

James 1 (Part 2):5-15 - Wisdom, double-mindedness and temptation

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We are in the book of James here on Sunday morning, going through the letter of James. We did the first four verses last week, so we're going to pick it up in verse 5, and we're going to read our way down through verse 15. And so I'm going to read; go ahead and follow along with me, please, as I do. It says: *"⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

"⁹Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass, he will pass away. ¹¹For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

"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. ¹³Let 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. ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

Let's stop there, and let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for the time that You give us just to pause in our week and focus on the Scriptures. And that's what our desire is today, that, as we take time to unpack these verses and talk about them and think about them, that You would increase our understanding, that You would fill us with insight that we can put into practice in our daily lives. We ask You to do that, Father, and teach us Your ways. We ask it in Jesus' precious name, amen.

You might have noticed as we're reading through these verses, and I'm sure most of you have read through the book of James before, but it kind of reads like the book of Proverbs, and that's one of the reasons why the New Testament

book of James is actually referred to as the New Testament Book of Wisdom. But what that means is, like in the book of Proverbs, you change topics a lot.

Sue and I were joking. We call it Minnesota conversation. Minnesota conversations are very much like that. You start a subject, but then somebody else starts a new subject, and then somebody else starts. And that's just the way conversations go in Minnesota. I don't know why. We're weird, but that's the way things are. Somebody will be talking about their new tires on their car and somebody else will say, "Yeah, boy, I had some spaghetti last night."

And then, that's the way Proverbs is. You read through Proverbs and there's a new topic pretty much every time you—every verse practically—that you come to. In fact in just a few verses that we read this morning, there are several topics that are covered. Let me show you.

In verses 5-16 James covers...

- Asking for wisdom
- Faith versus unbelief
- Mankind's attitude whether in poverty or wealth
- Enduring under trials
- The nature of temptations

We're going to deal with what it is to ask for wisdom. We're going to deal with faith versus unbelief. James talks about the attitude of man, whether he be wealthy or poor. It's an interesting few verses. He's going to talk about enduring under trials/temptations, and then the nature of temptations. All just in these few verses.

But the first subject here that he deals with is our need for wisdom. And James says in verse 5, “*5 If any of you lacks wisdom...*,” and I have to be honest with you, I'm a little surprised he starts off with “if.” Because with me, it's never “if,” it's always “when.” There's not a question about whether I'm going to need wisdom today from God. It's when and how much, and so he says, if you lack wisdom “*...let him ask God.*” Those are important words. In fact, I would even encourage you to highlight, or circle, or just remember, write down perhaps, those simple words, “let him ask God.” It sounds kind of like, “Well, of course.” No, but it's not “of course.” How many times do we face a situation in life where we really don't know what direction we're to take, but we don't ask God, and we go off, and we follow the wisdom of the world. We get advice from somebody else. Or we just do things on our own, or whatever the case

might be. And there's a lot of different reasons why I think we do that. One of them is a particular issue that's challenging to us in our current culture.

We're so used to coming up with quick answers. If we need to know something, we just Google it. And I don't know about you, but Google, for me anyway, it doesn't take very long. In fact, most of the Google queries that I give to my computer, I get an answer back in 0.53 seconds. I tested it just to make sure, and I've gotten accustomed to that.

In fact, I can be driving along in my car, and Sue and I are on vacation or something, and we're coming through a town. Yeah. I wonder how big this town is. Hit this little button I've got on my panel. "Hey, Google." I probably just made your phones go off. "Hey Google, what's the population of this city?" There it is. Just like that. Didn't even have to wait to go by the population sign. 0.53 seconds. I got my answer. That's a problem, you see, because we've become so accustomed to that, that we think somehow waiting on God is like, "Why would I do that?" There's all this information at my fingertips. There's something pretty special about waiting on God for wisdom, particularly in light of the fact that this passage gives us a promise.

First of all, it tells us that God gives generously when we come and ask him for wisdom. And then he ends this verse by saying, "...and it will be given him." So there's a promise there. You need wisdom. Of course. You go to God, you ask, you wait. He will give you wisdom. It's not IF He'll give you wisdom: He will give you wisdom. Here's the point. It probably just won't be in 0.53 seconds, you see? And that again, it becomes a problem for a lot of people.

And there's another reason why going to God for wisdom is a challenge. It's because it requires a special ingredient, and that's called humility. Because you see, every time I go to God for wisdom, I have to confess that I don't possess that wisdom on my own. I essentially have to confess that I don't have the understanding of the situation that is required to make a good decision. And it may sound funny, but for some people that's a real problem. That's a real hurdle to get over, coming to that place of going, "I don't get it. I don't know what to do, and I need God's wisdom to show me what direction to take." Some people don't want to admit that they're at loose ends related to that, and yet the book of Proverbs— let me show you this:

Proverbs 2:6 (ESV)

For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

In fact, Proverbs chapter 2, verse 6, “The Lord is the one who gives wisdom.” We’re told that in this Scriptures we’re told that “from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding” and we read those verses and we know that. And yes, sometimes we just lack the humility to come to Him and say, “I don’t know what to do. I don’t know which way to turn, so Lord, help me.” But then of course, having that willingness to wait as well.

And then there’s another condition to going to God and receiving wisdom. And this is another reason why I think so many of us don’t do it, and it’s what he kind of outlines here in verse six. Look with me in your Bible, in verse 6, he says, “*But let him ask in faith, with no doubting,*” He says, so if you’re going to go to the Lord and ask for wisdom, do what King David did. David talked to you about it. He says, “*I lay my request before you and wait in expectation*” (Psalm 5:3). Expectation means faith.

I’m trusting. I’m expecting that you’re going to answer me. Is it possible to pray and not expect God to answer? Absolutely. Otherwise, James wouldn’t have mentioned it. It’s possible to go through the motions of doing the asking without really believing that God is going to give you an answer. James goes on to tell us that if an individual gives into that kind of doubt, he or she becomes “*like a wave of the sea,*” who is literally tossed and turned and blown by the wind.

And he says that person shouldn’t suppose that they’re going to receive what they’re looking for because they didn’t have an expectation or faith in the first place. I want you to notice that James describes this person like someone who is “*tossed by the wind.*” It’s interesting, isn’t it?

The wind is often characterized for us in the Bible as something that could potentially take us off-course. The Bible talks about “winds of doctrine.” I think Paul says that in Ephesians (4:14), “I want you to be strong and stable in your faith so that winds of doctrine don’t just come and blow you off course.”

And whether it’s winds of doctrine, which is something related to the Bible or God, whatever, or it’s just winds in general, I think of all of the opinions that are out there today as the winds that are blowing, and there’s all these winds, and they’re just swirling all around. And if you’re listening to these things, you’re going to become confused.

And that confusion is going to give way to doubt, and that doubt is going to bring, eventually, unbelief. And so you have to be very careful that you don’t expose yourself to all these winds, and so it’s something that every believer has to eventually deal with. Am I going to listen to all this stuff that’s going on in

the world? All these voices, let's call them winds. Or am I going to stay grounded in the truth that is ours in Jesus Christ?

I've told you guys in the past that I had to stop watching the news. I used to watch it a lot. I used to spend quite a bit of time watching the news, and I had to stop because of the incredible confusion and, frankly, stupidity and lack of common sense and unbelief that is constantly spewed our way, encouraging us to live in fear rather than faith and all the things that go along with it. So I started subscribing to some Christian services that help keep me up-to-date on things. I don't want to be completely disconnected, but I want things to come more from a biblical viewpoint and that sort of thing.

Anyway, I subscribed to this one particular information service that's Christian-based. In fact, just saw this yesterday, and it was an article about people who are unsure about their relationship with God from the standpoint that doubt and unbelief enters in and so forth.

Let me show you this, I just did a screenshot and that was the headline:

People uncertain about their relationship with God more likely to suffer mental distress: study

People uncertain about their relationship with God, according to a study that they did, are more likely to suffer mental distress. Now, understand something, mental distress is just another word for anxiety or fear. Fretting. Depression, those sorts of things. But— and there's nothing here that should surprise us in any way—that when there is doubt that is in your heart or unbelief in your heart, it's going to have an impact on your emotional stability. And it just stands to reason.

I got a note just yesterday from a gal in the UK who was pretty upset. I could tell from her note that there she found a YouTube channel that was taking little snippets of videos and putting them together from Christians mostly and getting them to say things that they didn't mean to say, and actually getting them to say things that were wrong. And she said, even blasphemous, I didn't go there, but she said, you need to check out this YouTube thing because they've actually used some of your videos to put together these things or whatever. And I thought about it for a second, but I thought, wisdom would say, “don't go there. Don't go there.” In fact, the question I wanted to ask this person was, “Why are you going there? Why are you watching this garbage? Why are you exposing your heart to this stuff, because don't you know that's just going to foster

confusion? And again, confusion will often foster fear, and doubt, and then unbelief comes from that. And why would you do that?"

I'm amazed; all my teachings are up on YouTube, but I have to tell you something about YouTube. It's a dangerous place to go. It really is. I hear so many people saying, "I was reading the Bible and then I didn't really know how to understand this one passage. So I got on YouTube to see what somebody else thought," and I thought, oh man, that's dangerous. It really is because there's a lot of whackos that are saying incredibly crazy, off things that are going to really have a long-lasting impact in people's lives.

And we have to be very careful about exposing our heart and mind to that kind of confusing doubletalk because it's going to come back to haunt you. In fact, it creates a condition of the heart that James talks about here in verse 8. Look with me in your Bible. He talks about this man who has been wrestling with doubt and unbelief, and he says, "*8He is a double-minded man.*"

And he goes on to describe what double-mindedness does in the life of that person. He says it creates instability in every area of his life. In other words, it reverberates into his marriage, into his child-raising, into his business, into his thought life. When there is doubt and unbelief in our lives, it affects every area of our life. And so we have to be very careful.

So here's the question that naturally comes up. What do you do if you notice an area of unbelief or doubt in your life? Can I just say something about doubt and unbelief? The vast majority of born-again Christians would never admit that they struggle with any kind of doubt. Or unbelief. But the vast majority of Christians do struggle with doubt and unbelief, at least in some area. And, by the way, do you know you can compartmentalize your doubt? People think that you either have faith, or you don't. No, that's not true. I've talked to people. In fact, in my own life I've seen the same phenomenon.

You can have absolute total faith in the world that you are born again, child of God, going to heaven, your sins are forgiven. God loves me, but you just can't trust God for what's going to happen tomorrow. I've talked to people like that. They know that they know that they know they're going to heaven, but they can't trust God for a job or income or a relationship or whatever the situation might be.

So you see, we can do that. We can compartmentalize our faith and our doubt. And what that does then is that leaves us with pockets of doubt in our heart from time to time. And we have to wrestle with them. And you know what?

You do have to wrestle with them. You can't just let them go. You can't. It's like a thing, it'll fester.

If you don't, you got to deal with it, you got to deal with that sort of stuff. But I get asked quite a bit. So what do you do when you come to that recognition, that realization? I have areas in my life where I deal with doubt and unbelief. What do I do? What do I do about it?

I tell people three things, and I'll put those up on the screen here for you:

Three things to do when you recognize unbelief

- Shut down the voices of doubt and unbelief coming from the world.
- Dig into the Word of God (Romans 10:17)
- Cry out to God (Mark 9:24)

Three things to do when you recognize unbelief: first, shut down the voices of doubt and unbelief that are coming from the world; secondly, do a deep dive into the Word of God; and then thirdly, cry out to God concerning your doubt, and so forth.

Let me just talk about these just for a moment. We'll leave those up there. Like I said already, it's so important. It's so important that you shut down those voices, because the world is so loud today, so noisy, so much wind. If we don't, at some particular point, begin to lessen the amount of what's going in, it's going to have a devastating impact on our faith.

So I know there's certain areas of your life you just don't seem to have control over, but the ones where you do, control it. Stop allowing voices that are filled with darkness and despair and unbelief into your heart. Guys, we need to think of our hearts like a garden that we're planting things in, and what you plant is going to take root and come up, and so what do you want to grow in your heart?

The Bible says, "*Guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life*" (Proverbs 4:23). You know what a wellspring is, right? It's that original spring of water that feeds all of the other springs and wells. It's the source. So what the Bible is saying is, guard your heart. It's the source of your life. So how do you guard your heart?

You start by shutting out the voices that are constantly dragging you down and causing you to doubt the things that are true. And I know that it's difficult, but

it's something we have to do. And then secondly, I said to dig into the word of God. You'll notice I put Romans 10:17 because that's the verse that I quote most often when people say, "Pastor Paul, how do I build up my faith?" Romans 10:17: "*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word...*" right? So how do you build up your faith? The Word, and this is not talking about a casual reading of the Bible. I appreciate people who read through the Bible, who do it in a year. My wife does it. She reads through the Bible every year. And that's wonderful, but that's not all she does. She also deep-dives into the Word of God. And that's what I'm talking about here. You can read, but you need to study the Word of God. You need to really get into the Word, find out what it means, find out how it applies to you.

You need to spend time thinking about it and applying it to your life. That's what's going to make the difference. And that's what I encourage. In fact I give it out like a prescription, just like a doctor. Every so often I'll get a note from somebody, and they're just falling apart. Their life is just falling apart, and I can tell they're in a total tailspin, and then it is like, "Pastor Paul..." and they're telling me all the things going on. I can't do anything about all the things going on in their life. But I know what that attitude and what that emotional response to what's going on, I know where that comes from.

And so I give them a step-by-step way to address those issues of instability in their heart. And I literally say, "Okay, I have the entire Bible online. So go here, pick a book. I want you to start going through a study every single day. And here's what I want you to do. I want you to read the verses that I cover in that study first, before you listen to it. And I want you to make notes. And then I want you to pray about the notes you've taken. Then I want you to listen to the study, and I want you to take notes while you listen. And then I want you to pray again when you're done. And then when you're finished with that, go to the next study. And when you're finished with that one, go to the next one. And when you finish that book, pick another book and start doing it again." And you know what's interesting? The people who write me back after a period of time, they will give incredible testimonies about how their lives have been stabilized by faith. Because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word, and it's incredible. If you're feeling like you have noodles for legs, then you need to spend more time in the Word.

And then the last thing I tell people is: tell God about your doubt. He's not going to be disappointed in you. He already knows. He already knows about what's going on in your heart. So tell him, talk to Him about it. Say, "Lord, I need help here." And I always think, and that's why I put 9:24 there, Mark 9:24.

I'll just tell you, we won't turn there, but I'll just tell you about that passage, that is that passage right after the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus was up on the mountain with Peter, James, and John. He comes down from the mountain and He hears this squabble going on there at the base of the mountain. And He comes, and He goes, "What's happening here?" And this man comes up to him, and he says, "I brought my son to your disciples to have them cast this demon out of him, but they couldn't do it."

And of course an argument ensued, and it was just a chaotic mess. And Jesus goes over toward the boy, and the father says, "If you can do anything for him, please do". And Jesus addressed his doubt. He pinpointed his doubt. He goes, "If ? If I can do anything? Is that what I just heard come out of your mouth?" I love the father's response because it's honest. It's raw, but it's honest. He says, "I believe, but help me with my unbelief." And that passage hit me at one particular point. I got to thinking, that's interesting, because what he is saying there is, "I have faith for a lot of things, but I have pockets of unbelief. And this is one of them. When my boy is involved, I care so deeply for him. It can create unbelief, and I'm not sure if this is going to go the way I want it to go. Lord, I believe, but help me with my unbelief." That's a great cry. A very honest one.

So what are your areas of unbelief? It's important that you know what they are, and you go to the Lord and say, "This is an area where I struggle. I struggle in this particular area, believing and trusting You for what I believe, that I would otherwise believe, that You want to do in my life. So I'm going to ask You, help me in my unbelief. Help me to get over that and to respond with faith."

Now, verse nine. We do a little Minnesota thing here and we change this topic. Verse 9 says, *"Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation."* And then he goes on to describe how the rich man is like a flower. It's there for a while, but then the sun comes up, and it gets scorched. It withers, and it dies. And then he basically says, that's essentially like the rich man.

And there's, and this is all very poetic, and that's one of the reasons why, again we call James the New Testament Book of Wisdom because the Old Testament is largely poetic in a lot of the areas, particularly wisdom, literature, and I don't know how you feel about poetry. I don't like it really, honestly. It doesn't speak to me tremendously, although Hebrew poetry is very different from our kind of poetry. We think of limericks and rhyming and a canter to the thing, but in Hebrew poetry it's very different. But still it's poetry, and it's sometimes easy to lose the meaning of what's being said.

You read these three verses, and you're like, "Huh? What? What are you saying here?" Okay. He talks about the lowly brother. That's James' way of talking about the man who is poor, financially poor, okay? And then he compares him alongside the rich man, and he says, let the lowly brother, in other words, the poor brother, boast in his exaltation and the rich man in his humiliation because ultimately, time is going to bear something out for the both of them.

Let me give you the interpretation of what James is saying. He's telling these two men, whether they have a lot of money or very little money, I want you to think with an eternal perspective. That's essentially the point. And he says, for the poor man, please understand that your poverty is only of this earth. You are actually a very wealthy person in Christ. Okay, but for the rich man, he says, I want you to understand that your wealth is really unreal, and it could be gone in an instant. In fact, it will be gone at some point. So you need to understand from an eternal perspective where your real wealth lies. That's the essence of it, although it's couched in a lot of poetry

James goes on, verse 12: *"¹²Blessed 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."* Now, I don't know if anybody here has a New King James Bible on their lap, but if you do, your Bible reads slightly differently.

The word here that in the ESV is, "trial," is actually the word "temptation" in the New King James. And the reason for that is because the Greek word can be translated either way, "trial" or "temptation." Here's the problem. Trials and temptations are not the same thing. A trial is just a difficulty that comes into your life. A temptation is a temptation to sin. Okay. So they're really different things. So how do you know which one to use? We often have to just look at the context, and the context I believe is given to us in verse 13, where James continues on by saying, *"¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil"* and on and on.

So my personal feeling is, (and that's all it is) I believe that the New King James did a better job, frankly, of rendering verse 12, and it should be, "Blessed is the man who is steadfast under temptations." Under temptations, because James is going to have a few things to say about temptations, and the first things he wants us to know about temptation is that, when you go through a period of temptation— and again, this is temptation to sin— whatever, how that sin might express itself, that person should never say, "I'm being tempted by God," because God doesn't tempt people.

He does, however, test people. That's how we know temptation is the right word used in verse 13. It couldn't be, God does not test people, because we know God tests people. He tests us. Let me show you a couple of examples, first from Deuteronomy 8:2:

Deuteronomy 8:2(ESV)

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

And then Psalm 26, verse 2 says (this is the prayer of the psalmist):

Psalm 26:2(ESV)

Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind.

So see, God does test us, but He doesn't tempt us. Okay? And so God cannot be tempted himself, nor does He tempt His children.

So now we can look at that statement and understand that temptation is not coming from God. Where does it come from? It comes from the enemy. Satan is the one who tempts, but we can't blame it all on him. I hear people saying sometimes, "Boy, man, I'm really being tempted. I'm really being tempted a lot right now."

Do you understand, Christians, that the only reason that you can be tempted by the enemy is because you have a wicked heart? Did you know that? So what you're saying when you're saying, "I'm really being tempted," you're saying, "Man, I got a big target on me right now. I have a really wicked heart."

Because listen, if it were not for your heart, the condition of your heart, Satan would have nothing. No way to tempt you. You get it? Remember what Jesus said at the Last Supper? He's sitting around there with the guys and he's talking about how the enemy is coming. He says, (John 14:30) "The prince of this world is coming," but then you know what He went on to say, "He has no hold on me." Did you ever read that? He has no hold on me. Why? There's nothing inside of me that presents a target for the enemy to tempt me. Okay, so the enemy has to fight Jesus from outside. He has to come for Judas and Peter and the religious leaders and the guards and all those other sorts of things.

But Jesus said, he has no hold on me. Man, do I wish I could say that."Satan has no hold on me." No. I give him a really big target because that's why the enemy

is able to tempt us. He explains that in verse 14, where he outlines a process of how temptation works. Look at verse 14 in your Bible, he says, “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by Satan.”

Oh, it doesn't say that, does it? Now? See, that's what we want to think. I was lured by the enemy. No, he says we're lured and enticed by our own desires. And by the way, that word “desire” means passionate longings. There you go. We all have passionate longings. It can also be translated, lusts of the flesh. So each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own passionate longings and lusts of the flesh.

That's where it comes from. And God is communicating to you and me that the reason that the enemy has an ability to tempt us is because it's in our hearts. We have a gravitational pull in our hearts towards sin. And it's important that we understand, that is what makes us vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy. It's your heart, it's in your heart, and it's all in your heart. Like I said before, he would have nothing to tempt us with if our hearts weren't so disposed to going down that particular path.

But James, in this passage, speaks of that desire and how it turns into sin, and you'll notice that he uses in verse 15— which is the last verse we're going to look at here this morning— he uses the language of conception and birth, which is interesting, isn't it? You almost wish he wouldn't do that, but it is a good and accurate kind of an illustration. He, look at verse 15, he says, “¹⁵*Then desire, when it has conceived gives birth* (of course. And what you have is a bouncing baby sin.) ...*and sin when it is fully-grown* (and that means it has gone through all of its seasons and it's never been repented of or turned away from) *brings forth death.*” Okay? So you'll notice here that the process begins with desire, and the desire is in the heart, and the potential is in everyone's heart. I've said this to you guys many times in the past.

You should never look at someone else's sin and say, “How could they do that?” We should always look at someone's sin and say, “I know how they could do that, because I understand my own heart.” And people who say, “How could they?” don't understand the depravity of their own heart. They frankly just don't get it.

The Bible says the human heart is deceitfully wicked, and beyond cure (Jeremiah 17:9). That's the reality of the situation. I know it comes as a punch in the gut, but it's the truth. And so when we hear of something that someone has done, we should say, “I get it. I understand. I know.” So it begins with that

desire in the heart, which of course, because of our desires, we're now vulnerable to temptation.

And then when we give in to that temptation, that's when we enter into sin, and then sin, you'll notice James says, eventuates to death. He says, when it is full-grown, and that's an important thing there, when sin is full-grown. If there's an area of sin in your life, don't let it become full-grown. Take it to the Lord. Take it to the cross. "Lord, this is sin. I recognize this as sin in my life. I do not want this thing to grow up and haunt me and bring death into my life."

But there are a couple of things that I want to bring out here just for clarity, and the first is that temptation itself is not sin. Christians get this mixed up all the time. People will say to me, "Pastor Paul, I am a scumbag because I am under so much temptation." I tell him, "Guess what? Jesus endured temptation, but He never sinned. And you can endure temptation without sin." It's when you give into it that it becomes sin. Temptation itself is not sin, and just because you're being tempted, it's like, "Why am I being tempted?" "Because you're breathing. Your heart is beating, you're alive, and you're on the enemy's radar." I don't know. Pick one. As if once we become Christians, we should never have to deal with temptation ever again. I don't, I don't want to be tempted anymore. Really? Yeah? We all are tempted and Jesus was tempted. You remember where it says that? Hebrews chapter 4, let me show you. "We do not..." (He's talking about Jesus here):

Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

So write that down in your heart and mind. Temptation is not sin.

The second thing I want to emphasize here is this process that James talks about related to sin becoming full-grown and becoming death. First of all, you need to understand something as a believer. The death that sin can become in a person's life: First of all, that kind of death is never going to occur in your life as it relates to separating you from God's love or your salvation. You cannot sin your way out of the kingdom of God. We all mess up. We go to the cross. We get forgiveness. And by the way, I am not preaching once saved, always saved, but I'm still telling you that sin is not the issue. We all mess up. Okay?

Jesus bore your death on the cross. He already experienced that separation from the Father, and it's done. And because you believe—and I trust that you do—that

Jesus died for you, that issue has been taken care of. But let me explain also that there are other ways that death can get its slimy, rotten, hands in on your life through sin. There are times when God will allow the consequences of sin to enter into a believer's life so that they can understand just how serious that sin really is.

And I have watched it happen over the years. I've seen it happen in my own life. I have seen sin bring the death of marriages, relationships between parents and their children. I've seen sin bring the death of opportunities that they might have otherwise been able to lay hold of and enjoy, but now they can't because of sin. And sin certainly brings an early death related to our peace and joy and satisfaction and so forth. So those things can still touch us. Please don't misunderstand. And God will allow those from time to time in our lives to help you and me understand just how serious a thing sin really is. It's not something to be winked at.

Just because Jesus went to the cross and paid the penalty for your sin, does not mean that now you can just shrug it off. Say, "Yeah, He'll forgive me." I've heard Christians actually say that. "He's going to, I know He'll forgive me." He does that sort of thing. He's in the forgiving business, but he has also said, "Do not be deceived. There is a process to sin, and when it plays out in our lives without repentance, without turning away, it can be a very serious sort of thing." So there are very good reasons to avoid sin, and so forth. Even though it can no longer separate you eternally from God, in that particular sense, it's still a thing to be avoided like the plague. Amen?

Let's stand together. We'll pick up James right where we left off next time. If you have a need to lift some concerns or burdens before the Lord, we'd love to pray with you before you head out today. We'll have our prayer team down front, and we'll be available to pray if you need somebody to pray with, or grab somebody that you know, ask them to pray for you.

So let's go to the Lord. Father, we thank You so much for Your Word. We thank You for the strength of it. James is a strong book, and Lord, we need to hear these things. We need to be reminded of our need to walk in wisdom, to admit when we don't have wisdom. And to come to You, to live our lives with an eternal perspective and to avoid sin. Lord, You've given us the power in our lives to say No to sin, and I pray that we would do it. I thank You, Lord, that when we mess up, we can come to You, and You are so loving and so forgiving. You stand at the ready to cleanse and wash us and give us a clean slate. I'm so thankful for that, and I pray, Lord, that we would walk in the strength of the Spirit to hear Your voice as we shut out the voices of the world.

We thank You and praise You. In the precious name of Jesus Christ our Savior,
and all God's people said, amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your Sunday.