# James, Lesson #2 The Pressure of Temptation

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## James 1.13 - 18

### ACCOUNTABILITY

What three fellowships do we have scheduled for the next three months? Who will invite every member? Who will help invite every prospect? Who will help plan the party?

### OPEN

Let’s each share your name and one thing you love about being a Christian.

### DIG

1. James 1.13. Ever known anyone who blamed God when he was tempted? Who has a story?

Blaming God is, quite literally, the oldest sin in the book. It was the sin of Adam when he said, “This woman that you gave me. . .” (Genesis 3.12) It was the sin of Abraham in Genesis 20.13, “And when God made me wander from my Father’s household. . .” God made me wander. I wouldn’t have done it (lie about Sarah being his sister) if God would have left me alone. It is really God’s fault.

I knew a man (a former preacher) who was in the middle of an affair. He was living with a woman who was not his wife—and still married. We call it an affair. God calls it adultery. When confronted, his response was classic, “I prayed and asked God to take these feelings away. He didn’t. It is really God’s fault that I am living in sin.” He didn’t actually say that last sentence out loud. That is my explanation of the first two sentences.

James clears this up for us: “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.” James 1:13-15 (NIV) — Jerry Bridges. The Pursuit of Holiness (p. 129). Kindle Edition. — Josh Hunt. (2013). Following God.

1. Why the temptation to blame God?

Barbara, five, had disobeyed me and was sent to her room. After a few minutes, I went in to talk with her about what she had done. Teary-eyed, she asked, “Why do we do wrong things, Mommy?”

“Sometimes the Devil tells us to do something wrong, and we listen to him,” I said. “We need to listen to God instead.”

“But God doesn’t talk loud enough!” she wailed. —Jo M. Guerrero, Christian Reader (September–October 1996) / Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). 1001 illustrations that connect (p. 453). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

1. Why is it stupid to blame God?

The reason here is drawn from the unchangeable holiness of God; he cannot in any way be tempted into evil. Some read it actively—”he is not the tempter of evil”; but this would be a repetition of the last clause. Some translate it as, “God is not the tempter of evil people but only of the good, through afflictions”; but this does not agree with the original phrase, for it does not refer to evil people, but simply, without an article, to evil things. To sum up, God cannot by any thing external or internal be drawn into any evil. — Manton, T. (1995). James. Crossway Classic Commentaries (Jas 1:13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

1. What bad things happen when we blame God?

A young woman came to Christ in a marvelous way. Her conversion was, from a human perspective, partly due to the fact that she had come to a very low place in her marriage, making her intensely aware of her spiritual need. But having met Christ in her extremity, her life immediately took on an attractive buoyancy. She was truly a new person—and it was beautiful to behold. Sadly, her troubled husband did not follow suit as she had so dearly hoped. After a year of continuing marital disappointment, she sought help from a counselor. Instead of receiving help, she became the victim of a professional seduction. It began with extravagant sympathy, compliments about her attractiveness (ostensibly to shore up her fractured ego), then subtly suggestive comments. The next appointment, she dressed and scented herself with the palpitating self-attention of a first date. She was seduced, and there followed the inevitable history of liaisons and further damage to her fragile self-esteem.

When she came to my wife and me, she was a ruined person seething with bitterness and rage. To be sure, she was a victim of an unprincipled male in professional sheep’s clothing, but she was also a victim of self. But amazingly it was neither to him nor herself that she placed ultimate blame. Rather, she said through clenched teeth, “I asked God to lead me to the right person, and he led me to this man. It is God’s fault! He is to blame for what happened!”

This was the beginning of years of bitterness and estrangement from her Lord, ironically the only one who loved her with an everlasting love. Most stories like this do not end well. Happily, I can say in this case she did repent, and after more than a decade her husband came to Christ. All this after the needless miseries of those terrible years! — Hughes, R. K. (1991). James: faith that works. Preaching the Word (pp. 43–44). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

1. What good things come to those who resist the temptation to blame and take responsibility for their lives?

It’s so hard to take responsibility for our own acts. Adam tries to blame God, who put the woman there, and Eve, who gave him the fruit. And Eve tries to blame the serpent (v. 13). Sin not only alienated Adam from God: it introduced hostility into his relationship with Eve as well! The only way we can keep our relationship with God and others pure is to accept responsibility for our sins and failures, and rely on forgiving love to heal the damage done. — Richards, L. O. (1991). The Bible reader’s companion (electronic ed., p. 27). Wheaton: Victor Books.

1. Besides God, who else do we blame for our troubles?

Let’s not kid ourselves. When we deliberately choose not to stay positive and deny joy a place in our lives, we’ll usually gravitate in one of two directions, sometimes both—the direction of blame or self-pity. . . .

The aggressive attitude reacts to circumstances with blame. We blame ourselves or someone else, or God, or if we can’t find a tangible scapegoat, we blame “fate.” What an absolute waste! When we blame ourselves, we multiply our guilt, we rivet ourselves to the past (another “dangling” unchangeable), and we decrease our already low self-esteem. If we choose to blame God, we cut off our single source of power. Doubt replaces trust, and we put down roots of bitterness that can make us cynical. If we blame others, we enlarge the distance between us and them. . . .We settle for something much less than God ever intended. And on top of all that, we do not find relief! — Strengthening Your Grip / Swindoll, C. R. (2007). Wisdom for the way: wise words for busy people. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1. How does God think differently about sin than we do?

But it reminded me of another time when a cockroach the size of a bird... O.K., maybe not quite the size of a bird. (He has grown larger each time I have told this story.) Anyway, a big ugly cockroach was hang-gliding off the wall above our bed onto the soft landing of the pillow that lay between us. For some reason, God awakened my wife just in time to see this event. She woke up at 3:00 a.m., looked up on the wall just in time to see this creature begin his descent and then enter into a staring contest with my wife. The cockroach won.

All of these occasions remind me of a simple truth about God. He hates sin as much as women hate tarantulas, cockroaches and snakes. Occasionally we get to feeling like God should lighten up, not be so hard on sin, but he never will. (Someone actually said that to me once: Josh, your preaching is pretty good, but you are just too hard on sin.) Asking God to ignore sin would be like asking a woman to sleep with a cockroach or dance with a tarantula.

There was a song popular when I was in High School, “I don’t like spiders and snakes.” It was a ballad of sorts that told of a guy who thought it was a cute way to flirt with the girls to take her out then slip a spider or snake (hence the name of the song) down her blouse. It was never a very effective way of getting girls.

And God is deadly serious about sin. It is never a laughing matter. It is never “no big deal.” He never says, “Boys will be boys.”

God is absolutely righteous in all of his dealings. He cannot sin and is not even tempted by sin (James 1:13). — Josh Hunt. (2013). The God We Enjoy.

1. What are we tempted by? Let’s make a list on the board.

If I’m really honest with you, there are nights after the lights go out and the noise in my life dissipates that I lie there in bed acutely aware of an inner emptiness. And while I have moments and even days of what seem to be deep satisfaction or soothing peace, those feelings evaporate quickly. I run and run after them, but they seem as fleeting as a disappearing sun, and then once again that gnawing inner emptiness is back.

Have you felt it too—that unquenchable longing that tempts you to sacrifice everything you have and everything you are to be a little more beautiful, a little richer, a little more powerful and successful, a little more secure or in control, a little more loved—all in this futile attempt to heal the inner emptiness? It’s so easy to fall into the trap of “if only”:

* If I owned this, I would feel worthy.
* If I achieved that, I would feel significant.
* If I had what they have, I would be content.
* If I made a little more money, I would finally be satisfied.
* If I got that promotion, I would feel valued.
* If I could only get that person to love me, I would have security.

But sooner or later we discover the heartbreaking truth that no matter how beautiful or rich or powerful we become, it’s never enough.

C. S. Lewis wrote,

Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise.

We can sacrifice everything for these promises, but they will just leave us wanting, longing, used, and empty. We’ll never find what we need in an idol.

Unfortunately, that doesn’t stop us from trying. — Wilson, P. (2012). Empty promises: the truth about you, your desires, and the lies you’re believing. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1. Verse 14. Is desire a bad thing?

Christianity is often presented as essentially the transfer of a body of knowledge. We learn about where the Philistines were from, and how much a drachma would be worth today, and all sorts of things about the original Greek. The information presented could not seem more irrelevant to our deepest desires.

Then there are the systems aimed at getting our behavior in line, one way or another. Regardless of where you go to church, there is nearly always an unspoken list of what you shouldn’t do (tailored to your denomination and culture, but typically rather long) and a list of what you may do (usually much shorter-mostly religious activity that seems totally unrelated to our deepest desires and leaves us only exhausted).

And this, we are told, is the good news. Know the right thing; do the right thing. This is life? When it doesn’t strike us as something to get excited about, we feel we must not be spiritual enough. Perhaps once we have kept the list long enough, we will understand.

We don’t need more facts, and we certainly don’t need more things to do. We need Life, and we’ve been looking for it ever since we lost Paradise. Jesus appeals to our desire because he came to speak to it. When we abandon desire, we no longer hear or understand what he is saying. But we have returned to the message of the synagogue; we are preaching the law. And desire is the enemy. After all, desire is the single major hindrance to the goal-getting us in line. We are told to kill desire and call it sanctification. Or as Jesus put it to the Pharisees, “You load people down with rules and regulations, nearly breaking their backs, but never lift even a finger to help” (Luke 11:46 The Message). As a result, Willard says, “The souls of human beings are left to shrivel and die on the plains of life because they are not introduced into the environment for which they were made.”  — [**Desire: The Journey We Must Take to Find the Life God Offers**](https://kindle.amazon.com/work/desire-journey-must-offers-ebook/B000SYIL8Q/B001E95MT0) by John Eldredge

1. Would we all be more godly (and happy) if we could just kill our desires?

Desire is powerful. One of the most powerful forces in our lives.

At least, it was meant to be.

But we’re not quite sure how we feel about desire, really. Or what to do with it. Desire feels ... messy. You see those books out there promising you, “The life you dream of is yours to have! Follow your desire!” It sounds good. But we’ve all seen people try it and fail. They leap to a new career, or open themselves up to intimacy, or start up a project they’ve always dreamed about. And it comes crashing down, they come limping home. Seems like the only guy who can pull it off is the author of the book making all the promises. And we wonder, “Is it worth risking, opening myself up to my desires?”

Then you’ve got the other camp, often coming from well-intended church folk who warn, “Don’t even think about it. Desire is only going to get you into trouble.” And, there’s reason to believe them. We’ve seen the affairs, the addictions, the financial ruin and all the other heartache brought on by someone “following their desire.” It looks utterly reasonable to simply kill desire. And call it sanctification. The path of maturity. — [**Desire: The Journey We Must Take to Find the Life God Offers**](https://kindle.amazon.com/work/desire-journey-must-offers-ebook/B000SYIL8Q/B001E95MT0) by John Eldredge

1. Why is it important that we cultivate good desires?

Both camps are right, in a way. And they’re both wrong. Desire can lead us to the life we were meant to live. And, desire can get us into a heap of trouble, too. Or just profound disappointment. Desire is a lot like love in that way. When it’s good, it’s really good. And when it’s bad, it’s really bad. Many people fear love for that very reason. Just as they fear desire. But a life without love can hardly be called living. The same holds true when we abandon our heart’s deep desires. Instead of guarding the wellspring of life within us, we cap it with a cement plug and try to get on with life.

It doesn’t really work. You end up losing heart. And that is an awful place to find yourself.

I believe desire is a gift from God. After all, the Psalms say things like, “May he give you the desire of your heart,” (20:4) and, “Praise the Lord, 0 my soul ... who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (103:5), and “You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (145:16). Clearly, God is not opposed to desire. Far from it. He gave us a heart that desires deeply, and he uses those desires to draw us to himself, and to the life he created us to live.

What we need to learn is how to listen to desire, how to interpret it. Desire is speaking to us, all the time. It is one of the deepest voices of the heart. A voice many of us have never been taught to understand. Desire can lead us to the life we were meant to live. It can shape our hopes and dreams, fill them with passion and determination. It can sustain us in times of distress and suffering, too. It can lead us to God. If we will listen closely. — [**Desire: The Journey We Must Take to Find the Life God Offers**](https://kindle.amazon.com/work/desire-journey-must-offers-ebook/B000SYIL8Q/B001E95MT0) by John Eldredge

1. How important is it to our Christian maturity that we cultivate right desires? Does Christian maturity have much to do with having the right desires?

This may come as a surprise to you: Christianity is not an invitation to become a moral person. It is not a program for getting us in line or for reforming society. It has a powerful effect upon our lives, but when transformation comes, it is always the aftereffect of something else, something at the level of our hearts. At its core, Christianity begins with an invitation to desire. Look again at the way Jesus relates to people. As he did with the fellow at the Sheep Gate, he is continually taking them into their hearts, to their deepest desires.

The story of the two blind men on the road to Jericho repeats the theme. Jesus is passing by the spot where these two men have sat looking for a handout for who knows how long. They learn that Jesus is going by, and they cry out for him. Though the crowd tries to shut them up, they succeed in shouting over the ruckus and capturing the Master’s attention. The parade stops. Jesus steps to the side of the road, and standing there before him are two men, nothing clearer than the fact that they are blind. “What do you want me to do for you?” Again the question. Again the obvious that must not be so obvious after all. — Eldredge, J. (2008). The sacred romance, desire, waking the dead. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1. Affairs are oh too common. They happen to godly people that we think they would never happen to. How can we make sure it doesn’t happen to us?

There is a tendency for some to see how close to the flame they can get and not get burned. This is not smart. A little flirting. A little touching. A little lingering. A little too personal of a conversation. A little too much self-disclosure. A little charge of sexual energy. Just a little. The Bible recommends the opposite approach. Rather than getting close to the flame, flee. “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:22 (NIV)

The practical application of this is the Andy Stanley rule: “I don’t share a meal with a woman. I don’t get in a car with a woman. I don’t counsel a woman. I am never alone with a woman at any time for any reason.” — Josh Hunt. (2013). Obedience.

1. Matthew 5.29. What did Jesus teach about dealing with temptation?

This is why, by the way, if you choose to follow God’s standards for sexual purity, it is not a bad idea to build a hedge around the law. Building a hedge around the law can get you in trouble at times. It is what the Pharisees were famous for and one of the things that got them in trouble. If you build a hedge, you need to always keep clear that it is a hedge and not the law.

Still, I think building a hedge around the law is a good idea in this case. I recommend we all follow Andy Stanley on this one, “I don’t share a meal with a woman alone. I don’t get in a car with a woman alone. I don’t counsel a woman alone. I am never alone with a woman at any time for any reason. I don’t ever talk about anything personal with a woman.” Now, does the Bible prohibit you from having a meal with a woman? Not exactly. It is actually far more extreme than that. Jesus said, “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” Matthew 5:29-30 (NIV) Trust me, sharing a meal with a woman can cause you to sin. Trust me; I have seen it happen more than once. Get a hedge.

Andy may be following Billy Graham on this. In Just As I Am, Billy Graham says, “I did not travel, meet, or eat alone with a woman other than my wife.”

Scholars would agree that gouging out your eye and cutting off your hand is a hyperbole—an exaggeration to make a point. The point is this: take every extreme measure to avoid sexual immorality. It is a drug that will get you. It is a snake that will bite you. — Josh Hunt. (2013). Obedience.

1. Verse 15. Sin always promises pleasure. What does it bring?

Steve Irwin, the “Crocodile Hunter,” was killed September 4, 2006, while filming wildlife along the Great Barrier Reef. Irwin was best known for the wildly popular, wildly dangerous antics on Crocodile Hunter, his long-running TV program. During the fourteen years the documentary was on, Irwin survived countless snakebites, was chased up a tree by a deadly komodo dragon, was spat on by a red spitting cobra, and was pulled into the water by a massive crocodile. At the time of his death, he was in the Great Barrier Reef to film a documentary on the ocean’s deadliest creatures.

One of the ocean’s least harmful creatures killed Irwin. Due to poor weather, his team had stopped filming for the “Ocean’s Deadliest” series, so Irwin decided to do some work for a children’s show that was to be hosted by his eight-year-old daughter, Bindi.

While swimming with his cameraman, Irwin came across a five-foot-wide stingray and began to follow it. Stingrays are often called the “pussycats of the sea” because of their docile nature. They can be hand-fed by tourists on excursions from cruise liners. Irwin reportedly got a little too close to the animal, which thrust its poisonous, barbed tail upward in a defensive reflex. The ten-inch, serrated barb went into Irwin’s chest and pierced his heart.

Irwin was only the seventeenth person in the world known to have been killed by a stingray. If the barb had penetrated elsewhere on his body, he would have easily survived. He was rushed to the nearest island and picked up by a medical helicopter, but he died long before reaching the hospital. —AnimalPlanet.com (September 7, 2006) / Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). 1001 illustrations that connect (pp. 238–239). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

1. What consequences to people pay for falling to sexual temptation?

Following is an incomplete list of what you have in store after your immorality is found out

Your mate will experience the anguish of betrayal, shame, rejection, heartache, and loneliness. No amount of repentance will soften those blows.

Your mate can never again say that you are a model of fidelity. Suspicion will rob her or him of trust.

Your escapade(s) will introduce to your life and your mate’s life the very real probability of a sexually transmitted disease.

The total devastation your sinful actions will bring to your children is immeasurable. Their growth, innocence, trust, and healthy outlook on life will be severely and permanently damaged.

The heartache you will cause your parents, your family, and your peers is indescribable.

The embarrassment of facing other Christians, who once appreciated you, respected you, and trusted you, will be overwhelming.

If you are engaged in the Lord’s work, you will suffer the immediate loss of your job and the support of those with whom you worked. The dark shadow will accompany you everywhere . . . and forever. Forgiveness won’t erase it.

Your fall will give others license to do the same.

The inner peace you enjoyed will be gone.

You will never be able to erase the fall from your (or others’) mind. This will remain indelibly etched on your life’s record, regardless of your later return to your senses.

The name of Jesus Christ, whom you once honored, will be tarnished, giving the enemies of faith further reason to sneer and jeer. — Swindoll, C. R. (2005). Day by day. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1. Why are sexual sins more damaging than others? Why are they more difficult to get over?

In Praying God’s Word, God directed me to address the powerful yoke of sexually oriented bondage. I’d like to share a slice of something He revealed to me as I researched the reasons why sexual strongholds are so potent and satanically effective.

Satan desires to undermine the sanctifying work of Christ. He knows that all believers have been “set apart” from the unclean to the clean, and from the unholy to the holy. He also knows that when believers act like the sanctified people they are, God is released to do powerful wonders among them (Josh. 3:5). No purity—no power. Purity—boundless power. Satan is a fool but he is no dummy.

Satan knows the overwhelming effects of sexual sin. We must resist “ranking” sin since every sin causes us to miss the mark and require grace. All sin is equal in the sense of eternal ramifications, but not all sin is equal in its earthly ramifications. Satan knows that sexual sin is unique in its attack and impact on the body of the individual believer….Since the Spirit of Christ now dwells in the temple of believers’ bodies, getting a Christian engaged in sexual sin is the closest Satan can come to personally assaulting Christ. That ought to make us mad enough to be determined to live victoriously. Sins against the body also have a way of sticking to us and making us feel like we are that sin rather than the fact that we’ve committed that sin.1

Stealing is a sin, yet if I stole one hundred dollars and then changed my mind, dumping the money in a garbage bin, in some respects I could walk away without taking the “sin” with me. On the other hand, if I commit sexual sin, I have a much harder time dumping the garbage. Why? Because spiritually speaking, it got “on” me somehow. The sin was against my own body and wields a much stronger staying power. — Moore, B. (2002). When godly people do ungodly things: finding authentic restoration in the age of seduction. Nashville: B&H.

1. What advice would you give to someone who had sinned sexually and wanted to come back to God?

Sexual sin can be dumped, all right, but not in a garbage bin. Only Christ through the power of His cross can peel off the adhesive effects of sexual sin. The sin against the body somewhat resembles the outer layer of skin on a burn victim. It must be peeled off, and fresh new skin must be allowed to grow. Satan cannot get inside a believer, but sexual seduction is one of the most powerful ways the fires of hell can burn the outside of a believer. The sin is forgiven the moment the person repents, but healing from the ramifications can take longer.

God desires more than anything to restore sexual purity to those who have been sexually seduced, but it takes time to peel away the damaged character. The pain that can be involved in the process demands much trust in a good and loving God.

Beloved, trusting God is utterly essential if we are going to fortify our lives. Through the chapters of this book and the coinciding study of Scripture, we’re going to discover that our safety resides in withholding absolutely nothing in us or about us from God. — Moore, B. (2002). When godly people do ungodly things: finding authentic restoration in the age of seduction. Nashville: B&H.

1. What do we learn about temptation form Genesis 4.7?

We have an attraction to sin that is as strong as the animal sexual attraction. Let it in, and it develops a life of its own that is driven, dangerous, and destructive. It may seem harmless at first. We justify “one time” of shading the truth, or masturbating, or flirting with a married man, or watching the beginning of an occult movie. But when we tell ourselves, “Just this once, and I’ll do better tomorrow,” we have given the enemy a foothold.

We need to fear sin not only because it breaks the heart of God but also because it is addictive. God likens sin to a crouching beast ready to spring. God comes to Cain when he is angry with his brother and tells him if he does what is right, he will be accepted, but if he does not, “sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:7).

When Cain would not repent of his jealousy, it grew, and he murdered his brother.

When we do not flee temptation but flirt with it, we’ve opened the door to the beast. Then the beast comes in and we cry out with Paul : “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15). — Brestin, D. (2012). Idol lies: facing the truth about our deepest desires. Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing.

1. 2 Timothy 2.22. What do we learn about dealing with temptation from this verse?

Olivia, five, and her best friend, Claire, were in a nativity play at school. Claire was playing Mary, and Olivia was an angel. Before the show, a young boy went around the dressing room saying, “I’m a sheep; what are you?” Each child responded politely, including Olivia, who proudly declared that she was an angel.

The boy then turned to Claire and repeated the question to her: “I’m a sheep; what are you?”

Claire simply said, “I’m Mary.”

Realizing Claire was a lead character, the boy tried to justify his own role. “It’s hard being a sheep, you know,” he said.

“Yes,” said Claire innocently, “but it’s also hard being a virgin.” —Jeremy M. Basset, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma / Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). 1001 illustrations that connect (p. 377). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

1. What do you want to recall from today’s conversation?
2. How can we support one another in prayer this week?