

# James 1:12-18

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now if you have a Bible there, do you turn to James chapter 1. The last couple of weeks I've had an experience that I'm sure many of us have had many times. The phone rings, at a time you don't really want to answer the phone, you pick it up, and you find a distant voice from the other side of the planet, saying they want to speak to Mr Cashman.

I'm trying to deny my existence, but the ventures have come with curiosity, and the voice announces they're calling from TalkTalk, my internet and phone supplier, saying they notice that my internet service has slowed down.

And of course it's very plausible, isn't it? Because my internet service is never fast as I think it should be, as I think I pay them that money to make it. And so on, it starts to get interested, they've latched into a genuine desire to make things work quickly.

But then part of me remembers the truth. A, I don't really want to be speaking to this person, I've got other things I want to do, and B, there are fraudsters out there. The fact bolstered by the fact that TalkTalk have had all their data left in the last couple of weeks.

So I start to ask a few questions, and pretty soon the other person hangs up, annoyed that I'm asking them questions. The whole experience is a reminder, isn't it, of how easy it is to be deceived.

[ 1 : 12 ] Someone calls promising something you want, and you need to discern the truth, don't you? What is real, what is not. Well, James is writing because he doesn't want his readers deceived.

Look at verse 16, the middle of the section we're looking at. So we're looking at verses 12 to 18, right in the middle there. Verse 16, do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Now it's easy to be deceived about with prank calls or hoax calls, but that's actually not terribly dangerous.

What was the worst thing to happen? I might lose a bit of money, I might get my computer hacked. But these people, and we indeed as Christians, are in danger of much bigger deception. Turn over to the end of the letter.

See, this is the whole reason James is writing. Look at chapter 5, verses 19 to 20. My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, literally in the original language, is deceived.

It's the same word used back in chapter 1, verse 16. If anyone is deceived and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering, from his deception, will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of signals.

[ 2 : 22 ] See what's at stake in this deception? What's at stake is more than a matter of life and death. It's a matter of heaven and hell, James says.

And rather, he's writing to people who profess to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. He calls them brothers. Though the stakes are high, he does not want them to be deceived. Now, what could deceive them?

Well, as you have heard from the whole section that Penny read to us, many people were undergoing trials, having hard times. And it's easy in hard times to be deceived, isn't it?

To be deceived that maybe God doesn't really love me. To be deceived that maybe the gospel isn't really true. To be deceived that maybe to give in to this temptation would be an easier way out, an easier way to comfort.

Because that's why in verse 12, James reminds his readers of a greater truth. There is a reason for enduring. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.

[ 3 : 18 ] For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. See, what's the hope at the end? What's the reward for those who endure who don't give in?

It's this crown of life. I think we hear the word crown and we think of the crown jewels, don't we? Think of a big golden crown that a monarch would wear. For James' reader, the usual crown they would think of was more likely a laurel crown, a crown, a wreath that would be placed on the victor's head after an athletic competition.

But here James said this crown isn't made of laurel wreaths. It's made of something better. It's made of life. It's the crown of life. It's the crown of real life. The crown of eternal life. Life in heaven with God when we die. Life in a new creation. When Christ comes back. Real life. But these trials and difficulties of life bring us temptations.

They can make us think there isn't a crown of life to inherit. They can make us think that there are more to life now. It's when the trial of unemployment comes that the temptation to fill the tax returns can come, isn't it?

[ 4 : 32 ] You might never think about that normally. But suddenly the trial of financial hardship arises. The temptation to just get something a little cheap, get something a little quick. That suddenly arises, isn't it?

James knew. His readers were thinking like that. They were thinking, or maybe they were thinking that God was to blame for their trials. Look at verse 13. Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God.

For God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. Perhaps they were considering blaming God for their temptations because they knew that God is sovereign.

They knew the truth of Psalm 135 verse 6, that the Lord does whatever he pleases. Maybe they thought, well, God is making us suffer, so this is his way of tempting us. Or maybe they were remembering the Old Testament.

Remember how the Lord tested Abraham, or tested Hezekiah, 2 Chronicles chapter 32 verse 31. They thought the Lord is testing, tempting us.

[ 5 : 31 ] It's the same word in the original language. So how could they stand firm under these temptations and trials? Well, James wants them to know the truth.

Whatever they're thinking, they're in danger of being deceived. And he wants them to receive the crown of life. So how can they stand firm? Well, he wants them to make sure they're not deceived, but they know the truth.

Two aspects of the truth in particular. He wants them to know the truth about themselves, and the truth about God. Let's look at the truth about themselves, the truth about ourselves, first of all. So we can stand firm in our trials and temptations.

Verses 13 and 14. And the truth about ourselves is not a popular truth, is it? If you were to ask your neighbours, or boys and girls, if you were to ask someone at school, are you a good person? How would they normally reply?

I suspect they say, I'm not perfect, but I'm basically a good person. I do my best. I try to be nice to people. I'm a good person. And when they do make mistakes, they look for excuses, don't they?

[ 6 : 34 ] We live in a culture where everyone wants someone to blame, don't they? But James' point here is, we don't really have something to blame. Look at what he says in verse 13.

When we give in to temptation, it's never God's fault, it's always our fault. We are not the good people we think we are. We're slaves to our desires. Look at verse 13. Let no one say when he's tempted, I'm being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth to death.

See, James' readers were blaming God for their temptation. That was a symptom of an underlying problem with them. Back in verse 8 of chapter 1, James had said that, had warned them not to be a double-minded person, who's unstable in all their ways.

Over in chapter 4, verse 4, verse 8 as well, he talks about people being double-minded. In chapter 1, verse 18, double-minded is about not really believing God.

[ 7 : 43 ] It's about praying, but not believing he will answer. In chapter 4, verse 8, it's about claiming to want to follow God, but really desiring wealth and prestige on your own way in this world.

See, here's what we, what double-mindedness is. It's kind of saying one thing, pretending, claiming to believe one thing, but actually living in another way. And that's what we see going on here in chapter 1, verse 13.

This is probably a double-mindedness. It's kind of, it's God who's tempting me, not grasping the truth about God in their own minds. So James is showing them the problem is not with God, the problem is with them.

And we can be double-minded too, can't we? Maybe we don't go as far as explicitly blaming God for tempting us. But how often do I find myself saying something like, I'm sorry I got cross with you, but I'm very tired.

Or do you say, I'm sorry I did this, I'm sorry I reacted in this way, but I'm under a lot of pressure at work at the moment. I'm sorry I did that, but you provoked me.

[ 8 : 47 ] I'm sorry, but I wouldn't have done it if such and such. I'd fairly, quite easily, blame our sin, blame our failings, blame doing something wrong, not on ourselves, but on something in our circumstances.

Essentially, that's like blaming God, isn't it? So it's not about me, it's about something out there. I'm really God's in charge of all that. If it hadn't been like this, I wouldn't have behaved in this way. It's actually a bit of double-mindedness, isn't it?

And that's why James says we need to know the truth about ourselves. The truth is not popular, it's not comfortable, but it's what we need to know. That when we are tempted, it is because, verse 14, we are enticed by our own desires.

We're tempted by our own desires lure us or entice us and drag us away. We're tempted, we fall into temptation when we let our feelings run the show, rather than our truth, the truth, God's truth, dominate, so that we think straight.

The language James uses here is like the language of catching a fish. You know what it's like, I don't have a go fishing, I've never had any appeal to me, but you know how it works, don't you?

[ 9 : 59 ] You get a bit of bait, a fly, or a worm, or something, put it on a hook, cast your rod, cast your line into the river or the sea, and the fish comes along, and the fish is a fish.

So it sees the worm or the fly there and thinks, oh, that looks nice, I want it. And in its desires, it bites on to the bait and is hooked. That's the language James uses here.

We're enticed, we see the bait, we see the bait, and we act on those desires rather than submitting to God's truth. So for example, boys and girls at school, you know how this works out, don't you?

Well, how does it work out for you? Think about it for a moment. You desire to fit in with your friends, you desire to be popular. And so, someone suggests that you stop talking to that girl over there because she's a bit nasty, or whatever it is.

And so rather than letting God's truth dictate, it says you should love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, you say, you know what, I'm going to go along with that. So you give in your desire, and so you're being mean and bullying along with everyone else.

[ 11 : 06 ] And we all know how that works in our own lives, don't we? We all face choices daily, whether we act on our own desires or in line with God's truth. So we desire financial security.

So we hold on to all the money we have rather than giving to gospel work. Or we desire for control. And so we get angry, or we manipulate and dominate.

We desire for an easy life. So we don't correct a brother or sister who's falling into sin. So this is how sin starts. It begins with our desires.

It begins with how we act on our feelings. That's stage one. Then look at stage two, verse 15. Then desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin. In other words, when we let our desires control our will, rather than God's truth controlling our will, then we give in to that action, it gives birth to sin.

We're guided by our feelings rather than remembering the truth. Now, a sin doesn't seem that important to us, does it? Sin these days is used as a kind of, it's a marketing tool, isn't it?

[ 12 : 17 ] Magnum ice creams had the seven deadly sins flavours a few years ago. Sin is often viewed as eating too much sugar or too much fat or whatever is bad at the moment. James says, don't be deceived about that.

Sin is serious. So stage one is desire, stage two is acting on that desire which leads to sin. Look where that leads to, verse 15, the third stage. Sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.

See, sin is serious, says James. It's significant. If this is the pattern of our life, that we constantly follow our desires and fall into sin, and sin and sin without ever letting God's truth correct it.

And what's the result when it's fully grown? Death. And what James says here is mirrored by the very first sin in human history. It's mirrored by what happened in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve fell.

It began with forgetting God's truth or God's truth being distorted and then just acting on their desires, didn't it? Remember, God had told them, do not eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[ 13 : 23 ] For in the day you eat of it you will surely die. And Satan, disguised as a snake, creeps into the garden and starts to get them to doubt God's truth, to distort God's word.

He says, you're not sure they die. And then he distorts God's character. He says, hey, God doesn't want what's best for you, does he? God's trying to limit you. He knows if you eat that fruit you'll be like him.

That's what, God doesn't have your best interest in heart. And Eve looks at the fruit. Genesis 3 verse 6 says, when a woman saw the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate and gave some to her husband.

Do you see? God's truth ignored, the truth of God's character denied, desires acted upon. That's how sin begins. Begins with desire, leads to sin, ends in death.

And remember, just as James' readers are evidently blaming God, it's essentially what Adam and Eve did. It's a pattern for humanity. We always want to make excuses, don't we? So when God walked in the garden in the cool of the evening and said to Adam, Adam, what have you done?

[ 14 : 38 ] What did Adam do? He said, it wasn't me, it was this woman you gave me. Basically, God, it's your fault, you made her. What does Eve do? That wasn't my fault, it was this serpent that you made in the garden.

It was your fault, really God? As the old gag has it, Adam blamed the woman, the woman blamed the snake and the snake didn't have a leg to stand on. It's an old joke and it's actually not true because none of them have a leg to stand on.

It was a sinful desire all the way, wasn't it? Ignoring God's truth, acting on our own desires, it leads to death. See, James says there's no excuse when you're tempted.

We need to know the truth about ourselves if we're to remain steadfast under trial. We need to keep that truth about ourselves in mind. Our desires, our feelings are not reliable.

It's not that they're unimportant, it's that they're unreliable. And left unrestrained, they lead to sin and death. So we need to realise how weak we are.

[ 15 : 36 ] That's the first truth James wants us to get our head around. We are weak. That's why the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, lead us not into temptation. Not that God tempts us, but that our desires and the world around us, our own natures, can so easily entice us and trap us.

So we need God's help to remember his truth and act in accordance to it and not cave in to our own desires. So that's the first thing James wants us to be clear about, the truth about ourselves.

Our desires will lead us to trouble. But secondly, if we're to stand firm under trials and we can resist temptation, we need to know the truth about God. We need to avoid the deception that Adam and Eve fell into.

And there are five facts, I'll go through them quickly, don't worry, there are five facts that James wants them to know, wants us to know about God's truth. The first we've already seen in verse 13, he does not tempt anyone because he is pure.

God is pure so he doesn't tempt anyone and is not tempted. Evil and sin in the world is not God's fault. He tempts no one. But secondly, positively, he is the source of all that is good.

[ 16 : 46 ] Look at verse 17. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights. That means every good gift.

What good gifts do you have in your life? Family, friends, the beauty of the autumn colours yesterday, stable government to allow us to meet like this, the enjoyment of sport and art, of science, of technology.

These are all good gifts. They all come from one good giver. Every good gift comes from him. And even, in the context that James is writing in, even trials and hard times, even they come from God to make us perfect and complete, lacking in nothing, as James says back in verse 4.

Every good gift comes from him. So he's pure, it doesn't tempt everyone, he is the source of every good thing, and thirdly, he's the creator of everything. Verse 17 is the father of the light, of the heavenly lights.

The father of lights. In other words, he's the God who created the stars and the sun and the moon. He created this whole universe. He is that powerful. And maybe James particularly calls him the

father of lights, because perhaps some people were kind of resorting to blaming the stars for their behaviour.

[18:11] Oh, it wasn't my fault, but I'm a Leo or a Capricorn or whatever they all are. That's why I behave like this. And that's a contemporary problem, isn't it? I'm sure you have friends, I have friends, who check their horoscopes and seem to know what their star sign is, as if that excuses anything they do or constrains anything they do.

James says, no, the stars come and go, the moon waxes and wanes. Those things shift and change in their orbits around the world. Our father does not. Which is the fourth thing. He does not change. The father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. These people were double-minded.

We're often double-minded, aren't we? We can say one thing on Sunday and just live differently at various points of the week. James says, God is not like that. He is unchanging. He doesn't shift and change like the shadows. He is single-minded and single in his purpose.

In fact, earlier on, back in chapter 1 verse 5, James had said that if anyone if he lacks wisdom, let him ask God he gives generously without reproach.

[19:17] Now, wisdom is another of God's good gifts. But that word generously there, the original language, has the idea of simply, single-mindedly. This is the way God is. He doesn't change.

There's no variation. No alterations with him. He is unchangeable. Utterly reliable. So here are the first four things that he is pure. He does not tempt anyone. He is the source of good, of every good thing.

He is the creator who is in control and he does not change. And if God's character never changes, then his purposes and intentions for people never change either. And that takes us on to the fourth truth about God that James wants us to know.

Look at the end of verse 18. Look at verse 18. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Here's the fifth thing.

God is gracious and makes us into new people. He is gracious and makes us into new people. There's a lot in this verse 18. We'll speed through it very quickly.

[20:20] What does James say God has done? He has brought us forth. Do you notice that's the same language he used back in verse 15.

There he says sin, when it is fully grown it brings forth death. Our desires ultimately bring forth death. What does God's will, God's desire do? Ultimately it brings forth life.

Makes us new people. That's what he's done. He's brought us forth. It's new birth to use the language Jesus has given in John 3. We are born again James says.

That's why God makes believers into new people. That's what he's done. Why has he done it? What's the purpose? Look at the end of the verse. That we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

In the Old Testament the firstfruits were the part of the harvest that were given to God that were devoted to God but they also were kind of representative of what was going to come. The guarantee, the down payment of what was to come.

[21:23] So James is saying God has made us the firstfruits. He's given us new life. He's made us Christians in Christ. New people. And that means we belong to him firstly but secondly we're the beginning we're the guarantee the deposit of what is going to come next.

But ultimately God is going to make the whole creation new. That starts with us. That starts with us in Christ that one day everything will be made new. Now how has he done that?

Verse 18. He brought us forth by the word of truth. The word of truth. The gospel. That's what Paul calls it in Colossians 1.

The gospel. The word of truth. This good news message about what Jesus has done. And do you know just look down to verse 21 for a second. It's not just a message that's out there somewhere. It's not a truth we've had access out there.

Rather verse 21 it is the implanted word James goes on to say. It is this truth God has planted deep in us to use the language of the hymn we just sang.

[22:25] As this gospel is planted into us as you plant a seed into the ground you hope it will grow and bear fruit and change. So it is as God has planted his word of truth in us so it bears fruit and changes us from the inside out.

This word of truth is the announcement of what God has done in Christ. James calls it the word of truth specifically because it's to answer the deception that they are otherwise likely to believe. That deception is really the great lie that Satan whispered right back in the garden of Eden. The lie that God is not good. The lie that God doesn't really love us. The lie that God doesn't really want the best thing for us.

And that's the lie that always trumps us up doesn't it? Whereas what does the word of truth tell us? Oh yes it tells us God is incredibly holy. But it tells us God is incredibly compassionate.

That having seen Adam and Eve reject him and walk away God didn't then walk away from the creation. Didn't walk away from us as human beings. Rather he set a new start.

[ 23 : 32 ] He sent his own son the Lord Jesus Christ to be a new beginning a new humanity. When Jesus came he didn't give in to his own desires. He didn't make bread when Satan said you're hungry make some bread for yourself.

You're powerful enough to do that. Jesus didn't do that. Rather he lived by his Father's word. He brought his Father's truth to mind. In the garden of Gethsemane before the night he was betrayed how did he pray?

Father take this cup from me but not my will but your will be done. He resisted his natural human desire to preserve his life. He said remember his Father's truth followed his Father's way.

He died the death we deserve to die. He was raised to life again. As a beginning of the new creation. So that in him we too can be new people.

We too through faith in Christ are raised to new life. See when God when Jesus walked out that tomb that first Easter Sunday it wasn't just guaranteeing heaven one day or the new creation one day as gloriously true as those things are.

[ 24 : 46 ] God is guaranteeing new life for us now. Guaranteeing that we can be born again. We can be brought forth to new life by the word of truth. See naturally as we're born as human beings it is impossible for us not to sin.

Naturally we just cave in to our desires the way we are. But when we are born again we no longer need to sin. Of course we're not yet perfect.

That's why Sunday by Sunday we confess our sins together. We know that. Sunday by Sunday the Lord forgives in accordance with his promises. We do still give in to our wrong desires.

Yet the Holy Spirit is working new desires in us. So what has God done? How do we see God's goodness? He's caused us to be born again to be made into new people. Why has he done it?

So we can be first fruits. Part of his new creation. How has he done it? Through the word of truth.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And finally why did he do it? Why did he go to those lengths?

[ 25 : 52 ] Why did he bother? What does verse 18 tell us? Of his own will. It wasn't because we asked him. It wasn't because he saw potentially we would be good one day.

It was of his own will. There was one translation puts it by his sovereign plan he gave us God.

That's the truth James wants his readers and wants us to be clear on.

The truth about God. He is good. So how do we remain steadfast in trials? How do we remain steadfast under temptation? Now we need to know the truth about ourselves.

On the left of ourselves we will not remain steadfast. We will cave in. We will act on our desires. Our desires will give birth to sin and sin to death. That's the truth about ourselves.

We are worse than we ever imagined. We are not the nice people that society tells us we are. The truth about us is worse than we ever imagined.

[ 26 : 52 ] The truth about God is better than we could ever dream. He has chosen to make us new people. He has chosen to redeem. Chosen to rescue. He is unchanging, perfect in all his ways.

He has done everything possible for us through the Lord Jesus Christ. That should reassure us. I hope it reassures you. It reassures me. If it is of God's own will to bring me forth to make us new people then that gives me courage to face up to the desires of my heart.

It gives me confidence that God will not let me go no matter how I stray. It means that no matter what the trials are he will hold us and keep us nothing in the world, nothing the world can offer can be as good as that crown of life that he holds out to those whom he loves, who he keeps.

So because the unchanging creator God has brought us forth, brought us to life by the word of truth, those who are Christians will single-mindedly believe and practice the truth about ourselves and about God.

John Newton, the former slave trader, as he was dying in December 1807 was visited by a friend, William J. And he was a very old man by this day.

[ 28 : 08 ] And J. wrote these words in his diary about the visit. I saw Mr. Newton near the closing scene. He was hardly able to talk and all I find I had noted down upon my leaving him was this.

And he quotes what Newton had said. My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great saviour.

Those are the two truths about ourselves and about God that James wants us to know too. Let's pray.