loves them so well, and whom they love with all their hearts.”

Remember, it’s never for nothing when we choose to love God more than the world. There is a special reward, an eternal reward, the “**crown of life**” waiting for those of us who have learned to put into practice, “...submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Why does God put such a focus on us overcoming sin and temptation? Because the opposite to submitting to God and overcoming temptation is submitting to satan and making yourself an enemy of God. Put simply: sin destroys our relationship with God. It breaks His heart and hardens ours. God is jealous for us in a good way, like a father is jealous for his children to remain in fellowship with himself. Like any good earthly father, God does everything to protect and nurture our relationship with Him. Why? Because He loves us and wants what is best for us. God isn’t jealous of us (there’s nothing to be jealous of anyway), but jealous for us.

James 4:4-7

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?

⁶ But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

*“God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble.”*

⁷ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

The Sinfulness of our Human Nature

James 1:13-16

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

v ¹³ **Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone:** God allows us to be tempted, but He is not the one doing the tempting. If this is true, then how or why are we tempted? We are tempted in three ways:

1. by the world,
2. the devil (satan, the dragon or “that serpent of old”), and
3. our flesh (also referred to as our sinful nature or human nature)

1. Firstly, let’s look at how the “world” tempts us.

1 John 2:15-16

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. ¹⁶ ***For the world offers*** only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. ***These are not from the Father, but are from this world.***

Notice that the world offers us or tempts us with three things:

- ***physical pleasure*** (sex, drugs, alcohol, etc)
- ***eye candy*** (pornography, gaming, movies, TV etc)
- ***ambition and pride in our achievements*** (money, achievements, promotions, fame, popularity etc)

Notice that John makes it very clear that “***These are not from the Father, but are from this world.***” Why aren’t they of God? “*World*” here is Greek *kosmos*, referring to the world system more than the physical earth. Satan rules (as allowed by God) this world system that we live in (Ephesians 2:2, 6:12, John 12:31, 2 Corinthians 4:4). Therefore, he has corrupted every aspect of it. Thus these three forms of worldly temptation are not from the Father.

2. Now let’s look at how the devil tempts us.

John 13:2

And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s *son*, to betray Him,

Here we see satan putting thoughts into Judas’ heart. God allows this. Another example is in 1 Kings 22:19-23 where God allowed a lying spirit to deceive a wicked king.

It’s important to understand that Satan and the worldly cravings or desires can’t force anybody to do anything. Therefore, we can’t blame God for what is happening to us. God allows us to go through trials — hard times, persecution, temptations — but it isn’t God doing it. This is what the passage means when it says, “***nor does He Himself tempt anyone.***”

So if the root of our sin is not the world or the devil, then what causes us to sin? We come to the third way we can be tempted:

3. Our sinful nature

James 1:14

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires [sinful nature] and enticed:

David Guzik comments on this verse: “God doesn’t tempt us. Instead, temptation comes when we are **drawn away** by our own fleshly **desires** and **enticed**—with the world and the devil providing the enticement.”

Poole explains what it means to be **drawn away**: “It is either a metaphor taken from a fish enticed by a bait, and drawn after it, or rather from a harlot drawing a young man out of the right way, and alluring him with the bait of pleasure to commit folly with her.”

David Guzik puts it this way: “Satan certainly tempts us, but the only reason temptation has a hook in us is because of our own fallen nature, which corrupts our God-given **desires**. We often give Satan too much credit for his tempting powers and fail to recognise that we are **drawn away by our own desires**. Some people practically beg Satan to tempt them.”

So you see that our temptation to sin always originates from our sinful nature, and never from God. The less we love God, the stronger our desires for worldly things will be and the more likely we will be to listen to Satan and the world whispering in our ear, so to speak.

Spurgeon summarises it well: “Satan tempts: God tries. But the same trial may be both a temptation and a trial; and it may be a trial from God’s side, and a temptation from Satan’s side, just as Job suffered from Satan, and it was a temptation; but he also suffered from God through Satan, and so it was a trial to him.”

Remember that we always have free will. God will never force us to sin. God never has been and never will be responsible for man’s sin. It was Adam’s free choice to reject God. In the same way, when we sin, we too are simply exercising our free will to obey God, submitting to Him; or disobey God, submitting to Satan instead.

The best evidence of our sinful nature being the root of all our decisions to sin against God (remember that all sin is against God), is in the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ on the earth for 1,000 years. There will be a perfect environment, perfect ecology, perfect government, perfect justice, and no sickness. Jesus Himself will rule and reign on the earth. But what happens at the end of the 1,000 years when Satan is released from his prison? He goes out to deceive the nations and multitudes follow him. Everyone of those Christ rejectors was born into this utopian world where Jesus and His love were clearly visible, but chose to reject Him anyway. Why? There was no Satan or evil world system for the entire 1,000 years. There is only one answer — “The heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). Our sinful human nature is born hating God. Therefore, unless a person humbles themselves by repenting of their sin and trusting in God’s provision of a Saviour for the forgiveness of their sins, then they will remain condemned and separated from God.

James 1:15-16

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

The progression of sin.

v 15 **When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin:** Sin springs forth from our corrupt human nature. Springing forth from **sin is death**. This progression to death is an inevitable result that satan always tries to hide from us, but we should never be deceived about. Clarke puts it well:

“James represents men’s *lust* as a *harlot*, which entices their understanding and will into its impure embraces, and from that conjunction *conceives* sin. Sin, being *brought forth*, immediately acts, and is nourished by frequent repetition, until at length it gains such strength that in its turn it *begets* death. This is the true *genealogy* of sin and death.”

Think about it as a slow poisoning of our soul. At first we sin because we want to. Then we sin because sin controls us - very soon we become slaves to sin. Then sin owns us and will eventually destroy or kill us — **“and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”**

It’s like an alcoholic. The person never thought that when they had their first drink, “This is fantastic! I’m going to end up destroying my life, losing my job, lose my family and make them miserable, and kill that young family in a drink driving accident.” No, they thought, “I’ve got this, no problems. One drink won’t hurt. It’s just a little fun.”

v 16 **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren:** We must always remember that satan’s great strategy in temptation is to convince us that the pursuit of our corrupt desires will somehow produce life and goodness for us. If we remember that Satan only comes *to steal, and to kill, and to destroy* (John 10:10), then we can more effectively resist the deceptions of temptation.

Conclusion — Sin and sinful desires comes from within, not from God, so don’t blame Him. We overcome our sinful desires by abiding in God’s word and growing in our love for God.

James 1:12-16

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.