

Set up to Fail or to Succeed?

James 1:13-18

James is writing a letter to people facing crisis. So, it seems somewhat odd that he would follow up his point about the positive results of trials which build endurance as we look forward to our eternal existence with God. James tells us that God is ready to give us wisdom to deal with those trials if we would just realize that we need to ask. And then, he is basically ordering them to never say that they are tempted by God.

What makes this passage challenging is that James is using the same Greek root word for “trials” in verses 2 and 12, and “tempted” verse 13. The word has at its core the idea of a testing of the integrity or virtue of a person through the difficulties of life. In verse 2 there is the expectation of success. Success not being a grade of excellence but a sense of pass/fail where you will always pass if you apply what wisdom you have to the journey of life. There is always the potential to improve.

In verses 2 and 12 James is telling us that in life there are going to be trials that we can endure. We can endure them because we follow the rules that God has given us in His Word (his Wisdom in verse 5). And when we are not sure about the rules, we can ask God for clarifications of the rules of life. He will definitely give them to us because he wants us to succeed. He just tells us to ask Him and no one else. We follow His rulebook and not be wavering between His wisdom and the wisdom from the world which is in opposition to God. And as we do this we are anticipating the eternal fulfilment of how God's rules bring a completeness to our existence. Enduring trials is with the expectation of eternal success.

Then we arrive at verse 13 where he uses that same word differently. James anticipates an objection. The rules are too hard to live. Why is God tempting me to fail? Why does God make it so hard? Why are the rules so confusing?

James 1:13

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

This raises some questions:

- What is the difference between a trial and being tempted?
- Is there a connection between a trial and being tempted?
- What causes trials?
- Are trials ever punishment?

Key Word

Tempted – enticement to sin

Trials are not Temptations, but Trials can cause Temptation

James is demonstrating that the life of trials is not one of failure but of success. He starts with success in verses 2-12 where success is enduring the difficult challenges of life following the wisdom of God. Failure is failing to recognize personal responsibility and seeking to blame God or others when we do not follow the wisdom of God.

Question to Ask:

How do we keep Trials from becoming Temptations? Or How do we keep from failing so that we can have success?

1. Accept the Responsibility

James 1:13

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

James gives a command. Don't say that God is tempting you. There is no discussion. There is no way that God is trying to get you to reject His law through the trials of life. On the contrary in verse 5 he said:

James 1:5

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

God cannot go against His own law. God wrote the rules for success. If you cannot accept responsibility for your decisions, then you will never be able to live the fullness of life. You will never be able to endure trials. You will always be controlled by your own desires and not God's perfect wisdom. You will find yourself seeking human wisdom. When we spend our time blaming others or blaming God, we will never have time or the motivation to learn the wisdom of God to change. Blame is easier but is tragic.

At this point do not try and determine the solutions to the problems or even define how you should change behavior. When we try and fix ourselves then we are following the temptation to come up with our own rules. James simply wants us to take responsibility.

Questions to Ask:

- Why does it seem like God is tempting me?
- What is the true cause of being tempted?

2. Identify the Source

James 1:14,15

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Key Words

Lust – Craving, Longing for

Carried Away - Lured

Enticed – Take the Bait

Once we have accepted responsibility then we can look at the sources of the temptation. This is the same challenge that Adam and Eve and every person since has faced. The lust to fulfill desires instead of a desire to be a child of God. We cannot wait on God for wisdom. We want a resolution to our desires which we can control.

The language here is very powerful. When lust becomes our standard to follow then when we are lured to take the bait that we can make ourselves happy. We are taking the bait believing that we can make

this world a better place for ourselves or for others. **Life is not about making this world a better place. Life is about making the world an eternal place.** When our lives are simply to achieve what we can achieve in this world then it will only lead to death because this world only leads to death.

The hope that we have is that Jesus in his human form was tempted and was able to live without sin. It says in Hebrew 4.

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Questions to Ask:

- Why is the craving for physical fulfillment stronger than the craving for spiritual fulfillment?
- Why does simply doing good lead to death?
- What is the difference between doing good to make the world a better place and living wisdom to make the world and eternal place? What are the difference in the results?

3. **Discover the Standard**

James 1:16-18

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

James is challenging us to not be confused. Everything from God is good. God brings light into every dark corner of our lives. He makes a contrast here to verse 6

James 1:6

But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

We determine our standard by looking at the wisdom of God. Do our decisions result in light or do they result in darkness? Does my life bring more light to the room or does it bring more darkness to the room? The wisdom of God is not simply to make me a better person. The wisdom of God makes me a part of making the world full of light, a better place. My standard is the light of God and not the fulfillment of my lust.

James contrasts the idea of birth when he writes "brought forth by the word of truth." Brought forth is a word for giving birth in truth. Our new life is based on truth and not lust. This is a challenge living in a world where the standard is lust. Truth is defined by what I want and not by what is light. But when we realize our standard is the light of God's wisdom then we live to bring light to this world.

Questions to Ask:

- What is the difference between the light of God and the lust of people?
- What are the differences in the results of the light of God and the lusts of people?
- How can the light of God give me a full life even without fulfilling my desires and lusts?