

James 1:12-15 "Understanding How Temptation Works"<sup>\*\*</sup>    

Main Idea: As far as temptation goes, there are two options as explained in James 1:12-15. In this vital passage we discover how temptation works and consequently how we can respond in a God-honoring way to it.

I. If we endure temptation, we experience life (12).

A. God uses trials to test us (see also 1:2-4).

1. He is on our side, if we are in Christ.
2. If we are in Christ, He wants us to resemble Christ.

B. God allows temptations to give us opportunity to experience His grace.

--"Temptation is like a knife, that may either cut the meat or the throat of a man; it may be his food or his poison, his exercise or his destruction." John Owen

--"The preciousness of medicines is made known by diseases. We shall never know what strength there is in grace if we know not what strength there is in temptation." John Owen

II. If we fall into temptation, we experience loss (13-15).

A. Temptation reveals what we believe about God (13).

1. Our tendency is to accuse God of tempting us.

--"God made me this way. He must want me to..."

--"God put me in this situation. He must want me to fall."

2. The truth is, God gives only good gifts to us (see 1:16-18).

B. Temptation reveals what is inside of us (14-15).

1. Our desires entice us ("That looks good!").
2. Our desires conceive ("I want that!").
3. Our desires give birth to sin ("Here's what I'll do to get that!").
4. Our sin grows up and becomes a habit ("I must do that again and again!").
5. Our sinful habit results in death ("I never realized what that would cost me!").

Implications: Let's apply what we've learned today...

1. If we want to overcome sin, we must get serious about not only the sin itself but also with the temptation that led to it.

"He that would indeed get the conquest over any sin must consider his temptations to it, and strike at that root; without deliverance from thence, he will not be healed." John Owen

2. If we want to overcome sin, we need to change not only our sinful actions but our sinful desires as well.

"There are secret lusts that lie lurking in your hearts, which perhaps now stir not, which, as soon as any temptation befalls you, will rise, tumultuate, cry, disquiet, seduce, and never give over until they are either killed or satisfied." John Owen

3. If we want to overcome sin, we need to live a dependent life.

About one hundred years ago American workers completed one of the largest and most difficult engineering projects ever. They cut a passage, a canal, to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans in Central America. It's known of course as the Panama Canal. The French had tried twenty years earlier, but stopped after losing nearly 22,000 workers to the harsh conditions, particularly to malaria and yellow fever. In order to complete the project, the American leadership realized they had to address the cause of the malaria and yellow fever. Early efforts had failed because of faulty knowledge concerning how the dreaded diseases were contracted and spread. A common belief was that the sea mist spread the disease. In fact, when the suggestion was first made that mosquitoes were the culprit, the public ridiculed the foolish notion. In time, however, the theory was proven, the mosquito problem addressed, and the canal project finished.

There's a lesson here pertinent to our current series of study. In order to stop men from dying from the dreaded disease of malaria, attention was given, not simply to the malaria itself, but to the cause of the malaria, the mosquito, and more specifically, to the prevention and elimination of the cause of the malaria. Simply put, you get rid of the source of the disease, and you eliminate the disastrous effects of the disease.

That's what we're seeking to do in our current series, "*Lead Us Not Into Temptation.*" Think of sin as a dreaded disease. It's the worst of killers, for it destroys not only the body but the soul as well. Should we be concerned about getting rid of the sins that plague our lives? Absolutely, and through Jesus Christ we can experience deliverance from sin. But the Bible calls us to be proactive and not merely reactive, and stresses that we ought to be concerned about the prevention of sin as well as its removal.

Case in point, Jesus said we should pray, "Lead us not into temptation." In reality, temptation is the door which leads to sin. So we ought to be doing something about putting a dead bolt on that door! That's what this series is all about.

Last week we looked at the world's first temptation as presented in Genesis 3. Our aim was to find out how the Tempter works by examining how he enticed Eve (and Adam at her side) in the garden.

This morning we want to find out how the temptation process works, and no passage explains it more vividly than James 1:12-15. Again, my aim is not simply academic. It's to help you and (and me) put the dead-bolt on the door that, once opened, leads into a room where there's a killer disease called sin. If we can learn from God's Word how to keep that door shut, and do that of course by the power of the Holy Spirit, then we can live life as God intends, for His glory and full of joy.

According to James 1:12-15, as far as temptation goes there are two options. Simply put, if we endure temptation, we experience *life*—that's verse 12. And if we fall into temptation, we experience *loss*—that's verses 13-15. Let's take a closer look...

### I. If we endure temptation, we experience life (12).

James says in verse 12, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

The human author, James, the half brother of Jesus, wrote these encouraging words to first century Jewish Christians who were facing significant trials. They were suffering for the sake of Christ. Here James lets them know that the person who perseveres (Greek *hupomeno*, "to stand up, to endure") under the trials will indeed receive a crown. In fact, he'll receive "*the crown*" (Greek *stephanon*, lit. "that which

surrounds;" it's a word that refers to the victor's wreath which was placed on the head of a winner in an athletic contest). James identifies this crown as "the crown of life," more literally, "the crown which is life itself," referring to eternal life. In other words, the person who endures trials is the blessed person, the person of whom God approves. His perseverance is evidence that he possesses now and will possess forever God's promised gift of eternal life.

You say, "But wait. James doesn't mention temptation in verse 12. He commends the person who perseveres under *trial*." That's what it says in English, but in the Greek text that James wrote, the word translated "trial" is the same word translated "temptation" in other places (such as in Matthew 6:13, "lead us not into *temptation*"; and in Mark 14:38 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into *temptation*").

We need to do a little word study to appreciate this. The Greek noun is *peirasmon*, and the context determines whether the meaning of the word is a *trial* or a *temptation*. We find the same dual meaning in the verb form. In some places the verb *peirazo* means "tested" and in other places "tempted." For instance, Jesus "tested" Philip in John 6:6. The Pharisees "tested" Jesus in Mark 8:11. In Acts 5:9 Peter challenged Ananias and Sapphira for "testing" the Holy Spirit by lying. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul commands the Corinthian Christians, "*Examine* [that's our word, *peirazo*] yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test [a different Greek word, *dokimazo*] yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"

The psalmist asked God to *test* him in Psalm 139:23-24, "*Search* me, O God, and know my heart; *test* me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

In Luke 8:13 Jesus said that shallow-hearted people don't stand the test, "Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the *time of testing* they fall away."

So in the Bible *peirazo* often speaks of "testing" and "trying" a person. But there are also places in which this same Greek verb means "to tempt." For instance, in the very next two verses James says in 1:13-14, "*When tempted*, no one should say, 'God is *tempting* me.' For God cannot be *tempted* by evil, nor does he *tempt* anyone; but each one is *tempted* when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed."

We find both the noun and the verb in 1 Thessalonians 3:5, "For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the *tempter* might have *tempted* you and our efforts might have been useless."

Which raises the question, what's the difference between "testing" and "tempting"? One is the source—God tests, while Satan tempts. Another difference is the intent—the purpose of testing is to build us up, while the purpose of tempting is to bring us down.

So which does James have in mind in verse 12, trials or temptations? Again, it could go either way because the context determines the meaning, and in this case the context goes both ways. It all depends on whether you view verse 12 as the conclusion of the previous section (which is about trials; see verses 2-4), or the beginning of the section that follows (which is about temptation; see verses 13-15).

Not surprisingly, the Bible translators differ. "Blessed is the man who perseveres under *trial*," says the NIV. The ESV also uses the word "trial." But in the ASV we read, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation," as does the KJV, NKJV, and the NRSV. Interestingly, the NLT uses both words, "God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation."

With that linguistic background, let's look closely at the text. James wants us to know two things about how God works in our lives. First...

**A. God uses trials to test us (see also 1:2-4).** "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because *when he has stood the test*..." Ponder those final words. James wants us to know that trials are a

God-sent test. God uses trials in much the same way as a goldsmith uses fire. The heat brings the dross to the surface so the dross can be removed, and the gold purified.

James began the letter on this very subject in verses 2-4, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face *trials* of many kinds, because you know that the *testing* of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." [\[1\]](#)

Our God brings trials into our lives, trials of *many kinds*, says James. Why would God do that? For many reasons, but here's a primary one. To test us, says James, to test our faith. And what must we remember if we're going to pass the test? Two truths...

1. *He is on our side, if we are in Christ.* When we persevere under trial, it doesn't bring us into right standing with God. Salvation is a gift God gives to undeserving sinners on the basis of the work of Christ, not their own works. So if we are in Christ, and we are if we've repented of our sin and received Christ as our Savior, then God is already on our side. The fact is, those who are in Christ will pass the test for they will persevere in their faith. So the purpose of the testing isn't to determine if we'll make to heaven. The testing fulfills another purpose, namely this...

2. *If we are in Christ, God wants us to resemble Christ.* That's what trials do—trials in the family, trials at work, trials with our unsaved neighbors. Trials give us opportunity to develop perseverance and mature into greater measures of Christlikeness.

If that's God's purpose for *trials*, what about *temptation*? Granted, God is not the author of temptation, as verse 13 makes clear. But He is sovereign, which means He could prevent temptation from entering our lives if He so chose. And He often does. But He also allows us to experience temptation. Why would He do that? I would not presume to understand the mind of God fully, for obvious reasons, but I do understand His mind to the degree that I understand His Word. And in His Word we find at least one answer to our question that I'd like to point out...

**B. God allows temptations to give us opportunity to experience His grace.** Let me give you an example. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul says God gave him the privilege to see heaven. He says he was "caught up to paradise" and "heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell (12:4)." That kind of experience could go to a person's head, as Paul confessed. But to keep Paul from becoming conceited, there was given to him "a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me (12:7)." Paul pleaded with God three times to remove that Satanic attack. Could God have removed it? Yes. Why didn't He? His answer to Paul? Verse 9—"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

When do we find out how strong the Lord is? It's not when things are going well, but when we feel our own weakness. As a little child I knew my dad was stronger than me, but I didn't experience his strength when I saw him pick up my pencil. I could do that by myself. No, I experienced his strength when he did things I couldn't do, like pick up a one hundred pound sack of feed.

Paul says that the Lord let Satan attack him so that he might experience in greater measure the sufficiency of His grace.

It's the same way for us. We would never know the sufficiency of Christ's grace (His unmerited *help*) if we didn't feel the fury of Satan's attacks. Again, the Lord never initiates temptation, for He's holy. But He allows the Tempter to afflict us so that we might know more fully how sufficient divine grace is.

I'm thankful the Lord has given gifted individuals to His church to help us understand His Word. One of the great minds of the church was a Puritan pastor and theologian who wrote a book on temptation 350 years ago. Let's ponder a couple of quotations from John Owen taken from *Of Temptation* [in your notes you will see an abbreviation of the quotes; I'll give you the fuller context of each quotation here].

Let me call your attention first to the *second* quotation in your outline. In it Owen answers the question as to why God allows us to be tempted, suggesting that one reason is that we might know more

fully the sufficiency of His strength. As John Owen explains, "We know not the power and strength that God puts forth in our behalf, nor what is the sufficiency of his grace, until, comparing the temptation with our own weakness, it appears unto us. The efficacy of an antidote is found when poison hath been taken; and *the preciousness of medicines is made known by diseases. We shall never know what strength there is in grace if we know not what strength there is in temptation* [italics added]. We must be tried, that we may be made sensible of being preserved." [2]

Treximet is quite a medicine, but if I took it now I wouldn't know that because my head isn't presently hurting. But when I have a migraine and take it, *the preciousness of the medicine is made known*, to borrow from Owens. So even though God hates sin, He allows His children to be tempted so that we might experience the sufficiency of His antidote for sin, the grace of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now consider the first quote in your outline. In it Pastor Owen points out another reason why the Lord allows us to be tempted, not only so that we might get to know *Him* better, but also that we might know *ourselves* better. Owen explains, "For the general nature of tempting and temptation, it lies among things indifferent; to try, to experiment, to prove, to pierce a vessel, that the liquor that is in it may be known, is as much as is signified by it. Hence God is said sometime to tempt; and we are commanded as our duty to tempt, or try, or search ourselves, to know what is in us, and to pray that God would do so also. *So temptation is like a knife, that may either cut the meat or the throat of a man; it may be his food or his poison, his exercise or his destruction* [italics added]." [3]

Ponder that insight. Temptation can be our food or our poison depending on what we do with it. If we turn to Christ and experience His delivering power, it's our food, for we'll be stronger having resisted the temptation. Yet if we yield to the temptation, it's our poison, for we'll soon begin to experience the deadening effects of our sinful choice.

James says that as far as temptation goes, there are two options. First, if we endure temptation, we experience life. Let's think about the second...

## II. If we fall into temptation, we experience loss (13-15).

Listen to verses 13-15, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

Temptation is a revealer. When temptation enters our lives, it makes known to us the truth about two subjects.

**A. Temptation reveals what we believe about God (13).** James begins verse 13, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.'" That's interesting. James tells us what a person should *not* say when they are tempted. They should *not* say, "God is tempting me." The fact that James gives this instruction would indicate what? This. When we are tempted...

1. *Our tendency is to accuse God of tempting us.* James says, "Don't say that!" But we do, at least we often say it to ourselves.

Several years ago when meeting with a couple of men for a Bible study, we talked about their upcoming family vacation. They were going to the beach, and they were preparing themselves for the battle they knew was coming, the battle with lust. It's so easy for a man to say to himself...

--"God made me this way. He must want me to look at that woman. After all, He put her there in front of me." No, James insists. Do not say that God is tempting me. Do have a loose tongue? Do not say, "God made me this way. He must want me to share this juicy information He let me discover about my neighbor." Do you have extravagant tastes? Do not say, "God made me this way. He must

want me to buy that piece of merchandise they're advertising on QVC, even though I don't need it and will have to use credit to get it." No, don't say that for it's not true. Nor is this...

--"God put me in this situation. He must want me to fall." That's faulty theology, as verse 13 concludes, "For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone."

We learn about our view of God when we are tempted. We learn that we are prone to justify our sinful choices by believing things about God that are not true. What is the truth about God?

2. *The truth is, God gives only good gifts to us (see 1:16-18).* That's the very next point James will make in his letter when he writes in verses 16-18, "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

You say, "But if God is sovereign, which means He is in control of everything, that means He could prevent the temptation from coming into our lives. So if God doesn't prevent a particular temptation, does that mean He is the source of it?" No, James emphasizes. I find John MacArthur's analogy helpful, "He is aware of evil but untouched by it, like a sunbeam shining on a dump is untouched by the trash."<sup>[4]</sup>

How could God ever tempt us? He gives only good gifts to His children. He gave us the gift of new birth, didn't He? So we can be sure when we are tempted to do that which is *not* good, it is not coming from God, and therefore, it is not something we should attribute to Him.

**B. Temptation reveals what is inside of us (14-15).** "But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

Why do we sin? You say, "It's the devil. He tempts us." That's true, but that's not why we sin, not ultimately. Did you notice that James doesn't even mention the devil here in this teaching on temptation? We have an even bigger problem than the devil. He's not the reason we sin. It boils down to this. There's something inside of us, something James calls "our desires." "Each one is tempted when, by his own *evil desire*, he is dragged away and enticed."

That's our problem. I want *that*. I must have *that*. And when I'm tempted I find out what I'm wanting and thinking I must have.

Do you like to fish? A fisherman sees this principle in action, doesn't he? In fact, he depends on it. He throws that nice, shiny lure into the water, and begins to retrieve the line. Slowly, slowly, right past the large mouth bass. The bass eyes the enticing object, resists at first, and resists again, until finally, if the fish could speak we'd hear these words, "I *want* that! I *desire* that. I must *have* that! I'll do whatever it takes to *get* that." And so he grabs it. Then while he's being yanked across the water by the hook in his cheek, you can hear him moaning all the way to the fisherman's skillet, "Why did I do that?"<sup>[5]</sup>

James wants us to see the connection between one's desires and falling into temptation. Let's take a careful look at the process of temptation as explained here. The process involves five steps.

1. *Our desires entice us ("That looks good!").* It starts with our *epithumia*. That's the Greek word, our *lusts*, our desires. The term can refer to something evil or something good, but it's something we are *wanting*.

Men, the multi-billion dollar pornography industry understands this. So does the fashion world, ladies. They know that you have desires and their goal is to use your desires to entice you into buying their product.

By the way, please notice the phrase "*by his own evil desire.*" We're not the same. We are all sinners, yes, but we are individually susceptible to different expressions of sin, and that's because we possess our

own, tailor-made desires and lusts.

Let me be transparent. My wife Sherry and I have had many conversations about the differences between men and women, one of the big differences being how we're affected differently by physical attraction. Just last week as we were watching the news together, we heard about another sex scandal in which a well known man gave in to his passions and engaged in adultery. "I don't understand that," Sherry said as she shook her head in disbelief, with the unspoken question being, "What was that man thinking?!"

The fact is, most men I know are wired so that their desires are triggered by sight. They see skin and they are enticed. I've learned from talking to my precious wife that such is not the case for most women. For her, skin is skin. She sees the material in the dress the woman is wearing, the style of her hair, the color of her shoes.

By the way, does a woman have lusts? Sure, she does. James says *each one* is tempted when *his (or her) own* evil desires kick in. But her lusts are different than a man's. A man might be tempted to want a sexual thrill. A woman might be tempted to want a fashion thrill. But the bottom line is the same. They both *want* things, and their *wants*, their *desires* entice them.

John MacArthur rightly points out, "Just as one type of bait or lure works well with one kind of fish but not with others, so one person's passion is another person's repulsion. It is therefore his 'own' lusts that each believer should be most concerned about, because those are where he is vulnerable to temptation." [\[6\]](#)

Here's an example that affects both men and women. Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:9, "People who *want to get rich* fall into *temptation* and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction."

Do you know what your wants are, and can you identify where you are vulnerable? If you want to live a victorious life, you need to know yourself. And you need to be prepared to *not* do some things that others may be doing. And be aware of the fact that any self-examination is deficient, for I can think I don't struggle with a particular temptation and be dead wrong. Jeremiah said this in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

So step one, our desires entice us. We see something and think, "That looks good!"

2. *Our desires conceive ("I want that!")*. Verse 15 says, "Then, after desire has conceived." That indicates that before the sin action occurs, the unseen sinful desire occurs in the heart. When enticed, I make the assessment, "That looks good!" But once the desire conceives in my heart, I make the conclusion, "*I want that!*" Granted, I haven't done anything yet to get that (whatever *that* is), but I have determined I will. It's just a matter of time.

3. *Our desires give birth to sin ("Here's what I'll do to get that!")*. That's what verse 15 says. Our desires entice us ("That looks good!"). Then our desires conceive ("I want that!"). Then our desires give birth to sin, and so we conjure up a plan, "Here's what I'll do to get that!"

But it doesn't stop with the initial sin. James says next, "And sin, when it is full grown." That indicates that as more time passes...

4. *Our sin grows up and becomes a habit ("I must do that again and again!")*. One look at the computer screen isn't enough. "I must do that again...and again...and again!" And I do because sin grows, and develops, and matures. Until finally...

5. *Our sinful habit results in death ("I never realized what that would cost me!")*. Notice the double birth. First desire conceives and gives birth to sin. But sin too has offspring. When sin is full grown, it gives birth to death.

Remember the fish I described a moment ago? Why did he end up in the frying pan? The answer is, because he lived by his desires. If he could talk he would say to us, "I never realized what biting that free

lunch would cost me!"

Know this, my friend. You and I face the same decision every time we encounter temptation. Will we live by *our desires* or by *God's commands*? John Calvin said that the human heart is an idol factory. That's one of the hundreds of reasons why we need Christ. We lack the power to resist the attraction of those idols. We're enslaved to our wants. But Christ can give us a *new heart*. He went to the cross to pay the penalty for our idolatry, then He conquered death, and today He offers us His resurrection power so we can say no to sin and yes to God.

That's how temptation works, beloved. Our desires entice us. Then our desires conceive. Then our desires give birth to sin. Then our sin grows up and become a habit. And finally, our sinful habit results in death.

Implications: Let's apply what we've learned today...with three challenges.

1. *If we want to overcome sin, we must get serious about not only the sin itself but also with the temptation that led to it.*

Is there a particular sin that you need to overcome? Then get proactive. Learn from the Panama Canal. You need to get rid of the mosquitoes. That's so basic yet the neglect of this principle is one of the main reasons why many church-goers fail to experience victory over sinful habits. Listen to the Prince of the Puritans once again as John Owen offers this helpful explanation [italics added]:

"When they are overtaken with a sin they set themselves to repent of that sin, but do not consider the temptation that was the cause of it, to set themselves against that also to take care that they enter no more into it. Hence are they quickly again entangled by it, though they have the greatest detestation of the sin itself that can be expressed. *He that would indeed get the conquest over any sin must consider his temptations to it, and strike at that root; without deliverance from thence, he will not be healed.*" [\[7\]](#)

Do you know where you're vulnerable? It reminds me of the story of a man who came to work one morning with his arm in a cast. His boss asked, "What happened to you?" He replied, "I broke my arm in two places." To which the reply came, "Well then, it seems like you'd better stay out of those two places."

Do you struggle with sexual sin? Then cut off the source of the temptation. Stay off the internet. Don't listen to suggestive music or watch suggestive movies. Refuse to be alone with the opposite sex. Memorize Bible verses on purity. Begin thanking God for your spouse every day and look for ways to serve him or her.

Do you struggle with impulse buying? Then don't watch the shopping channel. Give your spouse control of the credit card. Fill your mind with Bible verses on contentment. The point is, if we want to overcome sin, we must get serious about not only the sin itself but also with the temptation that leads up to it.

2. *If we want to overcome sin, we need to change not only our sinful actions but our sinful desires as well.*

That's where the problem begins, with our *desires*, and that's where work is needed if we're going to experience victory over sin. Yet unfortunately, most of us pay very little attention to the condition of our heart. John Owen explains [italics added]:

"There are traitors in our hearts, ready to take part, to close, and side with every temptation, and to give up all to them; yea, to solicit and bribe temptations to do the work, as traitors incite an enemy. Do not flatter yourselves that you should hold out; *there are secret lusts that lie lurking in your hearts, which perhaps now stir not, which, as soon as any temptation befalls you, will rise, tumultuate, cry, disquiet, seduce, and never give over until they are either killed or satisfied.* He that promises himself that the frame

of his heart will be the same under a temptation as it is before will be woefully mistaken.”[\[8\]](#)

The fact is, when tempted we find out there are things in our hearts we did not know were there. Remember Peter? He said that although others might deny Christ, he never would do so. He underestimated the fear of man that lurked in his heart, like we often do.

Let me give an example of just how subtle our sinful desires can be. Take the sin of gluttony. A person wants food, so he eats and if he doesn't learn to control his desires, he will overeat. That's gluttony, right? Actually, that's only one form of gluttony. Here's another form that we easily justify. It's what C. S. Lewis called "the gluttony of delicacy" in his classic book, *Screwtape Letters*. The book is a series of letters from a demon named Screwtape to his junior demon in training named Wormwood about how to tempt a human being to sin. Here's what Screwtape told Wormwood in letter #17:

My dear Wormwood, The contemptuous way in which you spoke of gluttony as a means of catching souls, in your last letter, only shows your ignorance. One of the great achievements of the last hundred years has been to deaden the human conscience on that subject, so that by now you will hardly find a sermon preached or a conscience troubled about it in the whole length and breadth of Europe. This has largely been effected by concentrating all our efforts on gluttony of Delicacy, not gluttony of Excess. Your patient's mother, as I learn from the dossier and you might have learned from Glubose, is a good example. She would be astonished—one day, I hope, *will* be—to learn that her whole life is enslaved to this kind of sensuality, which is quite concealed from her by the fact that the quantities involved are small. But what do quantities matter, provided we can use a human belly and palate to produce querulousness, impatience, uncharitableness, and self-concern? Glubose has this old woman well in hand. She is a positive terror to hostesses and servants. She is always turning from what has been offered her to say with a demure little sign and a smile "Oh please, please... *all* I want is a cup of tea, weak but not too weak, and the teeniest weeniest bit of really crisp toast". You see? Because what she wants is smaller and less costly than what has been set before her, she never recognizes as gluttony her determination to get what she wants, however troublesome it may be to others. At the very moment of indulging her appetite she believes that she is practicing temperance. In a crowded restaurant she gives a little scream at the plate which some overworked waitress has set before her and says, "Oh, that's far, far too much! Take it away and bring me about a quarter of it". If challenged, she would say she was doing this to avoid waste; in reality she does it because the particular shade of delicacy to which we have enslaved her is offended by the sight of more food than she happens to want.

The real value of the quiet, unobtrusive work which Glubose has been doing for years on this old woman can be gauged by the way in which her belly now dominates her whole life. The woman is in what may be called the "All-I-want" state of mind. *All* she wants is a cup of tea properly made, or an egg properly boiled, or a slice of bread properly toasted. But she never finds any servant or any friend who can do these simple things "properly"—because her "properly" conceals an insatiable demand for the exact, and almost impossible, palatal pleasures which she imagines she remembers from the past; a past described by her as "the days when you could get good servants" but known to us as the days when her senses were more easily pleased and she had pleasures of other kinds which made her less dependent on those of the table. Meanwhile, the daily disappointment produces daily ill temper: cooks give notice and friendships are cooled. If ever the Enemy introduces into her mind a faint suspicion that she is too interested in food, Glubose counters it by suggesting to her that she doesn't mind what she eats herself but "does like to have things nice for her boy". In fact, of course, her greed has been one of the chief sources of his domestic discomfort for many years.[\[9\]](#)

I share that with you to illustrate the subtle and powerful effect of our desires on the sins that enslave us. The point again is, if we want to overcome sin, we need to change not only our sinful actions but our sinful desires as well. A final challenge...

3. *If we want to overcome sin, we need to live a dependent life.* That is, we need to learn to depend, not on ourselves, but moment by moment on Jesus Christ. To borrow the words of the hymn with which we'll conclude this service momentarily, we need to daily pray...

*I need Thee, O I need Thee*

*Every hour I need Thee!*

*O bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.*

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Likewise, 1 Peter 4:12 refers to the painful “trial” or “testing” of suffering.

[2] John Owen, *Of Temptation*.

[3] John Owen, *Of Temptation*.

[4] John MacArthur, *James*, p. 47.

[5] In verse 14, the Greek verb *exelko* is a hunting term that refers to a baited trap designed to lure an animal. The Greek *deleazo* is a fishing term, also with reference to the use of bait to attract an onlooking creature.

[6] John MacArthur, *James*, p. 51.

[7] John Owen, *Of Temptation*, chapter 4.

[8] John Owen, *Of Temptation*, chapter 3.

[9] C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, Harper-Collins, 1942.