

This chapter began by telling us that trials should be met joyfully because we know they test our faith and help to mature us. We are encouraged to ask for wisdom that God will generously give to us. But then we are warned not to doubt God, because God answers the prayer of faith. The humble are to rejoice in their exaltation and the rich in their humble service as these are signs that they are in the kingdom of God, which is so different from this world.

*<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

James 1:12 Blessed is sometimes translated as fortunate or happy. We use it casually such as, "I was blessed with a good day." But in many cases the word points to future glory when Christ returns. That is the case here. That kind of blessed is beyond our ability to imagine. If I were to try to translate it into our vernacular it would be something like, "O such a very great future awaits the one who faithfully perseveres through trials." The Scriptures took the Greek word translated as "blessed" and made it even more meaningful than was used in the Greek culture of the day. The Greeks used it for a person who has so much wealth that they have no concern about daily necessities. The Bible takes the word from the physical and temporal plain to a spiritual eternal condition. We can see that is the case here because the result is receiving the crown of life. I do not know what the crown is, but I know it includes eternal life in the presence of our Savior in His glory, and that to be truly blessed beyond our present comprehension.

Steadfast is the verb form (*hupomeno*) of that noun we have already seen in verses 3 and 4, *hupomone*. It is to bear up under a burden until the destination is reached or goal accomplished. In this case it is to endure the trials of this life until we see our Savior. In connection with the previous verses, it means to maintain our faith in God and His goodness through the trying circumstances of life. J. I. Packer wrote, "*God uses chronic pain and weakness, along with other afflictions, as His chisel for sculpting our lives. Felt weakness deepens dependence on Christ for strength each day. The weaker we feel, the harder we lean. The harder we lean, the stronger we grow spiritually, even while our bodies waste away. To live with your thorn uncomplainingly- that is sweet, patient, and free in heart to help others, even though every day you feel weak – is true sanctification. It is true healing for the spirit. It is a supreme victory of grace.*"

The one who gives-in to doubt has failed to endure and cannot expect a reward. The exaltation of the lowly and the humbling of the rich is to receive trials with faith recognizing how brief our lives are and the glory that lies ahead. It is to stand on the 7000 plus promises of God to us in His Word.

The reward of the crown of life awaits all who love God and endure in their faith. That is a promise of God that we can look forward to with certainty if we remain steadfast. Jesus told the church in Smyrna, "**Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.**" Revelation 2:10 He warned the church of Philadelphia, "**Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.**" Revelation 3:11 Paul told the Corinthians that unlike the athletes of his day that labor for a fading wreath, we are laboring for an imperishable crown (1 Corinthians 9:25<sup>i</sup>). Peter told the elders that when the Chief Shepherd appears that they would receive a crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4<sup>ii</sup>).

Just what is that crown of life? I do not think we can comprehend it now. Jesus said He is *the* life (John 14:6<sup>iii</sup>). To know Him is eternal life (John 17:3<sup>iv</sup>). Is it for all who are in heaven because Jesus helps us all persevere? Is it the glory Adam and Eve were clothed in before the fall? I do not know the answer, but I know that any kind of imperishable crown must be beyond anything we could hope for in this world. Whatever you dream of obtaining in this life is nothing compared to the crown of life!

Jesus gave us salvation, and we could all say that alone is more than enough. But He is a generous God who will reward faithfulness with His very own joy (Matthew 25:21<sup>v</sup>; John 17:13<sup>vi</sup>). We all long to hear Him say, “*Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord.*” How joyful is Jesus? That is ultimate joy! Hold fast brothers and sisters because that reward is for all who love Him. It is promised to those who love Him! And if you love Him, you will remain faithful to Him.

*<sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.* James 1:13 What might keep us from remaining steadfast under trial? Temptations are lying promises. While Jesus promises the crown of life, temptations promise brief satisfaction. You may think you have satisfaction from this world for a fleeting moment, but then you will find it is gone.

James cautions us to realize that temptations do not come from God. God is holy. God is not tempted because godliness is a descriptive word we use referring to His very nature. Evil is the opposite of His nature. That which is holy abhors evil (1 John 1:5<sup>vii</sup>). As His children, we should also (Romans 12:9<sup>viii</sup>). Our all-knowing God cannot fall for the lie temptations present. He knows what results in evil and despises all its various forms. He not only does not tempt us, but He delivers us from evil (Matthew 6:13<sup>ix</sup>). We should never say that God is tempting us. He does test us to strengthen us, but temptations come out of our own desires in our fallen nature (Galatians 5:19-21<sup>x</sup>). God does not tempt but He does test us. In fact, when we are tempted by our desires, He always provides a way to escape (1 Corinthians 10:13<sup>xi</sup>).

Sin is the self-centered virus in our soul that we inherited from Adam (Romans 5:12<sup>xii</sup>). Because we were so severely infected, we had to put the old nature to death and be raised a new person in Christ (Romans 6:2-4<sup>xiii</sup>). But we all find that the zombie that was our sin sick soul keeps trying to resurrect. That is not something God causes. It is the sin virus trying to infect our new nature and overtake it. The antibody is our love for God and the life of the Holy Spirit in us. Jesus has freed us from our enslavement to sin (John 8:34-36<sup>xiv</sup>). We could not even recognize it before we came to Christ, but now in Him we see things we were perfectly fine with before as ungodly and harmful to our souls. He gives us His godly perspective and that cuts through the lies of temptation. Now we know where sin would lead us, which is to death, as we see in the next verses.

*<sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.* James 1:14 We must take hold of this truth if we are to remain steadfast and receive that crown of life. Our temptations come from the ungodly desires of our old nature. Do not use the justifications you used before you were born-again. We are lured and enticed by our own desires. Our conscience convicted us, so we made excuses in our minds to justify our behavior. As our culture turns away from biblical truth, our education system and authorities are making these excuses for sin sound right. Right becomes wrong and wrong becomes right in their minds (Isaiah 5:20<sup>xv</sup>). But when you dig down into their logic, it is usually contradictory and often based on what turns out to be lies.

We are “lured!” It calls to mind fishing. I have a box full of fishing lures. Different fish at different times of the year are after certain creatures to feed on. The lure imitates that creature, but it has hooks attached. The lures of our old desires are promising the temporary satisfactions you once indulged in. It entices you to bite. Your old nature stirs desire and reminds you of the temporary thrill you experienced, never the consequences.

Spiritual eyes can see the hooks and realize that lure will drag us to somewhere we do not want to go. The Greek word for lured is “to be dragged off.” When I catch a fish big enough for dinner on a lure, I drag it ashore, whack it over the head, gut it, bring it home and eat it. That is what sin will do to you if you bite. Keep that picture in mind the next time you are lured by what you recognize as a temptation!

Recognize the things that entice you. It is different for each of us, but there are three **general categories temptations fit into: Lust, greed, and pride** (1 John 2:15-17<sup>xvi</sup>). Putting anything in this world above Jesus is idolatry which Paul calls covetousness (Colossians 3:5<sup>xvii</sup>). If you are uncertain about an expression or an action, wait until you discern if it is good or evil. If it is deceptive in any way or self-exalting, these indicate that it is probably evil. If it is helpful, sacrificial, and done out of your love for the Lord and mankind, it is probably good. But when in doubt, wait. You do not want the results in the next verse.

*<sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.* James 1:15 James gives us a vivid metaphor. He says that desire conceives. We should not look too deeply into metaphors, but I believe he chose this metaphor because of the similarity to conception and gestation. The act of conception is not always with the intention of a pregnancy. In other words, when we act on our lusts, whatever they may be, the consequences are often not something we considered. There is a long gestation period where we carefully nurture what has been conceived. That is contemplation. Then when it is finally born, it is revealed to be sin. Ungodly desires when acted on result in conceiving what is in time revealed to be sin.

This is why we must carefully guard our thought life. We cannot help the thoughts that pass through our minds. They are often the fiery darts of the evil one or our old nature stirring up our past temporal pleasures (Ephesians 6:16<sup>xviii</sup>). But we can refuse to meditate on those thoughts. We can immediately recognize them as lures with hooks and reject them. The mindset we have toward those temptations must change from pleasure to destruction. We must realize that when sin grows up it brings forth death (Romans 6:23<sup>xix</sup>). That is not an exaggeration. Serial killers confess to starting out with pornography, then to rape, and finally to murder. Drugs end up killing the user. Sin is like the mistletoe in the oaks around my house. They thrive on the trees life energy and grow until they kill the tree. Sin thrives in our lives until it kills us. I see people pass me on blind curves and wonder if one day there will be a car in the other lane and their impatience and violation of the law will kill them and possibly others.

Whatever form sin takes, the one who has cast that lure wants to drag you to himself and to be sure you die as a reprobate with a hardened heart. That is his way to fight God. Jesus declared that the Satan has come to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10<sup>xx</sup>). Jesus promises a crown of life to those who love Him and endure. Satan rewards a life of sin with death. It is more than physical death, just as life is more than a heart beating. Sin’s death is eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:8,9<sup>xxi</sup>). Satan cannot win so he will do everything he can to grieve the

heart of God. He knows that God's heart is that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9<sup>xxii</sup>). That is why Satan is out to see as many as possible to become hooked on his lures. But when we acknowledge that we have been hooked and ask God for deliverance, He cuts the line. We may have to live with that hook in our mouth, but we are free from the steady pull to destruction. We will find our flesh desiring things that are sinful, but we have the power to not allow those desires to conceive. That is the spiritual liberation of new life.

Even the secular world when dealing with addicts teaches that the cycle of thoughts must be broken. They use smelling salts for that interruption. We employ the power of the Holy Spirit and crucify the old nature. Breaking the pattern can just mean we move on to another evil pattern, unless we yield to the life of the Spirit and have our desires transformed (Romans 8:5<sup>xxiii</sup>). *The best motive for resisting temptation is to love Him; to love Him with greater power and greater passion than your love for the sin.*<sup>xxiv</sup>

Paul commands us to do this in Colossians 3:5 *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.* He tells us these earthly desires that are sinful are actually idolatry. We look to them for satisfaction and fulfillment instead of to our Lord and Savior. Our mindset then should be that the lure that catches our eye is an idol that wants to take our worship from God and destroy us. Reject it to your own peril. We are in a cosmic war, like it or not.

You may think that your weakness is not so bad as these obvious ones I have mentioned. All sin is just as deadly. A critical spirit that is the result of pride ends in the same destruction. We turn food into an idol, entertainment, wealth, health, or anything that becomes more important to us than God and His will for our lives. That is why the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength (Matthew 22:37-39<sup>xxv</sup>). God spoke that to Moses and included "mind" because He knew that is where Satan turns the heart. If our mind is tricked into the age-old doubt of, "Did God really say?" the mind starts to chase the lure and our actions will soon follow.

*<sup>16</sup> Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. <sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* James 1:16,17 James warns us as beloved brothers to not be deceived. The deception he is warning of is that of thinking that the things of this world can satisfy our soul. Though he was a part of Jesus' earthly family, Jesus' declaration that once may have made him angry, now meant so much to him. *"Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my brother, sister, and mother."* Matthew 12:50

Several times in Jesus' teaching on the end-times He warns us not to be deceived. In that discourse Jesus was warning against being led astray by false messiahs and false prophets' signs and wonders (Mark 13:22<sup>xxvi</sup>). James, however, is warning us not to be deceived by our desires and thoughts. We can talk ourselves into believing something in this world can fill the void in our hearts. That thing that will drag us away may not be evil in and of itself, but to look to it for satisfaction, to try to satiate our soul with it is evil, and evil is deadly.

Verse 17 is the mindset we need to realize that every good and perfect gift is from God. Therefore, if we enjoy something in this world that is good for us, we thank God for it. Instead of seeing it as means to satisfy our soul, we see it as a momentary gift that came to us from our good and perfect God. Our gratitude and praise is to God not the object. Did God give you a loving spouse? Thank God! Did you enjoy some time

exploring the wonders of God's creation? Thank the Giver and Creator. Was your food delicious? Who made it and made your taste buds? Thank Him! Praise Him! This mindset turns our heart from the gift to the Giver. This helps us enjoy God's gift without putting our hope in them. If we desire that which leads to death, where can we get a heart that loves God and endures? It is from the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

James adds that God is the Father of lights. I believe that means that He created the stars we marvel at here in our dark sky city. He is the maker of heaven and earth! He continues His description of the great Giver by saying that with Him there is no variation or shadow due to change. In other words, you will not find that God gives good things one day and evil things the next. God is consistently good. We may interpret the test we are going through as an evil thing, but God is using it for our good, therefore it is a good gift. Perfection cannot change or it would be imperfect. He will always have the same wonderful attributes of grace, mercy, steadfast love, justice, holiness, and faithfulness. He gave His only Son to save us and accepted His sacrifice in our place. That will never change, thank God. He is light without any darkness at all (1 John 1:5). That crown of life He has promised He will deliver.

*<sup>18</sup> Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.* James 1:18 It was God's will that you be born-again by the seed of the Word. It is like Jesus' parable of the sower. The sower sows the Word. The Word takes root in good ground. In verse 21 James will tell us to receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save our souls. God prepared the soil of our hearts and then at the right time the seed of the Word was planted in that prepared soil, and it came to life. Maybe it was a stranger who shared the gospel. Or maybe you heard it from your parents or a friend, it took root, and you became the firstfruits of his creatures.

Firstfruits are the first ripe portion of grain, or fruit, or produce, or firstborn of the herds (Numbers 18:12,13<sup>xxvii</sup>). It was offered to God in recognition that it was from God and God would provide the rest. It was putting God first. When the Word took root in our hearts and we became a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17<sup>xxviii</sup>), we were the first ripe fruit of the coming age when all will be transformed, and the curse of sin lifted from the world (Romans 8:19-21<sup>xxix</sup>). We are already experiencing that new life in our hearts. We give ourselves as an offering to God in faith knowing He is good, and the rest of the harvest will ripen in His time (Romans 12:1<sup>xxx</sup>). That not only means that our salvation is a work of God, but it also means that we are special to Him (Exodus 19:5<sup>xxxi</sup>).

Let us review this rich passage. James tells us who love the Lord that we have the promise of a crown of life if we endure the trials of life. We should never say God is tempting us because He is never tempted by evil. He does not tempt but He does test us. It is our evil desires that lure us into sin. The result of sin is death. Do not let the enemy deceive you. God gives good and perfect gifts, and He never changes. He will always be the same perfect God. It was His will to give us spiritual birth by the Word of truth that we might be the beginning of the new creation, special to Him. Praise His holy name!

Questions: 1 How is "blessed" used here? 2 Who gets the crown of life? 3 What else will be ours? 4 Why won't God tempt us? 5 What lures and entices us to sin? 6 What does desire give birth to? 7 What does sin grow up to be? 8 What are the two possible outcomes when you are hooked on a lure? 9 What assures the cycle is not shifted to another sin? 10 Why gives us good things? Why is that important to recognize?

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<sup>i</sup> **1 Corinthians 9:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

<sup>ii</sup> **1 Peter 5:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

<sup>iii</sup> **John 14:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

<sup>iv</sup> **John 17:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

<sup>v</sup> **Matthew 25:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

<sup>vi</sup> **John 17:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

<sup>vii</sup> **1 John 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

<sup>viii</sup> **Romans 12:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

<sup>ix</sup> **Matthew 6:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

<sup>x</sup> **Galatians 5:19-21 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>xi</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

<sup>xii</sup> **Romans 5:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

<sup>xiii</sup> **Romans 6:2-4 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>xiv</sup> **John 8:34-36 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

<sup>xv</sup> **Isaiah 5:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

<sup>xvi</sup> **1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Colossians 3:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Ephesians 6:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;

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<sup>xix</sup> **Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>xx</sup> **John 10:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

<sup>xxi</sup> **2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

<sup>xxii</sup> **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Romans 8:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

<sup>xxiv</sup> David Guzik, *James*, David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Jas 1:12.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV)**

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Mark 13:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Numbers 18:12-13 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> All the best of the oil and all the best of the wine and of the grain, the firstfruits of what they give to the LORD, I give to you. <sup>13</sup> The first ripe fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

<sup>xxix</sup> **Romans 8:19-21 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

<sup>xxx</sup> **Romans 12:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Exodus 19:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;