

James
Hook, Line, and Sinker, (Part 1)
James 1:13-18
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Well, this morning, we return to our study of the letter of James, to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. It's already been a wonderful journey for me, and I trust it has been for you as well, as we begin to look into the richness of this book. Today, we come to the issue of temptation. The passage that we're going to be examining, James 1:13-18, is absolutely foundational to the Christian life and experience. A number of years ago, I had the opportunity to really study this passage in depth, and the truths that I discovered here revolutionized my understanding of sin and temptation of my own heart. In fact, I've had the opportunity to share a few of the things from this passage with the men in our church, as well as with some of the young people, but let me just tell you that if you were in those studies with me that you haven't heard all that this passage has to yield, and we're going to be looking a lot more in-depth than we did in sort of an overview when we looked at it before with a few of you. So, make sure that you tune in, because there's so much richness in this great paragraph of Scripture.

When I think of the issue of temptation, my mind immediately goes to fishing, and you'll understand why in a few moments. Now, I'm not a fisherman. When I grew up on the Gulf Coast, we often went fishing for short periods of time, but my idea of fishing was the cast net that I often used, where you just throw the net out there and pull the fish back in. My idea of fishing is not sitting in a boat somewhere all day, and not having the slightest nibble on your line.

But while I'm not a fisherman, I know a great fisherman. His name is Christopher Parkening. He also happens to be the world's foremost classical guitarist. But those in the fly-fishing part of our world, and into the fly-fishing in a big way, they know Chris as a world-class fly-fisherman who just happens to play the guitar. He entered a number of years ago into the Gold Cup Tarpon Tournament. Now, most of you probably never heard of the Gold Cup Tarpon Tournament. But it is the Wimbledon of fly-fishing. Takes place in the Florida Keys in the Gulf of Mexico each year, and a number of years ago, I was sitting over lunch, and Chris told the story, and I've never forgotten it. It was of his competition in this tarpon tournament down in the Florida Keys. It was near the end of the tournament, and he really hadn't seen anything of significant size at this point, just a few hours till the tournament was done, and his guide spotted off the bow a huge tarpon. And so, Chris cast the fly. The fish turned slightly, and seemed interested by the lure,

but didn't strike. So, the guy suggested that Chris cast the fly again. This time, the fish grabbed it, and a battle ensued. In fact, a two-hour battle to pull this fish into the boat. But, just as they got the tarpon to the edge of the boat, and they could tell from how it fought and from the size as it appeared throughout the struggle, that it was going to be potentially, in competition for the tournament, as they got it just to the edge of the boat, all of a sudden it managed to get loose, and so the guide jumped into the chest-high water and grabbed the fish. And he immediately told Chris to jump in with him, and so Chris jumped into the water. So, here are two grown men wrestling a fish off of the Florida Keys. This fish was so powerful that it managed to pull these two grown men a hundred yards from their boat, still struggling to hold on to this slippery, slimy creature.

At one point in the struggle, Chris tells the story that the tarpon opened its mouth. Now, if you're not familiar with tarpons, you may not be aware that when a tarpon opens his mouth, particularly a large one, it's about the size of a watermelon, and in the heat of the struggle, Chris did something that he would have probably thought better of in his saner moments, but when that fish opened his mouth, he took his fist and thrust it down the fish's mouth and out its gills, essentially putting the fish in a headlock. When he did that, his guide gasped, and was absolutely shocked that he did this. Well, Chris said, look, you know, I've got it. You go get the boat, and bring the boat back over here.

And so, the guide went, brought the boat the hundred yards to where they had managed to headlock this fish, and they managed to get it on board. Only after that, did Chris understand why his guide was so shocked. Because the gills of a tarpon are razor-sharp, and they'd absolutely lacerated his arm. He had to have stitches. But, and this is the really important part, and you men will appreciate this, he won! A hundred and thirty-seven pounds, and six feet long. The winner of the tournament.

Now, I am absolutely not that devoted a fisherman. But I do know this: fishing at its heart is about deception. And so, it's no surprise that the most thorough discussion of human temptation in Scripture is immersed in the language of fishing. This Sunday, and, Lord willing, two weeks from today, we're going to carefully examine this passage together, James 1:13 - 18. Now, let me give you, remind you of the context. The author is one of the four half-brothers of our Lord. His name is James. James was the leader in the Jerusalem church. This is the first book that was written in our New Testament. It's written somewhere in the mid-forties A. D. And James writes it to those Jews who were scattered probably as a result of the persecution recorded in Acts 12. And because they had been persecuted, because they'd been driven from their homes,

because they now find themselves without resources and in strange countries, James begins his letter dealing with the issue of trials. In verses 2 - 12, we've gone through those together, James deals with the trials that God brings into our lives to test our faith and build our endurance. The word translated "trial" in verses 2 and 12, that word is the noun form of the verb that is translated "tempt" in verses 13 and 14. So, James uses this sort of link word, and he uses it to transition from testing to temptation. Why does he do that? Because every trial that you and I encounter, ever difficulty which God brings, carries with it the possibility of an inner enticement to sin.

The test comes from God. The temptation does not. So, in verses 13 -18, James transitions from the external test that God brings to strengthen our faith, and to prove us to the inner temptation to sin, whether that temptation comes in the midst of trial or not. This is absolutely crucial, because temptation is a universal human experience, and becoming a believer doesn't change that. I hate to give you the bad news, but you will be tempted as long as you live. Even Christ was tempted. It's part of what it means to be human. So, Christian maturity does not mean that we are tempted less, it means we choose to sin less. It's imperative because we're going to face this all through our lives, that we learn how to deal with temptation.

Let me read you these wonderful verses, this paragraph of thought of how to respond to temptation. Verse 13, James writes,

"Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God. For God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust is conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren, every good thing given, and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will, He brought us forth by the Word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures."

Now in verse 13, we get the theme of this passage. Notice he says when he is tempted. Literally, when one is being tempted. This passage is describing our response during temptation, or immediately after yielding to temptation. How are we supposed to respond when we find ourselves being tempted? Or, what do we do when we've given in to temptation, and chosen to sin? What do we do now? Well, James answers those questions here. In this paragraph, James outlines four godly responses to temptation. If you and I can master these responses, these skills,

we will be equipped to deal with the reality that'll be a part of our lives every day, from now until we die or Christ returns. Let's look at these godly responses together.

The first is accept full responsibility. Accept full responsibility. Verse 13. "Let no one say I am tempted of God." Sinners always want to cast blame somewhere else. This happens from the earliest moments of life. Children don't have to be taught to blame someone else. They don't have to be taught this skill. In fact, you understand if you have children, or have had children, or you've been around children, you can catch them absolutely red-handed with the evidence in their hands, you think, "I've got them this time", and their first response is what? "Well, she did it first!" John Calvin, in his commentary on this passage, writes:

This warning is very necessary, this warning about blaming others. For nothing is more common among men than to transfer to another the blame of the evils they commit. And they then especially seem to free themselves when they ascribe it to God Himself. This kind of evasion we constantly imitate, delivered down to us as it is, from the first man.

Exactly right. We got this fairly. We got it from Adam. In fact, if you go back to the third chapter of Genesis, you find that immediately after the first sin, blame shifting began as a common practice. What does Eve say in Genesis 3:13? She says, the serpent deceived me. It's that animal you made, God. It's not my fault. In verse 12 of Genesis 3, Adam says, God, I accept full responsibility. It's my fault that I sinned. No. What does he say? He says it's the woman You gave me to be with me. She gave me from the tree. This is such a common part of our lives and of our thinking that it's even a proverb.

Proverbs 19:3 puts it this way: "The foolishness of man ruins his way." We mess up our own lives. And then, how do we respond? Listen to the second half of the proverb. "And his heart rages against the Lord." We get angry with God. We make the mess, and we get angry with God about it, as if it's His fault. We shift the blame. And of course, today, in our culture, blame-shifting has become like a national pastime. You pick the cause. There's something else to blame for what I do, or the way I am. For example, heredity is a common thing that's blamed. Every sin is now a genetic predisposition, whether you're talking about homosexuality or alcoholism or drug abuse. You know, I want to tell those people who say these things and write these things, get over it. Every sin is a genetic predisposition. You got it from your parents, and they got it from Adam. That doesn't free us from the responsibility to obey God and the weight of blame if we choose to sin.

Others blame their environment. You know, well, I just grew up in a dysfunctional family, and that's the reason I'm the way that I am. Everybody grows up in a dysfunctional family. We're dysfunctional people. We're all sinners. There are no perfect homes. Only Adam and Eve had a perfect home, and they rebelled against that. Others blame their circumstances. A woman right here in Texas kills her children, and then blames her post-partum depression. Some blame other people. The most graphic illustration of that is the Columbine killers, who blamed the insensitivity of their other classmates. Boy, if young people took the life of everyone who was insensitive to them, there would be nobody left in the world. Some people blame Satan for their sin. This is particularly common in the charismatic movement. Satan made me do it. You know, there's some demon somewhere that led me to this.

James says, "Let no one say, I am being tempted by God." The verb tense here implies that God is constantly tempting this person. Here's a person who's probably feeling the guilt of giving in again and again to a particular temptation, and he's decided, rather than bear the guilt himself, to blame God for it. This is a common reaction. We all do it. And when we choose to blame God, it takes one of two forms. Sometimes people blame God directly. Like the noted Scottish poet, Robert Burns, he writes, and this is addressed to God: "Thou knowest, thou hast formed me with passions wild and strong, and listening to their witching voice has often led me wrong." And he goes on to say that "he is by passion driven, but yet, the light that led astray was light from heaven." What blasphemy. Accusing God of his sin and temptation.

But we do the same thing, don't we? We say, you know, God hasn't taken away my desire for whatever, for drugs, or pornography, or alcohol, or we say, God, you made me this way. Why? Why did you make me like this? Or, God brought this temptation into my life. Sometimes we directly blame God. But most of the time, we're a little more subtle, and we take the indirect route. The Greek preposition here that's translated "by", "tempted by God", implies that God is the remote agent, or the ultimate cause. You remember, when Adam sinned, who did he blame as the immediate cause? Eve. It's the woman you gave me. But notice, he blames God as the ultimate cause. The woman You gave me to be with. This is how we respond when we're tempted. We blame God, not directly, but indirectly.

For example, we say things like this: You know, if it weren't for my parents, I wouldn't be the way I am. Or we say, I just can't help it. It's just the way I am. It's the way I'm made. Or we say things like my temptation is greater than I can bear. Now, notice what you're doing in each of those cases. If you say anything like that, you're really blaming God as the ultimate cause, because God is sovereign. Who put you in that home? God did. Who gave you those parents?

God did. Who gave you those circumstances? God ultimately is sovereign, and allowed those circumstances in your life. So, if we assign the blame for our sin to anything outside of ourselves, whether it's parents, or spouse, or heredity, or environment, or circumstances, or other people, we are really blaming God.

James is saying, don't blame God, even as being indirectly responsible. Why? Well, notice, he gives us two reasons. Verse 13, for, because God cannot be tempted with evil. He says listen, don't blame God because of God's character. God cannot be tempted with evil. "Cannot be tempted" is really one Greek word. It's used only here in the New Testament in the Septuagint. If I translated it literally for you, it would be this: God is "untemptable". He's untemptable by evil, which of course refers to things that are morally base and degrading. John McArthur in his commentary writes: "God and evil exist in two distinct realms that never meet. He has no vulnerability to evil, and is utterly impregnable to its onslaughts. He is aware of evil, but untouched by it, like a sunbeam shining on a dump is untouched by the trash." He borrows an image from John Calvin.

Scripture clearly teaches that God is in no way tainted or tempted by evil. You can go anywhere in Scripture and discover that from those mighty angelic beings in Isaiah 6:3 declaring, "holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts" to 1 Samuel 2:2, "there is no one holy like the Lord." Psalm 5:4, "You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil." First John 1:5, "God is light, and in Him is what? No darkness at all." This is so important. This is foundational. James Hebert writes: "The fact that God is untemptable of evil is the foundation of our belief in a moral universe."

By the way, on a side note, I believe this is one of the passages that argue for what theologians call the impeccability of Christ, that Christ could not have sinned. He was not able to sin. I love the way W. G. T. Wright, the theologian, describes it:

He says if you take a thin filament of wire, imagine for a moment that that thin filament of wire is the humanity of Christ. Can it be broken? Absolutely. But take that thin filament of wire, and weld it into the heart of a huge steel rod. Theoretically, can that filament of wire be broken? Absolutely. But, practically, is there any way that it can be snapped? No, because the humanity of Christ was absolutely interwoven with the deity of Christ, although they remain separate. He was one at the same time God and man, unable to sin.

So, what James is saying here is, don't blame God for sin and temptation, because of His character. He's untemptable. But also, don't blame Him because of His actions. Notice the last part of verse 13. He Himself does not tempt anyone. He Himself in the original is emphatic. He is not tempting. It is not within the sphere of God's present activity to tempt. James' argument is this, listen: If God Himself will have nothing to do with evil, then He's not going to try to get others to do it. God isn't the source of your temptation.

So, if God isn't responsible, who is? Notice verse 14. Each one is tempted by his own lust. Reminds me of the comic strip character who said, "We have met the enemy, and it is us." That's what James is saying. Instead of blaming God that you give in to temptation, that you choose to sin, accept full responsibility. The responsibility for our temptation and our sin lies within our own hearts. In fact, every one of our sinful acts, listen carefully to this, every one of our sinful acts flow out of a corrupted heart, and that's why we choose to sin. We've been studying this on Sunday nights, the issue of depravity. Psalm 51:5, David says, "I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Christ in Mark 7:21, says "from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, etc."

Those passages represent hundreds of verses in the Bible that describe the original sin that we have inherited from natural generation from our parents. We've been studying that together on Sunday nights. If you haven't been able to be here, I encourage you to get the tapes. Original sin, what is that? It's that package that you and I have inherited from our parents. That package includes total depravity. We are by nature morally and spiritually corrupt in every part of our beings, moral inability. We're going to talk about tonight. We are utterly incapable of changing our character, or doing anything that pleases God.

And the third part of the package is real personal guilt. Because of our corruption, because of our inability to please God, because we bear the weight of Adam's sin, we are deserving of punishment. The classic statement of the Protestant Reformation puts it this way:

"From this original corruption whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil. From that corruption, do proceed all actual transgressions. Every sin, both original and actual, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God."

In other words, you sin because of what you are. I sin because of who I am. The devil didn't make me do it. I made me do it. This is James' point. We alone are to blame for our temptations and sins. Listen carefully. They flow from the polluted fountain of our own depraved hearts. If you want to respond biblically to temptation and sin, you must start by refusing to blame anyone or anything else, including God, and accept full responsibility.

The second biblical response to temptation is found in verse 14: identify the source. This is so helpful. If you want to deal with your temptation and sin, if you want to understand it, you need to identify the source. Where is it really coming from? In verse 14, James says, "each one is tempted by his own lust." Each one, notice, temptation is a universal reality, is tempted, literally is being tempted, the verb tense speaks of a constant reality. Every human being is being tempted by his own lust. Here's the source of our sin and temptation. Temptation for us does not have its source in the outer lure, but in the inner lust.

Now, what exactly are lusts? What is this lust that's described here in verse 14? The word "lust", the Greek word "lust", is simply a word which means "strong desire". It is a longing of the soul for what will give it delight. When you see the word lust in your English Bible, read the word "desire, longing, or better, craving". It's a "craving". It's unfortunate in English when we hear the word lust, we think of sexual sin. Certainly, that's included. That's one form of craving, but that's not the only form. What you need to understand about this word lust is in the New Testament, it is a neutral word. It is not inherently evil. It is good or evil depending on what the object is of your craving. What do you desire?

You see, God has planted the abiding principle within man to desire and choose what brings him delight. Man can delight in and therefore desire what's good. For example, if you were to trace this word through the Scripture, you would find that sometimes man craves food to satisfy his normal hunger. There's nothing wrong with that. In fact, that's good. You find in Luke 22:15 that Christ craved to eat the Passover with His disciples. In 1 Thessalonians 2:17, Paul craved to see other believers. In Matthew 13:17, we're even to crave to know Divine mysteries.

And if you go back to the Old Testament, the Septuagint, there we're told that we should crave the Word of God, Psalm 119:20. And Isaiah 26:9 says we should crave God Himself. There Isaiah says, "my soul longs, or craves, or lusts after you, O God." In Isaiah 58:2, there are those who crave the nearness of God. But I think the usage that most informs the New Testament of this word is to go back to Exodus 20:17, Exodus 20:17. There, the Septuagint uses this word for the tenth commandment. You shall not covet, or you shall not crave.

Paul uses it that way in Romans 7:7 as well. So, when you come to the New Testament, while this word is inherently neutral, it's used mostly in the New Testament for sinful desires. Any craving for what God has prohibited or currently withheld. But where do these cravings come from? Well, ultimately, the cravings of our heart trace back to Satan himself. Jesus makes a fascinating point in John 8:44. He's talking there to the religious leaders of Israel, and to the people of Israel who are an, antithetical to Him, and He says, "You want to do the lusts of your father, the cravings of your father. It's a reference to Satan. He says, "You're just copying your father, Satan. You have the same cravings that he had." So, ultimately our cravings trace back to the father of all sin, Satan himself. But more directly, our cravings are part of that package. They're part of the depravity that comes to every human being from Adam through our parents, that indwells and controls fallen man.

In fact, these cravings define what it means to be unregenerate. These cravings that we're describing, this constant state of craving or lusting, is what it means to be an unbeliever. Let me show you several passages. Turn to Ephesians. We turn to this passage often because it's so definitive in understanding the fallen character of man. Ephesians 2:3, "Among them, that is the sons of disobedience, we too, that Paul includes himself, now he's talking about all Christians, among the sons of disobedience, we, all of us Christians formerly lived, watch this, in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind."

This is what it means to be an unbeliever. It means to be pursuing with all of your might the cravings of your heart. Chapter 4 of Ephesians, verse 22, Paul says, "in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the deceitful lust, the lust of deceit," He says, listen, this is who you used to be. You lived a life that was absolutely consumed with the cravings of the flesh. Turn over to Titus 3, Titus 3:3: again Paul says, "... we also once ourselves, that is all of us who are believers, we once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various cravings and pleasures."

This is how unbelievers live. But here's a key point. Most unbelievers, the people around you who aren't in Christ, they are often unaware of these powerful desires, and that it's these cravings which are driving them. They just think they're doing what they want to do. And in a sense, they are. But behind what they want to do lies these sinful cravings of the heart, and they're often unaware of them until the law of God shows up.

This is what Paul describes in Romans 7. Turn, turn to Romans 7 for a moment, Romans 7:7. He talks about what happens when he became aware of the law. Verse 7 says,

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the law, for I would not have known about craving or coveting if the law had not said you shall not crave, YOU SHALL NOT COVET.” [He said I didn’t know until the law of God showed up. And I realized that’s what was really going on. And so, did Paul then obey the law? Absolutely not.] Look at verse 8. “But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me craving of every kind.”

God’s command not to crave because of our depravity only makes unregenerate men crave those things more. By the way, this is the problem with legalism, even as a believer. The flesh has no power to control the flesh. It only awakens the flesh, and makes it more eager to, to pursue the sin.

Now, that’s who unbelievers are. But when you and I came to faith in Christ, God gave us a new disposition. The way Ezekiel puts it, he gave us a new heart, and with that heart, he gave us new desires. Now we have a desire for things that please God. We have a desire for God’s Word. We have a desire for holiness. But here’s the key point: while you have those new and holy desires, those desires, those cravings, those sinful cravings that were a part of who you were before Christ, do not go away, once we become believers. If we had time, I’d take you to the second half of Romans 7, where Paul makes that crystal clear. Those cravings remain because we retain what the Bible calls our flesh, our unredeemed humanness which Paul develops at length in Romans 6 and 7.

And the primary characteristic of our flesh, listen carefully, the primary characteristic of our flesh that remains with us continues to be these corrupt longings, passions, and cravings, what Peter calls in 1 Peter 2:11, fleshly lusts or the cravings of the flesh which war against our souls. That’s what’s going on inside. You see, from the outside, we can face external temptation brought to us by Satan, as he did with Christ in the temptation of Christ in Matthew 4. We can have external temptation coming to us from others. You go to the book of Proverbs, and the Proverbs says don’t let sinners entice you, tempt you to sin. You get to chapter 6 and you have the immoral woman enticing the naïve man. So, others can externally tempt us to sin. Satan can externally draw us into sin.

But there would be no internal attraction or desire for evil things if it weren’t for our depravity. Our greatest problem is not the devil without, it’s the traitor within. Now what effect do these cravings have on us? Very important that you understand. You have, as part of the fallenness

that's still with you as a believer, these cravings, and these cravings or these desires are the root of every sinful act, whether a sin of thought or attitude or word or deed. Every time you sin, it's not just about that behavior, it's about the craving beneath it that fuels it.

Let me show you this. Turn over to James 4. We'll get here in God's time and my time, I guess. James 4:2, James puts it this way: "You crave and do not have, so you commit murder." What's he saying here? He's saying that even murder begins as a craving of the heart. It starts inside. It flows out of this craving of our hearts. You see the same thing in 1 Timothy. Paul describes it in 1 Timothy 6. He says, "those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction." Now watch verse 10: "For the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil. And some by craving for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves through with many griefs." You see, it starts with the craving of the heart, and the craving of the heart then issues forth in an action, in an attitude, in a sin.

So, how can we identify these lusts or cravings that tempt us to sin? Well, let me give you the basic forms they take. John does in 1 John 2. Here are the basic form our lusts, or categories may be another word we could say, into which our cravings fall. First John 2:15, "Do not love the world nor the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, [now here he's going to delineate the categories into which our cravings fall, first of all,] the "lust of the flesh", the craving of the flesh. These are the cravings of our unredeemed humanness. It includes the bodily appetites and the cravings of our unredeemed mind as well.

The second category is the "lust of the eyes", the craving of the eyes. This describes the craving to possess, to have what we don't have.

And then finally, he says there's the "boastful pride of life". This describes the craving for superiority, importance and recognition, arrogance because of one's circumstances, internal feelings of superiority or a subtle parading of one's status, possessions or accomplishments in order to impress other people. Those are the categories into which our cravings fall.

But they get much more specific than that. Back in James 1:14. Notice he says, "each one is emptied by his own lust." You see, our lusts have specific manifestations. Each of us is capable of harboring any lust, any craving, but circumstances, the influence of others, inherited propensities, tend to make us most susceptible to certain cravings or lusts. Now remember, these

are not unique to us. First Corinthians 10:13 says, “there’s no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.” You know, sin loves to get people alone, it loves to make them feel alone, make them feel like they are far more wicked and perverted than anyone else, and certainly there are people that are more sinful than others. But there is no temptation that isn’t common to man. Not necessarily to every man, but common. You’re not unique. We’re even told in 2 Timothy 2: 22 that there are desires or cravings that characterize certain periods of life. Paul says to Timothy, “beware the cravings of youth.” Youthful lusts.

We understand this if you back up and think about the issue of fishing. Back in the spring, Scott Mason, being a very brave man, decided to take me fishing. Now, as I’ve already described to you, a fisherman I’m not, and I usually don’t have the patience to just sit and drop a cord in the water, and sit there and watch it all day. I like something to be happening. As we got there that morning at the lake, we started out with a particular lure, we were fishing for bass. We started out with a particular lure on the end of our line, and as we threw that lure out there, and brought it back across the water, there was, there were no takers. There was nothing happening. It was a beautiful morning, but there was no fishing going on. And so, after a few minutes of that, Scott suggested, well, let’s change to a different lure.

And so, we changed the lures on each of our lines, and as we threw those back out and drug them across the water, all of a sudden, one after another, the bass begin to hit our lines, and in a very short period of time, we pulled in a number of fish, which is my idea of fishing. As I thought about that, it occurred to me that temptation is like that. Temptation is like the different kinds of baits or lures fishermen use. They might use a different bait or lure for a different kind of fish, or they might even use a different lure or bait for the same fish in different day parts or in different situations and circumstances. You and I are, we tend to respond to certain kinds of lures and baits. We are repulsed by some desires, you know, I’ll find myself saying, as you probably find yourself saying, “I don’t get it. I don’t see why that person could find any attraction there.” But others I understand, and so do you. Those are our own cravings.

Now, let me give you a few examples briefly as we finish up this morning. What are some examples of lust, of cravings of our hearts? Well, obviously evil things or anything we desire that’s evil, that’s forbidden is a sinful craving. But we can even sinfully crave good things. When is it that normal, permitted desires become lust or sinful cravings? Well, they become sinful cravings when we crave them in excess. Food, money, clothes, those are all necessary parts of life. There’s nothing wrong with wanting those things, but when we crave them in

excess, it becomes a sinful craving. Sometimes it becomes sinful by craving those things in contradiction of God's commands.

They may be good things, but the time isn't right. For example, the physical relationship is a good and beautiful part of life, a wonderful part of marriage, but God has laid down specific instructions for when this good thing is to be enjoyed, and to crave to fulfill that good desire outside of marriage is to turn a good desire into a sinful craving. We can also turn good things into sinful cravings when we desire them in rejection of God's providence in our lives.

Something good that God has not chosen to give us at this time, I often see this in connections like marriage, people who desire to be married, and God hasn't allowed that, and it becomes this huge sinful craving, not because marriage isn't good, but because it dominates their life in contradiction of God's providence. Children, wanting children, can be the same thing. There are a lot of things like that.

But let me give you a brief list. Here are some common cravings. These come from my own heart, as well as my experience in counseling others. Here are some of the sinful cravings that are very common in our world. The craving for approval or acceptance. Some people have a craving for pleasure or fun, for money, for possessions, for power or control. Some people just want to be in control, and they'll do whatever it takes to manifest that control. Sometimes teenage girls will, to be in control, choose to deprive their bodies of the needed food. Others crave status or significance, fulfillment, peace. Some people just want peace. Others crave respect. Some crave marriage. Some crave not being married. Some crave independence. Some crave children, success, education, sex, appearance, they either want to be younger, they want to look younger than they do, or they want to look thinner than they do. Some people crave security. And out of those cravings grow all of our sinful choices.

James teaches us that to respond biblically to temptation and sin, we must accept full responsibility, and secondly, we must identify the source, which is the cravings that are part of our unredeemed humanness, that express themselves in our sinful actions. Now, let me give you just a couple of practical steps very quickly to consider this week.

Number 1: examine your own heart to see if you have a tendency to blame others, your circumstances, your heredity, your environment, God, or anything else other than your own depraved heart for your sin. See if you tend to do that. If whatever that sinful tendency is you struggle with, whatever your own lusts are, are you blaming something other than your own

heart? If so, you're blaming God. Recognize that, and acknowledge it before God, and seek His forgiveness.

Number 2: make a list of the temptations you face most frequently, and then try to identify what craving or desire may be the source of each of those temptations. What craving is it that you're seeking to fulfill? Perhaps you struggle with anger. Anger is merely the outward manifestation of sin. What is the craving that drives that? What is it you crave? What is it you really want that causes you to be angry? Is it respect? Is it control? You need to look and see what is it that lies beneath those sinful expressions.

And number 3: confess that sinful desire to God. You see, now you're not dealing with your sin at the surface level. You're saying, what is the craving that's fueling it, and confess that to God, seek His forgiveness.

Number 4: come back in two weeks, because then we'll examine the process that temptation always follows in the heart, and the tools that enable us to effectively and consistently resist it.

Let's pray together. Father, we are always in your debt for so many reasons. One of them is the very clear and practical teaching of your Word. Lord, I thank you for this passage from the pen of your servant James. Thank you for helping us to understand our own hearts.

Lord, forgive us for ever blaming anything but ourselves for our temptation and sin. Most of all, Father, forgive us, because when we blame anything but us, we really are blaming You. And You are untemptable, and You tempt no one.

Father, I pray that You would help us to look deep within our hearts for the source of our sin. Help us to see it in our own cravings. Lord, help us to examine our hearts to see not merely the expression of our sinful hearts, but the cravings that flow out of our sinful hearts, that fuel our sin, and to deal with the root and not merely the fruit.

Father, I pray for the person here today who doesn't know Christ, who still lives to indulge their cravings. They're absolutely enslaved to their desires. Father, I pray that You would produce in them a genuine repentant heart. Help them even today to cry out to You, who will respond.

Give them repentance and faith, to the glory of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.