

February 21, 2021

James 1:12-18

“God Is On Our Side in Every Trial and  
Temptation!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Trials and temptations!” Those two words just go together. “Have we trials and temptations?” You will probably answer that question with a great, big “YES!” But do you know what the difference is between trials and temptations? Maybe, maybe not. I have often found that we use words in church so frequently that we begin to think that we know what they mean until we are finally asked to define and explain them. So, what’s the difference between trials and temptations? The first chapter of the book of James gives us the distinction between the two.

We will start with defining what a trial is. In James 1:2-4 and 12 we read:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing ... 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.

Trials are for believers. They are a testing of faith, not so that God can discover who we are, but so that we can discover where we are in our relationship with God. We meet them, that is, they come to us from the outside. They are to be borne for our strengthening, even accepted with joy as they lead us toward a final approval, proving faith to be genuine. They are intended to remove flaws, making a person whole. God uses trials to make us steadfast and immovable. The resulting crown of life that one receives is a symbol of our victory in trial. Though the trial appears to be for loss and death, faith in Jesus grows in the certainty of life in him, for he is the life of all the living.

This is reflected in the example of Abraham and God’s command to sacrifice his son Isaac. In Hebrews 11:17-19, we see what goes on inside a person when they go through a trial. It says: “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.” When one meets a trial, which can come in various forms, God is exercising a believers faith so that he or she clings to God even when God appears to be the enemy. The crown of life is a symbol of a victorious one who has conquered all opposing thoughts and conclusions about God by trusting that God is life and not death. Such are bid to believe in the trial that there is nothing but blessing. And we are told that Abraham was blessed in Gen. 22:15-18 and we, his offspring by faith, are also blessed.

Jesus understands what it means to undergo trials. Remember what the prophet Isaiah says about our Savior, Jesus: “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand (Is. 53:10).” For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. You see! the will of the Lord prospers in his hand and

he rules all things for our salvation! In perfect obedience to his Father, Jesus suffered all, and through it all had perfect faith in his Father and his plan for him and for us. Our trials have been met in him that we might receive a crown as he has received one. However, we lay our crowns at his feet knowing that all we have has come from him. Indeed! **God Is On Our Side in Every Trial.**

Now we come to what a temptation is. Although we have acquired forgiveness of sins and a good conscience through the life and sufferings and death of Jesus our Savior, yet such is life that one may stand today and fall tomorrow. We ask in the Lord's Prayer that we may not fall and collapse under attacks and temptations. We still live in the sinful flesh that goes to work and lures us daily into all kinds of evil desires such as sexual immorality, laziness, gluttony and drunkenness, greed and deceit, and into acts of fraud and deception against our neighbor, to name a few. And Satan and this unbelieving world attacks and tempts us by appealing to these evil desires in order that faith in the forgiveness of sins and a good conscience might be destroyed. These attacks and temptations are not designed to test faith and prove genuineness. Rather, they are designed to cause us to become clouded and weary so that we may fall back into sin, shame, and unbelief.

God sends trials, but God never tempts us. As it says in James 1:13: "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." So then, when we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "lead us not into temptation," what do we mean? The *Large Catechism* says:

This, then, is what "leading us not into temptation" means: when God gives us power and strength to resist, even though the attack is not removed or ended. For no one can escape temptations and allurements as long as we live in the flesh and have the devil prowling around us. We cannot help but suffer attacks, and even be mired in them, but we pray here that we may not fall into them and be drowned by them.

The victory over temptation rests in Jesus. First, as it says in Hebrews 4:15, we have in Jesus one who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses for "he was tempted as we are, yet without sin." We see this in our Gospel lesson for this morning when Jesus is tempted by Satan. Our first parents were tempted in a garden and failed. Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, paradise lost, and overcomes. And we should understand, that he overcomes for us in the full forty days. This number in Scripture, forty, is a number of completeness in our journey through life in this fallen wasteland. We are bid to believe in his victory over temptation that we may be alert in repentance and desiring to shun evil.

Secondly, it goes on to say in Hebrews 4:16, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Here we are bid to pray when tempted. What was it that Jesus said to Peter shortly before he was arrested? He said, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41)." Even when we think we are strong, it is likely that the devil will send such an arrow into our hearts that we can scarcely endure. We should expect attack, and when we are, the *Large Catechism* reminds us:

... seize hold of the Lord's prayer and to speak to God from our heart, "Dear Father, you have commanded me to pray; let me not fall because of temptation." Then you will see that the temptation has to cease and eventually admit defeat. Otherwise, if you attempt to help yourself by your own thoughts and resources, you will only make the matter worse and give the devil a wider opening. For he has a serpent's head; if it finds an opening into which it can slither, the whole body will irresistibly follow. But prayer can resist him and drive him back.

The reason why prayer resists and drives back temptation is because prayer is offered in faith toward Christ and is a cry to God for help. Prayer considers and uses God's Word as Jesus used Scripture in his own temptation. Crying out to God in confession of sin, while resting in forgiveness with the anticipation of what is to come in heaven, is resistance at its best, and will drive back all enemies unless we become distracted and weak-kneed. It is a reflection of what James is saying at the close of our epistle lesson: "Do not be deceived. 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. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures (James 1:16-18)." Indeed! We have been brought forth by truth and belong to God. He loves us. He sent his Son to die for us that we may have all that is good. **God Is On Our Side in Every Temptation.**

Yes! God knows all about trials and temptations. He sent his only Son to face them perfectly and successfully so that we might have everything we need to face them and receive the crown of life. It is the crown that Jesus has earned for us at the cross and empty tomb. The cross and empty tomb proves that **God Is On Our Side in Every Trial and Temptation!** What a friend we have in Jesus!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott