



YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Winter 2017-2018 Midweek/Sermon Starter

Unit 3: Dare To Be Different
Sermon Series Title: Holding Up Our Holiness
Sermon 3: Fighting Temptations
Bible Passage: James 1:12-14

Introduction

An Achilles heel is a metaphor that is used to describe a weakness or vulnerable factor. According to Greek mythology, when the Greek mythological hero Achilles was an infant, his mother Thetis dipped him into the Styx River in an attempt to make him immortal. However, his mother held him by one heel while dipping him in the river of 'immortality'. Consequently, Achilles' heel did not touch the water and so remained vulnerable to mortality. An arrow wound to his heel eventually killed Achilles. Achilles fell because he had an exposed weakness.

I believe it is safe to assume that we all can identify with the Greek tragic hero Achilles—we might appear to be strong and invincible, but we all have weaknesses. History teaches that ignored and unaddressed issues eventually surface and always have adverse affects.

Background/Context

In our text, James wrote to a community of believers about the need for them to address their personal weaknesses and subsequently triumph over temptation. James recognized that everyday believers find themselves fighting temptations. Therefore, James proposed a few keys for successfully triumphing over temptation. Today, in our lesson, we will learn how to triumph over temptation.

A. We Cannot Make Excuses
(Jas. 1:13)

James made a shift in this portion of his letter to the 12 Tribes in Dispersion. At the beginning of this chapter James stated that God permits trials to produce endurance, which makes us mature and complete—lacking nothing. However, in verses 13-15, James identified temptations. Temptations conversely, do not produce perseverance and purity; temptations are personal prohibitions that only produce pain and punishment. And James implies that all believers must tackle their own temptations.

Let's be honest and address the seemingly often-ignored elephant in the room: sin is real; temptation is real and saved people struggle with overcoming both. For James, the first step to triumph over temptation is acknowledging one's own weaknesses.

Unfortunately, many refuse to take responsibility for their actions and would much rather cast blame—in some cases, blaming God. James wrote in response, “no one undergoing a trial should say, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn’t tempt anyone” (v. 13). James in essence said, “stop making excuses—own your vulnerabilities.” There is no question that Satan is the orchestrator of all sin and all people are subject to their innate sinful natures because of the fall of Adam. However, here, James put the onus of responsibility on each individual.

Beloved, it is impossible to triumph over temptation while living in denial and making excuses. Those who triumph over temptation are those who take responsibility for their actions and choose to change.

Application Point

Who do you blame for your mistakes, and why? Casting blame is unproductive. Remember, the first step to overcoming temptation is acknowledging your weaknesses. This week, spend some time in prayer and ask God to reveal your areas of weakness and begin working on improving those areas.

B. We Must Master Our Excitements (Jas. 1:14)

In the second part of our text James advised us to master our excitements as a means of triumphing over temptation. James knew that fighting temptations is a daily struggle for all believers. Everyday people are tempted to think, say, and act in ways that contradict God’s will, word, and way. Everyday people are tempted by their own desires. However, James made it clear: if we want to be victorious, we cannot be moved by what excites us. We cannot act on impulse. We must practice discipline daily.

In verses 14-15, James presented a diagram for the cycle of sin. James wrote, “each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire” (v. 14). According to James, sin begins with desire—an intense longing for anything that God deems improper. Secondly, deception creeps in when we are drawn away and enticed by our own desire. Then we practice disobedience when “desire has conceived,” and “it gives birth to sin” (v. 15). Lastly, we experience death: mental death, financial death, relational death, spiritual death, and sometimes even physical death.

Contrary to belief, sin never appears ‘out of nowhere’; sin manifests when believers refuse to triumph over temptation. Beloved, one mistake always leads to another. Therefore, triumphing over temptation comes one obedient disciplined day at a time—one victory at a time. We must practice triumphing over temptation every second in every day. We must master our emotions everyday. We must choose to subdue our flesh, emotions, and desires everyday.

Application Point

What desires do you find yourself being tempted by the most? Sometimes making small changes in our environments and lifestyles can help protect us from giving in to our susceptibilities. This week, consider your company and your surroundings and ask God to lead you away from your places of vulnerability.

C. We Must Be Eager to Receive God's Reward (Jas. 1:12)

In this verse, James highlights the primary incentive for believers to triumph over temptation. James wrote, "blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (v. 12). According to James, God promises to reward disciples that successfully defeat the antagonistic power of temptation. Believers therefore, must be eager to receive God's reward, and believers should use God's promise as motivation to keep fighting temptations.

Secondly, we are assured of the ability to triumph over temptation. James wrote, "blessed is the one who endures trials, because WHEN he has stood the test..." Here, James offered hope for those whose difficulties have brewed denial. This is a word for those who believe that it is impossible to overcome the obstacles of temptation. James reminds us that mastering self-control is an achievable feat if we discipline ourselves.

Yes, God has already promised to give us victory in the face of temptation. Paul wrote, "But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide a way out so that you may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). Beloved, God has equipped us, and we can overcome temptation—we will overcome temptation. In fact, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). And we will receive the crown of life.

Application Point

What kind of rewards do you anticipate receiving when you get to heaven? Remember, God has promised to reward us when we overcome the obstacle of temptation. Ask God to give you a desire that focuses on God's promises, and let that desire motivate you to remain resistant towards temptation.