

# “Shaky Foundations and Deadly Off-Ramps” // James 1:1–8 // The Book of James #2<sup>1</sup>

## Announcement

I do hope you'll get one of these, put it on your wrist or hang it around the gear shift of your car, and pray for the name throughout the week.

Charles Spurgeon, the greatest preacher of the 19th century, was once asked to identify the secret of the power he had in his preaching. He took the person who asked down to the bottom floor of their church, into a Boiler Room under the church where hundreds of people prayed through the service. While he preached, people prayed, and the result was incredible power on his preaching.

We actually have 'Boiler room' ministries at each of our campuses that pray throughout the services for God's power to fall as I, or one of our pastors, stands up here to preach. You might want to check it out.

Well, these bracelets are a way that we can do this all week long for the students and volunteers as they go to student camp.

By the way, I just got this report. Did you know: We have over 1100 people headed up to student camp this week. Isn't that amazing?

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<sup>1</sup> Works Consulted: Sam Allberry, *James For You: Showing You How Real Faith Looks in Real Life*, "God's Word For You" series, The Good Book Company; Tim Mackie, The Bible Project, "[Book of James Summary](#)," December 6, 2016; ESV Study Bible notes; Russell D. Moore, *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011);

That's students, a few staff, and then a bunch of volunteers who have taken a few days off of work to go up.

If you are one of those 1100+, whether volunteer, staff, or student, would you please stand up at all of our campuses? For you students, you're going to have the time of your lives. For you adult volunteers, go with God, my friends. A week with middle or high schoolers. Hey, I'm up here with you. I wouldn't miss this for the world. I'll be there a couple of days this week.

You can sit down.

## Introduction

James 1, if you have your Bibles.

Last week we saw that trials are a defining moment in the life of a believer. Trials, James said, reveal what you really believe about God and how much you trust him; trials show what your faith is really made of. You can **talk a big spiritual-game** all day long, but trials show where your faith really lies.

These defining moments are never fun, but they play an important role in your life. A defining moment is when something becomes real to you.

**I have a friend whose middle school son was having some behavioral issues.** This dad tried everything he knew to get his son's

Jen Wilkin, "[Genuine Faith Resists and Flees Temptation](#)," Lesson posted by Flower Mound Women's Bible Study on February 5, 2014; Allen Parr, "Three Tests of our Spiritual Health," sermon posted by 'The Beast' by Allen Parr on Nov 24, 2017; Kaci Nicole, "[Bible Study With Me | James 1](#)," study posted by Kaci Nicole on March 20, 2020. Bryan Loritts, "Trading Places," James 1:9–11. And others as noted throughout.

attention and bring his behavior in line, but none of his lectures or punishments seemed to work.

- Well, this guy is a pilot, so he decided to take his son up on an airplane ride—and use that different perspective on the world from 10,000 feet to talk to his son about his need to grow up and make better decisions.
- This dad discovered that these high altitude conversations put his son in a **different frame** of mind, and after they returned his son was much more cooperative and respectful.
- So, whenever his son's behavior began to deteriorate, he'd take him up in the plane, look him in the eye, and tell him what was expected of him as a young man.
- Having a **middle school son of my own**, I was so intrigued by this, I asked if I could accompany him on one of these rides to see how they worked.
- I **snapped this picture which might explain** why the technique was so successful. **PICTURE OF BOY ON JET**

**Just kidding.** That's not a real picture. But a trial is a defining moment where God looks YOU in the eye and says to you, "Do you actually trust me? Do you actually trust me? What are you really leaning the weight of your life on?"

James **continues his counsel about persevering through trials in vs. 9** by giving us more perspective and then a very important warning.

Listen, **trials and suffering** are the hardest part of the Christian life. Nobody enjoys it. Trials often leave you wondering if you did something wrong, or why God doesn't seem to care. You're like, "God, what about me? I just want a good marriage. I just want to have kids. You've given me this desire for mothering, why can't I have kids?" Or, "I just want to feel good--to be healthy and strong. There are so many things that I want to do in life--for other people!" Or, "I just want to have a little financial stability and freedom." Or, "I just

want my mom to be well." Or, "I just want my parents to be together." God, what about me?

James was no stranger to suffering, and nor was his audience. These people have been unjustly driven away from their homeland. But he wants them, and you and me, to know that God is up to something good in these trials. Today he is going to give you a new perspective: **I. Trials reveal our false foundations (vv. 9-12)**. And then a dire warning: **II. Beware the deadly off-ramp of sin (vv. 13-18)**.

### **I. Trials reveal false foundations (vv. 9-12)**

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

One of the things trials do is reveal where your life is built on faulty foundations. For many people, that thing that they build their whole lives on is money--getting it, saving it, keeping it--and that won't endure, so, James tells the rich--rejoice in the humiliation your trial brings! (And, by humiliation, btw, he just means when things happen to you that your money can't protect you from.) Rejoice in that, he says, because that's helping you to see that money is no foundation to build your life on.

**During the COVID pandemic I told you the story of a lumberjack** who was preparing to cut down several trees in a mountain forest, and just before he began, he noticed a beautiful bird building its nest atop one of the trees. Well, not wanting to harm the bird or its young, the lumberjack took a mallet and pounded on the base of the tree until the bird (quite annoyed) flew to another tree and began to build its nest there. But the lumberjack was planning to also cut down that

tree, so he repeated the process with that tree. And so the bird moved to a third tree, which the lumberjack was also planning to cut down, so he did it again. The bird and the lumberjack repeated this dance a half-dozen times, until the bird abandoned the forest altogether and built its nest on the side of a rock face. **I imagine the bird never understood why the lumberjack was attacking each tree he attempted to build his nest in,** but the lumberjack's motive, of course, was not meanness but compassion. The lumberjack knew that every tree in the forest was about to come down, and he wanted the bird to build its nest in a place his axes couldn't touch it.

**That's what God does with us in trials.** He reveals those false places we have put our confidence. For most people, they base their whole lives on the premise that money is security...money is significance. Money is beauty. Money is enjoyment. If you have money, you can obtain the good things you want in life and protect yourself from the bad ones that you don't. **And if you don't have money,** you're powerless.

**It's helpful to consider that In James's day the line between the haves and have-nots was really stark.** The wealthy tended to be crazy wealthy--they owned all the land and had seemingly infinite resources, while the poor merely worked the land that the rich owned--like sharecroppers. This meant the poor had almost no possibility of upward mobility. If you were poor, mostly likely you'd be poor forever.

The result was that you had **two very distinct classes**, where the rich felt invulnerable and the poor felt helpless. **But trials come, James says,** and they reveal the rich are not at all invulnerable. There's nothing like a disease diagnosis or divorce papers or a dissolving relationship that can show you how powerless your money is.

- Pastor Bryan tells the story of several years ago being on a plane when one of the engines went out. I can tell you in all the flights I have ever been on, that's never happened to me, but he says it is

one of the most terrifying experiences of his life. He said, "We heard this loud boom, and I saw smoke coming out of the engine about 8k feet in the air, followed by an eerie silence. (This is the last thing you want to hear on a plane--a loud boom, then eerie silence.) Bryan said, "But then all of a sudden something beautiful happened. All of us spontaneously stretched out across the aisle and held each other's hands and started praying together. Blacks prayed with whites, Asians with Hispanics. There was no first class or economy comfort--if you were in the front of the plane and it went down you'd just be the first to die. We were classless--a bunch of people in the same predicament. No one cared who was sitting where or what kind of watch that was on your wrist. We were all uniquely aware of our own mortality, and in those moments, class didn't matter."

- That's what a trial does, James says (v10-11). It reveals weakness. "In a trial," he says, "all your riches are useless to stop disease, or death, or divorce. All flesh, rich or poor, is just grass. A couple of hot weeks with no rain, and the rich fade as easily as the poor." It doesn't matter if you are a hydrangea or a dandelion. The sun comes out and you don't get any water, you all end up the same way anyway.
- Truth be told, not only is money unable to save you on the day of death, it won't really satisfy you now. Trials show that, too.
- **Maybe you are financially comfortable**, you have every kind of insurance and convenience but now you are going through a divorce and you're seeing that all that money was unable to build you a stable home. Or you've got a kid who is wandering that you're really worried about them. Or you just got a bad report from the doctor and all your money can't remove the tumors. Or maybe, after all you've obtained, you still feel unsatisfied and empty.

I heard Tony Evans say: "Money can buy a bed but not sleep; books but not brains; food but not appetite; finery but not beauty; a house but not a home; medicine but not health; luxuries but not

culture; amusements but not happiness; religion but not salvation – money can get you a passport to everywhere except heaven.”

So, again, James tells the rich (v10–11), “Rejoice in your humiliation, because it’s keeping you from building your lives on false foundations.”

Before I discuss the flipside of this--what James says about the poor--don’t just think about this in terms of being financially rich. Anything you’re rich in, you’re likely to start trusting in it. Some of you, for example, are rich in popularity. The result is that your identity is built on people liking you. If so, you rejoice when other people don’t speak well of you, when you’re not roundly praised, when you don’t get the recognition, when you didn’t get invited to the party, when you’re the one who got cropped out of the pic when it posted on Instagram, because only then will you see whether you’ve built your foundation on what God thinks about you. If I’m used to being roundly praised for my gifts, it’s only when that’s not there that I can consider, “OK, how weighty is GOD’S approval actually to me? For example, I love when people write me encouraging notes and say that God has used me in their lives, they enjoy my preaching, or whatever... But when I look back, it’s been those seasons where those notes weren’t coming, or when I was really being criticized, that I had to consider whose opinion really mattered to me--yours or God’s? Is my identity built on his approval or yours? BTW, I’m not asking you to write me critical notes to help me grow in my sanctification, only saying that when trial and humiliation comes, then and only then am I forced to consider what the real foundations of my life are. For those of you who are rich *in anything*, trials reveal false foundations.

**And the flipside of James’ counsel--to the poor (vs 9), who basically live in a state of trial, James says, “boast in (your) his exaltation,”** which means to reflect on the fact that in Christ they have riches beyond anything money could offer them.

Reflect on the fact that you have a Heavenly Father who loves you and sings over you with rejoicing and has promised never to leave or forsake you; who has promised to bless you and make you a blessing to others, to work every single thing in your life for good, and soon to take you home to an inheritance of incalculable riches. That’s real power, James says. That’s real security. That’s real riches. That’s stuff that the rich people around you don’t have. So rejoice in your exaltation.

**It’s like that 80’s movie *Coming to America (chosen of the 80’s)***, in which Eddie Murphy plays a prince from a faraway land named Zamunda who comes to America and through a series of unfortunate circumstances has to live like a poor man--even taking a job as a lowly custodian at a McDonald’s knock off called McDowell’s. He falls in love with a girl who has this rich boyfriend who always condescends and looks down on Eddie because he’s poor. Eddie’s never bothered though--he’s always whistling at work. It seems like the oddest thing to everyone else, but we--the viewers--we know why Eddie’s so happy. Eddie knows that he’s not really from here. In his real home, he’s a child of the king. An incredibly wealthy king. And soon and very soon he’s going to see that King, who has an inheritance of incalculable value waiting for him.

James says to the poor--REJOICE! YOU are a child of the King, and soon and very soon you’re going to see him, and in the meantime, rest assured he is working in all your trials to produce something in you far more valuable than silver or gold, and that is the beauty of Christlikeness.

**You may be poor in dollars, but you are rich in Jesus.**

In trials, let the lowly brother rejoice in his exaltation and the rich brother in his humiliation, and then

**in vs. 12**, James repeats his theme: **12 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.** )To both rich and poor, he says, “Stay steadfast in trial, because if you persevere, you’ll receive something far more valuable than earthly glory or riches--the **crown of life that God has promised** to those who love him.”

(BTW, **many Bible interpreters wrongly divide up all these verses** in James 1 like they are little mini-sermons. **That’s a mistake**. They are all united by this theme of suffering.

Which is true of the next little set of verses, too, **vv. 13–18**. It’s almost like another little mini-sermon, but it’s on this theme of how to go through a trial. **James warns us, in a trial, to:**

## **II. Beware the deadly off-ramp of sin (vv. 13–18)**

Let me first just read these 6 verses: **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. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.**

**16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 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. 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.**

First, James gives a clarification. Any temptation to sin in a trial is not from God. You see, **in almost every trial** there will be a chance for a

short-cut. A compromise. A sinful stress-reliever. Some replacement for God. That temptation to sin is not from God.

- The **reason James takes time to clarify this is** because in Greek, the word for trial and temptation are the same. (In English, we use two different words--trial typically means a difficulty; whereas temptation means an opportunity to sin. In Greek, however, they use one word for both trial and temptation.)
- (**Preachers always be like**, “Oh, if you could read it in Greek it would be so much clearer.” Here, it’s better in English!)

**The temptation to sin in a trial is never from God**, James says, because God only gives good gifts. And that’s because God, he says, **v 17**, is like the sun.

- **The sun is always shining**. You can hide yourself from the sun or you can get far away from the sun, but the sun is always the same, and any time you’re in the presence of the sun, it’s only warmth and light that radiate off of it.
- That’s what God is like. God does good all the time because he is good all the time. Bad cannot come from God because God is infinite goodness.
- **God is not like a shadow**, James says, whose goodness lengthens or shortens depending on what time of day it is. God is not moody or capricious--you know, sometimes you look at him and he’s leading you with tender love, but then other times he’s irritated with you so he’s going to mess with you a little bit or ignore you or lead you toward destruction.
- **God has one thing in his heart: constant, unfailing, forever goodness**

**And just as a way of proving that**, James throws in one little line at the end. He says, **“(After all,) Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”**

- Even when you DESERVED anger and wrath, God gave you new life!

- **"Of his own will** he brought us forth by the word of truth"... HE'S the one that decided to save you in the first place! Your salvation wasn't your idea, it was his.
- **Sometimes we present coming to Jesus like it was a joint project.** I wanted to be near to God. I felt like something was missing in my life, and I know I need to get things straight, so I came back to him, and thankfully he received me.
- But **according to Scripture**, even those feelings you had of wanting to get close to God were from God. Real quick, here's your key verses:
  - **John 6:44**, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."
  - **Phil 2:13**, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." God not only gives you the power to obey Him. He also gives you the desire to obey him. God is the one who works the willing and the doing.
  - **John 1:12-13**, "But to as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believed on his name" (OK, that sounds like I am the one doing the action, right? I received; I believed. But look at what John says next, vs 13): who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. Whose will did all of this happen by? Not ours, God's.
- I've **heard salvation presented like we were drowning in our sin**, calling out for help, and Jesus came along in a lifeboat and said, "Hey, do you want some help?" and we said, "Yes, please, I'm tired of being in this ocean and want to be up in the boat with you" and Jesus threw us a line. Beautiful image; but truthfully, though, according to James, when Jesus came to us we were already face down in the water, no longer breathing and without a pulse, and God pulled us into the boat and breathed new life into us. *"Of HIS OWN will he brought us forth."*

So, James says, rest assured if this is what God did to you when you were his enemy--spiritually dead!--then only good comes from God.

Thus, any temptation to sin can't come from him. Any time you look to him you're going to find only goodness and truth and help and love.

**Well then, where does sin come from?** In vs 14 James gives you the anatomy of a sin: **14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.** (Look at that: Sin always starts within you! Not the devil. Not your ex-husband. Not your kids. Not your boss. You sin when you are lured away by your own desire. A lot of people in a trial want to blame their sin on the trial: "Well, the way I got treated in my divorce made me a really mean and vengeful person." "I wouldn't have stolen, or cheated, unless I'd been wronged this way."

James says, "You may have indeed been wronged, but all the situation did was provide an opportunity for the bad parts of YOU to come out." That divorce, that quarrel with that friend, that overbearing boss--those didn't make you the way you are. Those situations just gave an opportunity for those parts of you to come out.

**Listen, we saw this when we studied the life of David: you'll never really be able to deal with your sin**--to really confess it, really deal with it, until you acknowledge the primary source is you. And that's hard. Since the beginning of the human race, we've been trying to blame others for our sin. What did Adam say when God confronted him? "The woman that you gave me..." In one-half of a sentence he blamed two people, the woman and God. "The woman that you gave me...she made me do it."

Even now, when something happens and when we get caught in a sin, we want to distance ourselves from it and say it's not the real us.

**How about this? Have you ever had one of those moments where something slipped out of your mouth that totally embarrassed you?** An outburst of anger, or you said something snippy and unfair about

someone, made a demeaning joke, or maybe verbalized a lust. And later, you feel bad about what you said, and so you go back to the person you said it to to apologize--and what do you usually say in that apology? "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. That's not really me."

Hmmm. Yeah, but in the moment, you meant it. It came out really naturally. You've never meant anything more in your life.

- And if it's not really you, then where exactly did it come from?
- Maybe a better explanation is that as we grow up, we get better at filtering what we say (until we get real old then we lose our filter again), so what's inside our heart doesn't come out and embarrass us.
- But just because we don't verbalize something doesn't mean it isn't in there.

**The real, unfiltered us is a swirl of toxic desires.** The **other way I've told you to think about this** is to consider this: What if there was a little monitor on the side of your head that displayed for everyone what you were thinking at any given moment? How many of you would have any friends at the end of the day?

Sin, James says, comes from wayward and distorted desires in us. And **until you embrace that**, you'll never really confess your sin or do the radical soul-work to get it out.

**15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin** (desire grows in you until it finds an opportunity for expression. A way you can express it and get away with it), **and sin when it is fully grown** (and turned into a habit or lifestyle or an addiction) **brings forth death**.

**Let's map that out:** **(IMAGE)** Sin starts small, as a desire deep in our hearts. But as it grows, it gets stronger and stronger. Desires become ingrained ways of thinking. Ingrained ways of thinking become habits. Habits become addictions and life trajectories. And that leads to spiritual death.

There's so much I want to say here, but let me make a few observations:

**1. Sin is the Satanic off-ramp offered to us in a trial.** This is the opposite of remaining steadfast. You lose your confidence in God, and turn to something else to give you comfort and peace that you should be getting from God.

**It's like the children of Israel in Exodus 32** when Moses got delayed up on the mountain with God. They concluded God had forgotten about them so they made a golden calf to replace him and then had a giant orgy in front of it.

**That's really graphic**, but demonstrates what happens when you take the off-ramp in a trial. Satan almost always offers some fleshly comfort as a substitute for trust. "Here's a sensual pleasure; a creature comfort. A compromise. A way to maintain control. Alcohol. Sex. Materialism. Shopping. Manipulation."

The bottom line is that God is not enough for you. You can't wait in faith for him. You need something now. Because your **soul is not feasting** at the table of his presence, and it's starving, so it looks for something else to eat, and that's the pleasures of sin.

**Listen, this is important. Every sin you commit this way** (horizontal): alcoholism, drugs, sensuality, materialism, whatever--begins with unbelief this way (vertical).

- It's like **Martin Luther** always said, **"Every sin begins with an evil heart of unbelief."**
- Before you express sin this way (horizontally): anger, rage, stealing, lust, adultery, whatever it is, you express doubt and unbelief this way (vertical).

**2. Sin leads to death:** The indulging of those desires, the worship of that golden calf, feels so right, so satisfying in the moment, so natural. But it leads to destruction. Your enemy is using your wayward desires to lead you to destruction.

- Some of you have heard me tell this before, and it's a little graphic, but it gets the point across... **Wolf in Alaska.** That's what sin does, my friend. It lures you by your desires to the destruction of your soul.
- **Let me illustrate** this from my own life. I'll go back several years. **In my late 20's I served as a missionary in SE Asia... the riot; the allure of the hotel attendant.**

**3. The longer sin grows, the harder it becomes to kill.**

- Sin starts a desire; then turns into an action, which turns into a habit, which turns into addiction, which turns into a life trajectory. And the farther you go down that road, the harder the pattern is to break.
- You have to kill sin while it is young. You may think that wayward desire, that fantasy is not harming you, as long as you keep it under control, indulging it only occasionally when there's no real consequence. But see, whether anyone is around to see it or if it affects anyone or not, its roots are spreading throughout your soul in a way that makes it increasingly difficult to eradicate.
- Right now I'm reading a book with my son called *Thoughts for Young Men* by J.C. Ryle. J.C. Ryle was a British pastor in the 1800's. Pastor Ryle says, "Habits, like trees, are strengthened by age. A boy may bend an oak when it is a sapling—a hundred men cannot root it up, when it is a full-grown tree."<sup>2</sup>
- **Take sin seriously,** and kill it at the 'desire' stage, because if you don't it will grow to the point it takes you over. It forms habits in you. The ways you relate or think about the opposite sex. What you do when you are upset or angry. How you see people who are

in competition with you. These desires just grow and grow until they become YOU.

- It's like another British Puritan, John Owen, says, "You must be killing sin, or it will be killing you." Arrest your thoughts. Stop watching the movie. Get out of the house. Call others and confess your sin. **Our G-4 ministries here** have excellent resources for helping you deal with these sinful desires and addictions, and some of you should take advantage of them. Sometimes what you most need is community.
- Many of you have sin in your life that you are just playing with. It doesn't seem that bad to you. Lust. Laziness. Gossip. Judgmentalism. Self-righteousness. Bitterness. Hatred. Racism. But it feels contained. Harmless. It's just in your head and you filter it. But it won't stay that way. Desire grows until it takes over your heart, at which point you couldn't contain it if you wanted to.
- It's like every once in a while we see some story on the news, "Florida man mauled by pet cougar" and you read the story and find out this guy had a pet cougar named Fluffy and Fluffy "snapped" one day and bit his arm off. And everyone they interview in the neighborhood always acts so surprised?! "Oh, but Fluffy was always so gentle and sweet." FLUFFY IS A PREDATOR. Always was, always will be. It's her nature. If you keep a pet cougar in your house, at some point you are going to get eaten. Sin is a predator. It will destroy you.

**But that leads me #4,** very important:

**4. Satan is in the desire cultivation business.** Your enemy's main tactic is not always to directly attack you. Sometimes he is just quietly and subtly cultivating sinful desires in you, reinforcing them until they become second-nature to you and you can't escape them.

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<sup>2</sup> *Thoughts For Young Men*, page 7.

- **I learned something recently about how ranchers cultivate beef cows.** They've found that high stress levels in cows make them release hormones that significantly downgrade the quality of the meat. If you go to a nice steakhouse, you are being served the remains of a very relaxed cow who lived a totally stress-free life. But if you order the T-bone from Waffle House, you are looking at a cow that was a nervous wreck, bit his fingernails all day long, whatever. So, modern ranchers do all they can to **keep cows calm**. **Unlike what you've seen in movies**, workers don't yell at them. Cowboys aren't out chasing them, rounding them up with dogs. And they never, ever use cattle prods anymore. They've found that if you just keep cows contented and comfortable, they'll go wherever they are led, and you can **lead them**, fattened up, happy and satisfied, straight to the slaughter house.
- Here's what Russ Moore says, *"Sometimes the Bible uses the language of predator and prey to describe the relationship between tempter and tempted, but often the Scripture also speaks of temptation in the language of rancher and livestock. You are not just being tracked down—you are also being cultivated."*

So, here's the question: Where is Satan cultivating you right now?

- **Is it through materialism:** you find yourself taking more delight in things than people?
- **Maybe through lust: pornography; mental fantasies, flirtatious relationships?** You indulge in books or movies that allow you to experience sexual pleasures vicariously that let desires grow and become oak trees of mental habit in you.
- **Maybe it's in bitterness and anger and gossip:** Do you find yourself thinking mean and hateful thoughts about people a lot, or that what you enjoy most talking about--with your spouse, or your daughter, or your friends--is other people? You love talking about what's wrong with who, and I can't believe so-and-so did

this. Have you ever thought about the fact that you can gossip with your spouse? You can gossip with your daughter. A lot of mothers seem to cultivate gossip in their daughters in the name of building relationship: "Tell me what's wrong with all your friends..." You want to have good communication, yes, but don't cultivate gossip. That doesn't end well for her. Gossip is gossip no matter who you say it to. Do you know how to identify gossip?<sup>3</sup>

- **Or maybe it's rage:** When you're by yourself, do you cuss and hit things? You say, "I'm not bothering anybody!" Yes, but that desire is growing and growing. It will find expression.
- **How about alcoholism?** Maybe it's becoming the thing that takes the edge off of every day. It's the only way you can deal with life. And maybe it's not alcoholism yet, but if you're honest it's headed there. Which is why you hide it from your spouse.

**Be killing sin, or it will be killing you. Attack it in the desire stage.** Do serious work in confessing it.

**One thing I do that I got from John Mark Comer: Counter Talking Prayer.** I've tried to actually verbalize the form the desire, the lie takes in my mind and then I've written out Scriptures to counteract the lie. I go through these once-or-so a week. For example, I have one called

- **"The Pursuit of Riches."** Here's how the lie sounds: An abundance of money is the good life / so don't give it away! Or give only enough that you can feel good about it / look good before others, but not in a way that threatens a future of material comfort. VERSE: Lay not up treasures on earth...
- **Anger toward others: THE LIE:** "You have a right to be angry and to despise/look down on X" / VERSE: Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors

<sup>3</sup> You repeat negative things about someone, assuming you know their motives, and take delight in the negative report.

- I have them for sexual temptation, doubt, and everything else I struggle with.

**Whether you use this or not, here's my point:** Take sin seriously and do serious, radical work in confessing it / getting rid of it. Find someone today and make yourself accountable to them.

**Let's return once more to James's theme:** 12 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.

"Be steadfast." James uses battle and athletic competition imagery.

I've read a number of Navy SEAL books, not because I'm thinking of becoming one one day. At 35 years old now, sadly that ship has sailed for me. But I'm always fascinated by the stories of HELL week. To become a SEAL, you have to make it through this six month training course, and the hardest week of the 6 months is the third week, called 'Hell Week.' 5 ½ days in which you get almost no sleep. In 5 days, you run over 200 miles. Or, for up to 8 miles at a time, a team of 6 soldiers will have to carry a boat over their heads as they hike together through mud and slog. And often you do this wet and cold and covered inside and out of your clothes with sand. I was reading the account of one SEAL who said that because his team came in last they had to do nonstop cycles of pull-ups, pushups and air squats for 6 hours straight. Sometimes at night, when the temperature can drop down to the low-40s, they stand neck deep in the cold ocean for over an hour.

Here's the thing: At any point, one of these can choose to quit by simply talking up to a bell and ringing it, at which point you're treated to hot coffee and warm donuts and a nice bed. But you're out. For those who remain steadfast to the end, they have the great honor of becoming a SEAL.

## VAMP

Now, I realize that not many of you will become SEALS. But James uses imagery like this to urge you to press on. Stay steadfast, he says, under trial. Keep running the race, don't ring the bell, because God has something amazing for you at the end.

**Remember that journal I read to you last week?** You can see it--through the mud--the sun! God is waiting at the finish line. And what you will be there is stronger, more beautiful, more full of joy and God than you could ever imagine!

The point is: **Hold on and don't give up.** Suffering is not forever. God is up to something good.

You say, "But pastor, there's a reason I'm not a Navy Seal. I don't have that type of stuff in me."

The **reason you and I can be steadfast with him** is because he is steadfast with us. Because God demonstrates his love for me in that while I was still a sinner and an enemy, Christ died for me, and then of his own will he brought me forth by the word of truth, that I should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures... and he's the Father of lights in whom is no shadow of turning, and so I am convinced that the one who began a good work in me will complete it unto the day of Jesus Christ. **I can remain steadfast to him because I know he's steadfast with me.**

So, when I feel like I can't hang onto him, I just remember that he's hanging onto me--and that keeps me hanging onto him! And when I fail him, he stays faithful to me, so I can get up and keep coming back

to him. The Lord has promised good to me; his word my hope secures; he will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures!

**Can you anchor your life on that promise?** It's the only sure foundation in the universe. Which brings us to COMMUNION. This is how we are going to end our time in the Word this week. The bread and the cup. These are the symbols of God's steadfast commitment to us, and we're going to end our time by taking a few minutes just to sit with them.

You should have gotten them when you came in, so take them out, if you will...

## **COMMUNION**