

A Difficult Happiness James 1:12-16

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

For the past few months Pastor Sandy has been teaching through the Book of Philippians - He spoke often about the Joy we can experience in The Lord - even when times are hard - Even in the most difficult circumstances of life - we can find Joy in Christ.

Paul's teaching clearly shows us how to experience joy even when we are not enjoying times of happiness - For happiness depends far more on our circumstances - Happiness is an emotion state that comes when life is full and exciting and things are going our way.

Unlike joy, there seems to be many shortcuts to happiness - At least that is what the world will preach to you - The world always speaks of an easy happiness - one that is found in a case of beer - or at a ball game - or on a vacation - or maybe it is found at the Theater on a Friday night after a long week of work.

Certainly these activities can bring to our lives a temporary happiness - for a short time we forget about the world around us with all its conflicts and chaos and confusion - I call this an easy happiness - it is a cheap happiness - and because it is easy & relatively cheap, it is also often a short-lived happiness.

You are happy for a short time - then it quickly evaporates - As soon as you walk out of theater and start your car, the radio reminds you of the conflicts raging all around you.

As soon as the buzz from the alcohol wears off, you are left with the dull headache and the reminder that life's pressures have not gone away.

The vacations end - We lose as many of the ball games as we win - for Atlanta fans we usually lose far more than we win! - even with 25 point leads in the Super bowl - Oh, I'm sorry, did I cause some of you to lose your happiness!

How many of you remember Christmas morning when you were a child? - Did you ever experience what I call the **Christmas morning Blues**? - It usually hit me shortly after all the gifts were unwrapped and the surprises were over.

After weeks of anticipation and dreaming . . . it was suddenly over - For me the excitement started to build in October with the arrival of the Red Sears Christmas Catalog! - They called it the "**Wish Book**" - **(Photo)**

I would go through it and circle all of the amazing new toys that I just had to have! - I would then leave the Wish Book open to certain pages with circled items on them on the coffee table - I was just hoping that mom and dad would take notice.

Then on Christmas Eve I had another ritual - I would climb to the top of the tall pine tree in my front yard and wait patiently for my grand parents to arrive - Their car would always be loaded full of wrapped packages for my brother and sister and myself.

When I saw the car make that turn onto our street, I would begin my dissent to help them unload what seemed like one hundred presents!

Can you begin to see why Christmas morning was quickly followed by the Blues? - Can you see why the Happiness of that morning was so fleeting? - No experience this side of Heaven could meet such high expectations!

And that is the problem with most happy moments in this life - They don't last - They just can't meet up to our expectations! - Thus, they are soon followed by the Christmas Morning Blues - or the **Monday Morning Blues!**

Easy happiness is a fleeting thing - I am not suggesting that there is not a place for these momentary happy times in our lives - I am simply pointing out that this kind of happiness does not last.

But there is a more difficult happiness that we can experienced in life - It is much harder to come by - but it last - it stays with us in the face of a trying, chaotic world!

It hangs around on Monday morning as we face a new week - It stays with us even when Christmas Day has come and gone - It doesn't depend on winning games - or even vacation!

But, It doesn't come easy - and it doesn't flee with changing circumstances!

Whenever you see the word "Blessed" in your Bible, think of the word "Happiness" - because that is what the word means - There are many places in the Scripture where we are instructed on how to experience true happiness - but in the Bible it is never an easy happiness.

Jesus told us in the Beatitudes of 8 Experiences that would produce happiness in our lives - He spoke of:

- Spiritual poverty (truly understanding our need for a Savior)
- Mourning (over our Sin & failure)
- Be Meek rather than haughty
- Of hungering and thirsting for righteousness
- Having a Pure Heart
- Being a Peacemaker in the face of conflict
- Being Persecuted for doing Right

Jesus said these are the experiences that would truly make a person happy - Yet, None of these are easy - But all produce Happiness in my life - not a temporary one that quickly passes away when we are faced with real life - **This is happiness produced by real life!**

It won't fade away because this **"hard happiness"** is produced in the midst of real life - This happiness does not come from a diversion - it is not found in escaping life - It is a happiness that results from some of life's most challenging and painful moments.

Here in the Book of James, we have another “Blessed” statement - **1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.**

James declares that happiness will be found by the person who **“Endures Temptation”** - First, let’s acknowledge what he does not say:
 (1) James does not say, **“Blessed are those who avoid temptation”**
 (2) James does not say, **“Blessed are those who win an occasional victory over temptation”**

No, he speaks of a man or woman **“enduring through”** a long period of temptation - The blessing comes to the person who does not experience one victory - but to the person who faces the same temptation down time . . . after time . . . after time.

I can really appreciate the word James chooses to use: **“Endures”** - We would expect him to use the word: **“Victory”** - We like to think in terms of winning - and then having the temptation go away - We have defeated it - But, **James pictures a victory that comes from standing up to bully who won’t go away!**

It’s not victory . . . it’s Endurance - The bully doesn’t give up and leave - You learn to stand up to him and keep him at bay - You take the blows and you keep fighting - You don’t give in to his constant barrage of enticements.

I have found that victory over occasional temptation is relatively easy - But, battling a temptation that is relentless . . . day after day . . . is far more difficult.

There are certain temptations that never seem to stop - at least not as long as we are walking around in this body!

And I think we make great progress in battling it when we stop thinking it will soon go away - I believe we are stronger when we confront the fact that this temptation may never leave me - it is just part of my life - **and battling it - and enduring it - is just what God requires of me!**

When I stop thinking it will go away, then I stop being disappointed and surprised when it does not go away - There are certain battles that I just know I am going to face almost everyday!

I am no longer caught off guard by them - I have accepted them and thus I am more prepared to fight them - and in doing so I endure them.

Some of you need to face this fact - that battle with food is not going away - that battle with alcohol is here to stay - that war with lust and pornography will be there every time you turn on that computer - that struggle with your short temper is not leaving you tomorrow!

If we can just face this fact, it changes our thinking towards the temptation - We stop being surprise and disappointment when it hits us again - Now we are prepared and expecting it - **We are mentally prepared to hold off the bully again!**

Notice James says we will **“receive the crown of life”** for our endurance - God knows our struggle - Jesus has lived through our struggle - And when He sees us enduring and battling temptation over a long period of time **“He approves us!”** - God is excited - He congratulates us with the Crown of Life.

I don't believe this Crown of Life should be thought of as a literal crown - I think it is more of a reward - God rewards our endurance with a different kind of life - A life of victory - A life of freedom from the bondage and enslavement of sin - A life that Jesus called the **“abundant life”**.

It is a life that results from years of standing up to the Bully of Sin - It is a life full of God's blessing - It is a life that experiences real happiness - Not temporary happiness - but an enduring happiness that is the result of a blessed life.

It is a happiness that remains even when we realize the crazy, corrupt world around us is still crazy and corrupt - **It is a happiness that is accompanied by maturity and perspective** - It is a happiness that has proper expectations of this life - this Crown of Life is an abundant life full of God's Blessing and God's approval!

Now in the next few verses James is going to help us better understand the nature of temptation - and where it comes from - so that we are better equipped to endure it.

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

First, let's define "temptation" - The best definition I have ever read is this: **"Temptation is the offer of an ungodly solution to meet a God-given desire or need"**.

We all have God-given needs - Hunger is one - But meeting that need by eating 5 servings of pizza and toping it off with a 1,000 calorie dessert is probably crossing a line to an ungodly solution!

Many of us use food as an ungodly solution to loneliness or disappointment - God has placed within all of us the need for friendship and companionship - but a bag of chips and dip, and 8 hours of Netflix are probably not a Godly solutions.

Sexual desires and needs are God-given - but pornography and prostitution are ungodly ways of meeting those needs.

The temptation to meet these God-given needs with ungodly solutions will never come from God - James tells us that **"we should never blame God for an ungodly way out!"**

The Bible is clear, **"God does not tempt anyone with evil"** - Nor can God Himself be tempted **"by evil"** - Our God is a pure and Holy God - He can not be tempted by evil - nor can He experience evil.

This is why when Jesus took on our guilt and sin on that Roman Cross, God had to turn His back on Jesus - That's why Jesus cried out, **"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"** - For that brief period of time while Jesus paid our penalty for sin, God had to turn away from His own Son.

God's holiness would not allow Him to experience sin and corruption! - And because of God's holiness, He would not . . . and could not . . . tempt someone to do evil.

Have you ever blamed God for your battle with temptation? - I think many of us have!

After falling into sin we say things like, **“Why did God make me this way?”** - **“Why did God put these desires within me?”** - Isn't that a way of blaming God? - **“God, this is your fault that I want to do these things!”**

God did not make you that way - That sinful nature that you were born with made you that way - If you want to blame someone, blame Adam and Eve - but before you do that, ask yourself if you were in the Garden of Eden, would things have turned out any differently? - I don't think I would have!

But, if we don't blame God, we often find someone else to blame - Remember Adam blamed Eve - Eve blamed the Serpent - Many of us have blamed our spouse . . . or our parents . . . or our boss - We are really good at blaming others.

Sometimes we blame our circumstances - **“If I had grown up in a better family environment I would not be struggle with this!”** - **“If I had a better job, I would not be so angry when I come home at night”** - **“If I had more friends at church, I would not be going to the bars at night”**.

We humans are very good at the blame game - But James says we actually have no one to blame but ourselves - **14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.**

The Bottom Line when it comes to my weakness towards temptation is that **“I am the problem”** - It is my own desires that get me into trouble - It is not God - It is not my spouse - It is not circumstances - NO - The problem is ME!

Down deep inside I desire the wrong things - Those desires draw me away from God and the godly things He has for me - My sinful desires entice me to do things I should not do - **“I have found the enemy and the enemy is me!”**

Please understand that just because I have a sinful desire within me, that does not mean I have to follow it - or give in to it - I have a choice - I always have a choice!

Do not believe anyone - be it doctor or teacher - be it parent or pastor - who tells you otherwise - None of us has to give in to our sinful desires - We always have a choice.

Are those desires within me strong? - Absolutely! - And the more I surrender to them, the more powerful they become - Eventually any desire can become an action - any action can become a habit - and any habit can become an addiction - or what the Bible would call “**a strong hold**” in our lives.

But we never get to a place where we have no choice - Even our sinful strong-holds can be pulled down with the power of Christ!

I love this Quote from Commentator William Barclay: **Desire is something which can be nourished or stifled. A man can control and even, by the grace of God, eliminate it if he deals with it at once. But he can allow his thoughts to follow certain tracks, and his steps to take him into certain places, and his eyes to linger on certain things; and so foment desire.**

Or he can so hand himself over to Christ and be so engaged on good things that there is no time or place left for evil desire. It is idle hands for which Satan finds mischief to do; it is the unexercised mind and the uncommitted heart which are vulnerable. If a man encourages desire long enough, there is an inevitable consequence. Desire becomes action!

I love this thought that “**desire can be nourished or stifled**” - We can feed that lustful desire we feel with television shows and youtube video's - or we stifle that desire by starving it out - We can best stifle evil desires by keeping our minds focussed on Godly things!

Yes, we are most vulnerable to our own evil desires when our lives are idle and unfocussed!

I have found that if I stay busy doing those things God has ordained for me to do, - **(working my job, serving others, loving my wife and raising my children)** - there is far less time to focus on the sinful desires that dwell within me!

Barclay calls it, **“the unexercised mind and the uncommitted heart which are vulnerable”** - **Are you exercising your mind with Godly pursuits? - Have you committed your heart to following & obeying the Lord Jesus?** - This is the secret to Victory over your evil desires! - This is how you stand up to that bully within you!

The real wonder of this text is that it forces each person to take responsibility for his own sin! - I have to stop blaming God - or my wife - or my situation - or my family history - This passage reminds me that I need only look in the mirror to find my biggest enemy when it comes to temptation!

15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

In contrast to **“Endurance” which leads to “a blessed life”**, James now shows us where **“uncontrolled desire leads”** - It first gives birth to sin - and when sin fully develops and matures, it brings death - this is the opposite of God’s promise of a **“blessed, happy life”**.

And isn’t this just the opposite of what Satan try to sell us when it comes to sin - **Satan and Hollywood advertisers both try to sell us on the idea that giving in to your desires is what will make you happy!** - just go ahead and do those things that your flesh craves for - this is where happiness is found.

Sure, momentary pleasure is found there - but not real happiness - The truth is that sin will only make your life more difficult - it will only make your life more complicated - it will only bring pain and confusion to your life.

If you do not stifle your ungodly desires, they will always lead you to sin - sin that is not turned from, and repented of, will always metastasize into death.

James speaks of sin becoming “**full-grown**” - Have you ever thought about the fact that sin grows? - Yes, it is like kudzu.

If Kudzu is not cut down and killed, it will spread and consume all that it comes in contact with - it will overtake your life just as it has overtaken some of the trees beside our parking lot (**PHOTO**).

If that kudzu is not killed and controlled, eventually those pine trees will die - the life in those trees will be strangled by the ever-consuming vine!

In the same way, things in your life will be strangled and destroyed by the uncontrolled sin that is allowed to grow and mature:

- **Marriages will die (as selfish flourishes)**
- **Friendships will die (as gossip abounds)**
- **Job opportunities will die (as irresponsibility grows)**
- **Ministry callings will die (as wrong motives creep in)**
- **Healthy sex lives will die (as lustful desire go unchallenged)**
- **Physical abilities die (as laziness takes over)**
- **Positive outlooks will die (as negativity attitudes takes over)**
- **Spiritual gifts will die (as worldly attractions take control of my heart)**
- **If Satan has his way long enough, he will take your very life**

When sin is allow to grow and flourish, it always kills - We need to heed the the final words of the Holy Spirit on this topic - In verse 16 we read, **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**

The most powerful tool of our enemy is his ability to deceive! - All though the Bible God warns us of the dangers of sin - He warns us of the intent of Satan: “**to kill, to steal and to destroy**” - He warns us that sin always leads to the death of something!

Yet, we still allow the world, and Satan, and our own desires, to deceive us - We still believe that we will be the exception - Yes, that what has happened to my neighbor, but it won't happen to me - Yes, sin destroyed that family, but it won't destroy mine!

How foolish can we be? - How gullible can we be? - How deceived can we be?

As I have gotten older, I have begun to believe that most of us are deceived simply because deep down inside we want to be - Deep down inside we want the temporary pleasure - the short-term high - more than we want to pay the price it will take to endure the temptation.

In other words, we want the cheap, temporary happiness more than we want the difficult happiness that last a life time - Yes, we buy into the deception simply because the deception is easier!

Who wants endurance when capitulation demands less of us! - **Why fight the bully when giving him what he wants is far less painful and frightening!** - It is much easier just to give in than it is to fight!

But the blessings comes through the fighting - The happiness comes by enduring - We must fight for the freedom from sin - As Winston Churchill so famously said, **“Wars are not won by evacuation!”**

They must be fought - day by day - moment by moment - temptation by temptation - Don't stop fighting!

I know it is hard - I know you have fallen many times - but keep getting up - keep fighting - keep battling that desire that daily arises from within you.

Victory is not measured by the end of temptation - No, victory is measured by the tenacity & determination with which we stand up against temptation.

The bully is big and strong and intimidating - But, remember the words of Paul: **“Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh”**.



