

James 6. June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005.  
James 1:6, 12-14, 4:7-10,  
Pastor E. Keating

## TEMPTATION

We all feel it at times! A child is playing with a balloon and you have a pin in your hands. On the day you are starting your diet again you are offered a chocolate. When you are driving, a cat is crossing the road in front of you. There is an 'ear bender' heading for you in the shopping mall at a time when you are in a hurry. The unsolicited email offers you a preview of what can be found on a pornographic web site.

Temptation comes to anybody who has defined moral standards. Most of us would come into that category and most of us, during the past week, have felt temptation in some form or another. Many of us would have succumbed, and just prior to communion we will have a time when we can acknowledge that and seek God's forgiveness.

But understand that James is not saying that there is something wrong with being tempted. He is encouraging us to resist temptation, not to feel guilty because we have experienced it!

*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him [James 1:12, NRSV].*

In the context of James it seems to be saying that when we are going through trials, or testing times, or even in times of affluence, we need to be aware that temptation will not leave us alone.

While there is nothing wrong with the experience of temptation, he gives some advice on how to make sure that it does not destroy us. Out of this advice let us suggest the six steps that may help us to make sure that temptation remains as temptation and does not lead to sin.

### 1. THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH BEING TEMPTED

James doesn't say that only evil people are tempted. He almost implies that it is a universal experience. And so it is, for it is one of the few things that we all have in common here this morning.

He has already told us that we live in an imperfect world, a world of trials and persecution, and place of doubt, arrogance and false wealth. We all live in this imperfect world, a world that is going to clash with our values all of the time. Basic Christian living, Christian Living for Dummies, tells us that there is very little out there that is going to happen that will be consistent with our Christian life style. Every pressure is aimed in the other direction.

We cannot stop the tempting emails. We cannot avoid the graft, corruption, and back stabbing that occurs in the work scene. We find that the dangers of inappropriate expressions of anger rise within all of us at times. We find ourselves battling with the feelings of jealousy. All of the time, in effect, there are horrible little negative voices that are saying, "Come with me. Come my way."

If it is any encouragement to you, we know that Jesus felt temptation as well. The fact that in his time of isolation he experienced temptation, is not seen as being sin. The writer to the Hebrews says: "*He was tempted in all points yet with out sinning.*"

So let me say to the young mother who was tempted to smack her young child; or to the hormonal young man who was tempted to place his hands in forbidden areas; or to the employee who noticed that the boss was out for the day; or to the people who felt an incredible urge to stay in bed and miss church on Sunday; there is nothing wrong with hearing the tempting voices. The problem is when we hear the tempting voices and obey them.

Healthy guilt, our informed conscience, helps us to recognize temptation and so resist it. Rather than feeling bad about being tempted, we should feel thankful to God that we have recognised it for what it is and that we have been able to resist it.

## 2. SEE THE EVIL OF SHORT CUTS.

Think about the time that Jesus was tempted and understand the exact nature of the temptation. His ministry was all about compassion, service and then ultimately, on the cross, glorifying God. His purpose was to glorify God and reveal what God was like. The temptations were basically temptations to take the short cut. “You want followers? Don’t worry about teaching, healing, encouraging, and all of that ridiculous stuff about having yourself put on a cross. A few tricks, a few miracles, will give you the instant results without having to put up with pain or put up with people. “

The temptation of the short cut is one of the most common that we encounter. James has warned us that wealth can be a short cut to deep satisfaction; religion without works can be a short cut to a relationship with God; poor use of our tongue and our language can provide instant gratification.

We will look at the issue of patience in James, but let us say now that he is always telling us to take the long-term view, rather than to take the short cut to finding an instant solution.

*Be patient, then, my friends, until the Lord comes. See how patient farmers are as they wait for their land to produce precious crops. They wait patiently for the autumn and spring rains.*

*You also must be patient. Keep your hopes high, for the day of the Lord's coming is near.  
[ James 5:7-9]*

The minister or church leader who wants to lead a growing church organizes services that make “Leap of Faith” look tame and promises wealth and health without mentioning the cross. The criminal who wants financial security makes a permanent loan of his neighbour’s goods. The male who wants to cure his loneliness buys the services of a prostitute. The depressed person tries to drown their sorrows in alcohol.

Politicians, to ensure re election, make promises that they cannot keep. People desiring health and satisfaction, buy things and hope that will produce results. People wanting happiness get confused with instant gratification.

When Jesus told the devil to ‘get lost’, in effect, he was underlying the basic truism that there is no short cut to significance. Many have yielded to the temptation to find an easier way and have failed miserably. To be the significant person that God intends you to be, understand that there is no short cut.

### 3. APPRECIATE YOUR VULNERABILITY

Remember the temptation of Jesus? The devil knew the moment to come to Jesus. Not only was he fasting for a long time but he was also going through the great transition from the carpenter's bench to the ministry to which he believed God had called him. It was not only a time of hunger, but also a time when he was sorting out the nature of God's mission. It was during that vulnerable time that the devil comes to him and suggests the temptation of the short cut.

If we understand our vulnerable times it can help us overcome temptation.

What is going on in the background of the readers of James' letter? We are not sure, but from the hints that are given, it seems that the churches may have been under some form of persecution. There are constant hints that they were being confronted with the needs of the poor. There seems to be some conflict around as the issues of anger and the bad use of the tongue are raised. There were some hurting people. A dangerous time of vulnerability! The time for the devil to become active! Appreciate those vulnerable times in your own life!

James says that we have control over the degree that we are exposed to temptation. It is not a matter of it being God testing us to see how tough we are. It is sometimes of our own doing. We are the ones who place ourselves in the place of danger, in the place of temptation.

*No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it [James 1:13-14, NRSV].*

The separated person may have been rejected by his/her spouse, and in order to prove that they are acceptable to the opposite sex, they lower their normal high standards. The recovering alcoholic knows that Christmas is a dangerous time. A person who knows that they have a history of depression understands that grief times can be the trigger to regress. Some know that their temper becomes short because of stress or hormonal reasons and are aware that unhealthy conflict may not be far away. If we are aware of these times we can stay away from the situation that may cause trouble, or we can appreciate that a God given steely resolve may be needed to survive.

One of the most vulnerable times is when we have enjoyed success and we start to believe that there may be a touch of 'the divine' in the way that we operate and we start behaving like a humanist. I suspect that is some of the thinking of James as he continually warns us about being enticed by our riches. Wealth can lead to arrogance. When we start to leave God out of the equation we are close to a great fall. Our prayer life starts to fall away. When we start acting as if we can cope by ourselves alone, disaster is just around the corner.

When are you most open to attack? Know those times. Take the precautions. Stay away from situations that may cause problems. Many years ago I knew a man who behaved in a somewhat bizarre way when he was away from home. Whether it was the devil or some type of emotional dysfunction I do not know, but I do know that he recognized that he was most vulnerable when he was alone. In the end he took his wife with him on business trips to help him overcome the problem.

But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it [v.14. NRSV].

Knowing yourself and your own limitations may be one of the greatest weapons in your armory to overcome temptation. You have control!

#### 4. RECOGNISE THE OTHER VOICES

I am not accusing you of some form of mental illness when I say we all hear voices. In an animated film, one of the heroes has little men appear on his shoulder when he is confronted with a decision. One is dressed in white and tells what is the right thing to do while the other is a little man with horns who is dressed in red and tells him to choose the wrong thing.

If only those voices were so obvious! If only we could see little men standing on our shoulders. It would be so easy then! Unfortunately the voices we hear are subtle, so that we don't even know the voice of evil when it whispers in our ear.

James tells us to know the source of those voices.

*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you [4:7].*

There is the voice, the voice of evil, that says, "You need this." "You owe yourself this." "You have been good for so long that one little lapse will not do any harm." "You are stressed and tired and everyone will understand if you let fly. Go for it." **The voice of rationalization** can be so subtle.

There is the voice that says, "It is so tiring to swim against the tide." "Being the odd one out is a very poor form of witness, so be like every one else." In recent times members of the police force have heard **the voice of compromise**. Caught up in the tide of corruption, two officers refused to testify against their mates in court and ended up being jailed for perjury. They were victims of a "stick up for your mates" type of culture that led them down the paths of evil.

Compromise is not always evil, but when it means that you sacrifice important Christian principles for the sake of popularity or job survival, it could be the voice of evil. Compromise is a good thing for a couple who debate over whether the house should be painted or whether they should go for an enjoyable bike ride. You find them riding around the house painting as they go! Any relationship is kept alive by sensible compromise.

At times there is a sensible middle ground. I know a couple with very strong convictions about alcohol. When their daughter was being married they were confronted with a situation where nobody else involved in the wedding shared their convictions. The compromise was to serve low strength beer.

But the whisper about compromise is the voice of evil when it asks you to compromise yourself, to compromise who you are. Compromise is evil when you sell your soul. It is when you deny your Christian integrity that you are probably hearing the voice of 'the little man dressed in red'.

Pray for insight that you can stand back and recognise the voices that whisper from the dark.

*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded [James 4:7-8, NRSV].*

One of the great difficulties in recognizing those other voices is that they may be like your neighbour's stereo. So loud that you cannot hear anything else! I mentioned the police service before. If you are surrounded by corruption you may not even understand that this is evil and soon the evil may become a way of life. In my teaching days, sarcasm and the belittling words were an established piece of a teacher's armory and so every one did it. But that didn't make it right.

Many years ago I was asked to help a friend who was selling his house by auction. I was to stand in the crowd on the day of the auction and scratch my nose every now and then and every time I did it, the house value would rise by a \$1,000. I felt very uneasy at the time when I was asked to do this, but was assured that it was common practice within the industry and I didn't want to let my friend down. Common practice? It was then, but that didn't make it right. Now I see that what I did was something unacceptable and I was foolish to accept something just because it was common practice. At times we need to stand back and see how our culture, and what is called "common practice" can be extremely evil. The voice can be masked and cultural forces can disguise evil.

## 5. KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING.

Back to Jesus in the desert when he was tempted! The devil was telling him to "take the short cut and find instant fame." He was being asked to become an instant celebrity. Now that is a good offer. How did Jesus resist it? Partially, because he knew where he was going. Do you remember that great text that Jesus used from Isaiah?

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor [Luke 4:18-19].*

That was Jesus' mission statement. He wasn't into jumping off buildings or turning stones into bread. He was into a ministry of service and compassion. To ask him to do the spectacular specials was like asking me to join a Can-Can dancing group. It would have been totally incongruous!

The man who is dedicated to building a sound marriage and family will find it harder to be tempted into adultery. James has told us that the man who is dedicated to serving the poor will find it harder to be tempted into materialism. The policeman who sees his job as strengthening the community will find it harder to be tempted in to corruption. The person working in a team environment who is dedicated to building the team will find it harder to be abusive in his use of the tongue. The student who knows that God wants them to prepare for some type of service through their tertiary studies will be less inclined to read novels a week before exams. The person who is convinced that their job is to bring healing will be less inclined to create conflict and discord.

When we, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, know where we are going and what God wants us to become, then we are so much more focused. Note the number of times that James condemns the double minded. People who are uncertain of their destiny, trying to live in two worlds under different marching orders!

*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded [James 4:8, NRSV].*

The evil one is so much active when we are walking around in circles wondering what to do next.

*But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind [James 1:6, NRSV].*

## 6. UNDERSTAND THE BREADTH OF INTEGRITY

Many years ago there used to be a song that was heard on the radio, “Cigarettes and whiskey and wild, wild women. They drive you crazy they drive you insane” The song had been sung at an old time revival meeting and in the background a voice was heard yelling, “Sing Temptation, I want to hear Temptation.”

The implication was that temptation could be easily recognized. It was associated with all of the old evils of alcohol, drugs and sleazy women [or men]. Some of us could identify with that way of thinking. We were taught that evil was easy to recognise. It was found on the dance floor, in drugs and inappropriate sex.

But that is not the case. No wonder the Bible describes the devil as one who skulks around like a “hunting lion.” Temptation pops up in the least expected ways and at the most unexpected moments. No one would ever have thought that asking Jesus to do a few tricks could be interpreted as evil. It is only when you stand back and see the total picture of what Christ was on about that you see the subtlety of temptation.

Wars and programs of revenge! The quiet word that defames or puts down another person! The nasty thoughts that find happiness in another person’s misfortune! Walking by on the other side! Ignoring human need! Caring little about injustice! The temptation to use the tongue to degrade another person! Caring little about others as you climb to the top with your foot prints firmly left on the backs of other people!

One of the incredible things we are seeing in this series on “Christian Living for Dummies,” is that James hones in on the areas that we think are not so important, that impact on the ways we behave when few see us. The way we support the poor, the way we think, our speech, the inner reasons why we create conflict! The subtle things that do not seem as obvious as the big sins! Temptation can be so deceptive!

*Do not be deceived, my beloved [James 1:16, NRSV].*

Temptation comes in many forms and guises and we all need those times of reflection as we think of what we are doing and where we are heading because we can see that we are often called away from the destiny that Christ has in mind for us.

“Blessed is any one who endures temptation.” The expectation is that we may see through the subtlety of temptation and that we may make sure that we do not place ourselves in situations where temptation’s voice is heard more strongly. The expectation is that we do not rationalize away the voice of evil but rather see that temptation not only comes from without but also comes from within.

My prayer for this week is that I might walk closer to Christ so that I can recognise evil’s voice when I hear it. I pray that the victory may not be deliverance from my mistakes, but the ability to understand that I am close to making one. I would far rather recognise temptation and resist it, than be on my knees pleading for the forgiveness for the mistakes that have hurt me and hurt others too. I would also pray that I would have the common sense to avoid

situations where, because of my human weakness, I could fail again. I would also pray that I would have the common sense to identify those situations.

**It would be great if one day, at a time of the ultimate appraisal, God could say to us, "You are blessed for you have endured temptation."**

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## STUDY 6. NOTES FOR LEADERS.

1. **You are pulled over for speeding. As the policeman slowly walks towards your car, opening his folder, would you be tempted to...**
  - a. Swap places with your wife so that she could get the demerit points.
  - b. Tell the policeman that you are running late for a funeral.
  - c. Tell him that your speedometer is not working properly.
  - d. Tell him he should be out catching real criminals.
  - e. Tell him that you are doing benevolent work.
  - f. Something else.
  
2. **Has anybody in the group faced a strong temptation this week?**

How did you handle it? Did you feel guilty about the temptation? Did you “win” or “lose.”

*Be alert for anybody in the group who associates guilt and temptation. With skilful questioning point out that Jesus himself was tempted. See Hebrews 4.15, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are –yet without sin.”*

3. **Consider the following situations:**
  - i. A young mother is depressed and is getting less sleep with a restless baby. When the baby squirms as she is about to change a nappy she raises her hand to slap the baby.
  - ii. A young man at work is having a tough time with his marriage and starts talking regularly to a female companion about his domestic problems. She is very caring and seems to understand what he is going through.
  - iii. A single mum is having a huge problem making ends meet. She is in a Target store and notices a dress that would look great on her 4 year old daughter but she hasn't the money to pay for it.
  - iv. The 52 year old accountant has just lost his job and feels a lot of shame and anxiety. He has not told his wife and heads off every day as if he were going to work. He calls in at the Hotel and after three drinks starts to feel a lot better.
  - v. A 16 year old struggles to overcome her feelings of lack of acceptance. She goes to a party with a friend who is upset with her because she will not take the little pills that every one else is taking. “If you want to be a prude then you are on your own,” she was told.
  - a. What do the situations all have in common?
  - b. What advice would you give these people?
  - c. Is temptation always as obvious as it is in these stories?
  - d. Would it have been as obvious to those who were involved?

*Each of these stories shows how temptation is more strongly felt in times of vulnerability. Some people could be advised to avoid placing themselves where temptation is strongly felt. Some of the above could also be advised to seek help with the underlying problem that may eventually lead to sin. The stories also highlight the subtlety of temptation. See James 1:16. “Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.”*

4. In the light of what we have studied in the book of James so far, what do you think the temptations facing the readers would have been?

*Work the group through the issues that we have studied so far, such as materialism, conflict, abusive language. As mentioned briefly in the sermon, there may have been the added stress of persecution, more than likely from Jewish groups rather than the Roman Government. Also refer the group back to Luke 4. Some in the group should see that Jesus was tempted at a time of high vulnerability. It was not only that he was fasting. He was about to launch into a ministry that would meet opposition and misunderstanding, and may have played with the idea of taking a short cut towards success and popularity.*

5. **a. In what ways are you tempted when you are:**
  - i. Depressed
  - ii. Stressed
  - iii. In conflict
  - iv. Being criticized
  - v. Having problems with children.
  - vi. Unable to sleep because of a snoring spouse.
- b. How do you deal with temptations at such times?**

6. **See James 1:12-14, 4:7-8.**

*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it [12-14, NRSV].*

*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded [James 4:7-8, NRSV].*

- a. What advice does James give us for handling temptation?
- b. Is it realistic advice?

*In these verses James encourages us to:*

1. *Keep our eye on the long term goal [1:12]. To yield to temptation might be a short cut to temporary happiness but may have long term consequences.*
2. *Recognize that temptation is not the occasion for rationalization, but is our own doing. [1:13-14].*
3. *See the power of the devil and make a continual renewal of our commitment to God [4:7-10].*

7. **See James 4:8.**

James uses the term "double minded" [see also James 1:6]. What do you think that has to do with temptation?

*James seems to use this term with regard to people who want to submit to God and also submit to the world, or those who waver in their convictions. In short the double minded are those who lack focus.*

8. **What do you do when confronted by temptation?**

- a. I do not always see it. *[Note the word deception in 1.16.]*
- b. It depends on what it is, but I have some weak areas. *Point out that the areas covered by James would not be the normal aspects of Christian living that we would associate with temptation.*
- c. Normally I am very strong and can walk away. *[See 4.8]*
- d. I avoid such situations where I could be tempted.
- e. I keep falling!

9. Does prayer help you to overcome temptation? How do you pray when tempted?

10. In the light of the above, how should we pray as a group regarding temptation?

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