

Book of James

Sermon #3: Play Stupid Games

James 1:13-18

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- September 4, 2022

We're looking at the Book of James today, if you'll turn to chapter one. And I'll let you know—first hour people, you have an opportunity to go to discussion questions. We have a wonderful host in the education building--that's kind of straight across. It's the ugly one-story building—we call it “Ugly Two.” And there's discussion time together, you'll get to meet people and see how you might apply today's passage. We're in James chapter one.

When my son Ryan was playing lacrosse in college his senior year, they were playing a team that was well below their team's talent and skill levels. And anyway, Ryan plays defense. And one of the opposing team's attack men was making a run for the goal. And so, Ryan kind of did this—I don't know what you'd call it—a high-risk, low-reward overhead check. And that overhead check gave birth to a score. The player went on to score a goal. And then Ryan was able to get a penalty, which meant he went into a penalty box. And while all of that was happening, Ryan's coach became absolutely unglued. I mean, he's screaming at Ryan from the sidelines as it's happening because the coach could see it happening in slow motion. (You know, coaches can do that.) And Ryan had to walk by the coach to get to the penalty box. And so, the coach grabs Ryan by the facemask and screams into his face—spittle, that kind of thing—and just yells at him, “What are you doing?! You're playing like a freshman!”

Now the reason he said that and the reason he was so upset is because when Ryan showed up to the team four years earlier he had all these freshmen high school style moves. They don't work in college lacrosse. And the coach had worked to break him of those bad habits and to beat that kind of playing out of him, drilling him so that he wouldn't be tempted to go for high-risk, very low-reward—what's it called again?—overhead check on the way into the goal.

Now the reason I tell you that story is because when we look at the Book of James, you need to understand James—not just today's lessons, for sure. Coach's super-animated display here is called “coach speech.” And you need to know that that coach loved and respected Ryan. As a matter of fact, they have a reward they give out every year to the best team member of the

year, and it's called the Ryan Cassidy Award. They renamed it after him. It's his jersey—that's the plaque. So, there's no doubt about love or respect. That's just coach speech. That's the way a lot of coaches speak. And grabbing facemasks and screaming at you is kind of the tone of what's happening here in James. And you need to know that to understand the deeper meaning; not just what this book says, but what it means.

And know this about James: he's going to be showing a great deal of love and respect in this book. He's going to say "brothers ..."—and we would say "brothers and sisters ..."---and sometimes "beloved brothers" more than any other author in the New Testament. And then his style is going to be yelling. He's going to use what in grammar is called "imperatives" more than anyone in the Bible. It's so saturated in his writing, that it's one imperative for every two verses. He's a coach. He's yelling.

And I want you to feel the passion, because part of the meaning is in that passion. Because he's going to be grabbing us by the facemask and yelling and wondering why we don't know better. We're playing like freshmen. He's trying to scare us sober because what he's talking about is true.

Now in the Book of James he's talking about the nature of faith, more so than any other writer. He's going to talk about how to mature in faith. And if you ask the question, *What does that even mean? What does "faith" mean?*—you should have been here last week. Here's the notes from last week, that when we say we have faith or trust in Yahweh, we're saying it's in the promises of the character and the nature of Yahweh, the God of the Bible, that He is both good and sovereign. We just sang, "Holy, holy, Lord Almighty"—that's sovereign; "good and gracious King." And when we act in faith and in obedience and we're doing what Jesus tells us to do, especially during difficult times, we're proving, independent of circumstances, that we believe that God is good and that God is powerful and sovereign.

And so, maturity, in the context of last week, which is important, is that in difficult times when we encounter various trials, we actually are committing to perseverance. And this week James is going to add temptations in the context of trials, because they're often walking hand in hand together. When there are trials they're usually coming at the end of some temptations, or trials precede temptations. What's the old saying? "Fatigue makes cowards out of all of us." So, in the context of fatigue when we're trying to persevere, here come trials.

And the last two years we have had various trials, haven't we? Yeah. We've been inundated with them. And addictions of various kinds that went up in 2020 have not receded. In other words, what once were vices are now habits. And it's because we've gotten used to that. And so, today's lesson is especially important to people living in this time, in this place. He's talking to us and he's saying, *Do not fall into temptation. Do not sin, especially in times of various trials.*

Now today, I think there's somewhat of a simple outline that he works. He wants to make sure we understand the clarity of this message. So, it's three simple points. The first is that he's going to talk about the source of temptation. Then he's going to help us avoid temptation by telling us the steps or stages of temptation. And then, finally, he's going to give us a solution for overcoming temptation.

1. The Source of Temptation

James 1:13-14

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 away and enticed by his own desires.

Here's the first one—the source of temptation. He's going to tell us what it's not, and he's going to tell us what it is. This is chapter 1, verses 13 and 14. "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. But each one is tempted when is lured away and enticed by his own desires."

So, the first point is where temptation does not come from. It does not come from Yahweh. And this is like the oldest excuse in the book. It goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden and serves as the template for most temptations or excuses. In Genesis chapter 3 Adam is caught in the context of sin. And his excuse?

Uh, it was the woman that YOU gave me, Lord.

It goes to Eve. *Well, Eve, what's your excuse?*

Well, it was the serpent that YOU made, Lord. (That's implied there.)

We're just always going to push this somehow on God. And whatever it is—*He made me do it—It was the parents that You gave me—It's the way that You made me, Lord—It was the opportunities that I didn't have, and You're in charge, Lord*—it's just so simple and common.

And so much so, that in classic Greek literature, *The Odyssey* by Homer, Zeus is complaining about getting blamed for everything. He says, “It is incredible how easily human beings blame the gods and believe us to be the source of their troubles, when it is their own wickedness and their own stupidity that brings upon them sorrows more severe than any of the things that the gods would assign them.” So, Zeus is complaining about this!

But the reason that James is telling us not to blame God for our failings or even our temptations—the temptation itself—is just based on logic. He's just saying, God—Yahweh—doesn't even have the capacity to be involved in temptation that leads to sin. It says, “God cannot be tempted by evil, and He himself tempts no one.” “Cannot be tempted” means that it's not within His nature. It's like, God cannot be evil or do evil. God can't be involved in temptation that leads to sin. He can't even participate in it. Why? Because, going back to the summary of the attributes of God, He is good, pure good and love. He is sovereign and in control and doesn't bring evil into our lives.

Proverbs 19:3

A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.

So, if God isn't the source of our temptations, what is? Solomon said it succinctly and reviews our passage here. He says, “A man's own folly ruins him, and yet his heart rages against Yahweh” somehow.

James 1:14

But each person is tempted when he is lured away and enticed by his own desire.

And James will say in verse 14, “But each person is tempted when he is lured away and enticed by his own desires.”

Now I hope you're watching the picture, the vivid and graphic picture that James is painting here. He's talking about hunting. He's talking about trapping and hunting and killing. And James is saying, again, with passion, like a coach watching something happen in slow motion, *Look, if you fall into your own desires you're going to end up as the devil's dinner and your head will be on his wall later tonight as a trophy.* He's not playing games in this whole passage here. And he's talking about hunting. And hunting, the temptation part, starts with the bait of your own desires, each person's own desires. It's pretty clear with the words he's choosing here that he's talking about a custom-made bait for you, which is different than for me. What does not tempt you at all, I'm a sucker for every time. One man's oatmeal raisin cookie is another man's chocolate chip cookie.

And the point here is that this design, this bait, this desire, is based maybe on our bents of the way we're made or the way we've been raised, or sometimes a series of choices where we just keep practicing doing dumb things. And the point is that it doesn't matter, because the standards of God remain consistent. And it doesn't matter whether you're wired this way or it's your personality, your temperament, your circumstances—those things. It's independent of this: do not be consumed by these desires. This Book of James is the very definition of what's right and real and true. It's the rock. It's the anchor that doesn't move. All of these other things are variables. It's not trials--it's how we respond to trials. It's not temptation--it's how we respond to temptation.

And so, the first little bit of application here is, one, our temptations do not come from Yahweh. They can't. It's impossible. Not the ones that lead to sin.

And the second one is that the bait that's going to lure us in is customized ... for me. There's another one that's customized for you, and it's based on our desires.

2. The Steps in Temptation

The second part is where James is going to show us how temptation works—the steps in temptation. And he's going to do this to help us avoid it. Look what he says in verse 14 again: "... when we are lured away and enticed by our own desires." "Lured away and enticed .." So, temptation comes, not by the situation of the temptation, but rather, it's our response to it,

choosing to be lured away and enticed. There's a moment in time when the temptation comes to us, it's part of our desires, and we choose.

Okay, let's see where this goes. What could happen? Let me just briefly talk about the attributes of bait, what it is and what it's for. The nature of bait in the context of hunting, which is what we're talking about here, is to first grab you by your desire, to lure you away from safety. And while it's grabbing your desire, it's hiding the obvious agent of death that it is. So, expose the bait, hide the trap. And why is that happening? Again, why are we exposed the bait? Because it's trying to lure you away from various expressions of safety, like out of the woods or out of the brush, out of some kind of cave that protects you, away from your friends, or away from the flock, away from your family. I'm going to get you safely out there. The hunter knows, *Look, I can't beat you fairly; I've got to get you out where I can win.*

It's to lure you out away from safety, and at the same time it doesn't look like death. People say, *It didn't look like sin to me. It looked like popularity. It looked like some kind of satisfaction in life. It didn't look like sin; it looked like—I don't know—just me kind of being me. It didn't look like death; it looked like me just trying to go along and be liked. It looked like a relief from pressure. It looked like fun.* And then there's always, *She look good to me.* There's always that one. *It just looked good.*

So, in deer hunting, you encounter various trials like a drought. The deer start doing stuff they wouldn't do normally, and then a bait is set out away from safety to lure that big buck into a clear shot. He's going to bend down and eat that corn you've been spreading and that corn will be his last meal before he hears the boom. He'll be tonight's dinner and later on someone's wall as a trophy.

And James is saying that Satan, and the world itself as a source of temptation are preparing a bait for you and for me. They're going to put you in the perfect time or the perfect place or wait for that to happen and then pounce on you.

The shortest MMA fight in UFC history lasted one, two, three seconds. Three seconds! Here's how it happened.

Ben Askren used to be a four-time Division I wrestling champion. He wasn't champion four times—he was in the championship four times. He won the last two years. His junior and senior year he won the championship and, in that, he won what would be the equivalent of the Heisman trophy two times. He was only the second wrestler to ever win the wrestling version of

the Heisman trophy twice. He was a national champion, he was on the 2008 Olympic team. His MMA record was 18-0. He never lost. He never lost wrestling in his last two years of college.

And then he ends up going up against Jorge Masvidal. (I'm going to say "Jorge" a lot—I don't know how to say his last name.) He was 33-13. And here's how the fight started. It will take me longer to explain it than the fight actually lasted. Jorge was leaning against the cage right before the bell rang with his arms behind his back, just leaning. Now Ben was setting up sprinting blocks. He was going to race across the cage and he knew that. And when that bell rang, Ben did what Ben did. I mean, he was Division I champion twice. And he runs as fast as he can and shoots in for a double-leg takedown. And Jorge just kind of skips three times and then raises his knee up. And Ben dove into that knee. He was unconscious before he hit the ground. That took three seconds. It took another two seconds until the ref came over and saved him. And so, the whole fight lasted five seconds total. Years of training, and it lasted five seconds. Askren went to the hospital. Jorge went to the bank with a \$50,000 bonus. That's the fastest win in UMC history.

What happened? Why did it happen? How did that happen? Here's what happened. Jorge's coach, Mike Brown, had studied Ben's game films for months and came up with the flying knee as a defense. And they showed films afterwards of Jorge practicing the flying knee months and months in advance of that fight. Then they cut to the warmup session right before he went out to the arena and he's doing the flying knee. He knew it was going to happen, and the whole thing was set up.

Here's what Masvidal said in his post-fight interview. "Askren fell for the bait."

Coach James is telling us that Satan has been watching our game films. He knows, of course, what we're going to do when we're weak. He knows our vulnerabilities. He knows what happens when we get cocky about what we're good at, like double-leg takedowns. It doesn't matter to him. He is reading us, he is plotting, he is conniving. He's setting bait, and he's setting bait to lure us away from our safety. He's going to use our personal desires. He won't be using asparagus, anyone. He's going to play to the part that just lures you out every time. And this is why he's in this coaching model where it says that you're like an ox going to the slaughter. You don't even know what's happening to you. So wake up!

James says, *Look, this is the source of temptation.* Then he's going to stop and talk about the steps of temptation. And then he's going to give us two reasons to not involve ourselves in temptation, not to be lured out. He's going to give us two reasons.

3. The Solution to Overcoming Temptations

The first one is negative, and that inspiration is scary. And then he's going to give us a positive one, a motivation to inspire us. And these are the solutions for overcoming temptation.

Now, here's what I want you to look for when I read these passages. Because he's leaving the hunting metaphor, and now he's going to—believe it or not—to a hospital delivery room. He's going to say, *Look, there are two babies to choose from. What do you want to be known for? There's this baby of falling into temptation. Sin is the baby of death. Or do you want to be identified as the baby of life?* But he says to choose. Choose your baby. Choose death or choose life.

James 1:14-15

But each person is tempted when he is lured away and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown gives birth to death.

Look what he says in verses 14 and 15. Verse 14 helps us with the context. "But each person is tempted when he is lured away and enticed by his own desire. Then when the desire has been conceived, that gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown it gives birth to death."

He says it clearly, doesn't he? There's not a lot to explain. When our desires are entertained and they are succumbed to and they're surrendered, there's a conception there. And that conception gives birth to sin. And when that sin is nurtured and when that sin is kept, when that sin has matured and grows up, it gives birth. It gives birth to death. We have another baby, and it's death.

And the death here is not physical death, or else we'd all be dead. It's not a spiritual death, because he keeps talking to us as brothers and sisters. So, it's not like we lose our covenant relationship with our King. But rather, it is this deathlike existence.

Guilt creeps in on cat's paws and steals whatever joy might have flickered in our eyes. Confidence is replaced by doubt, and honesty is elbowed out by rationalization. Exit peace. Enter turmoil.

--- Max Lucado

Here are some great pictures. Max Lucado writes about this kind of death. "Guilt creeps in on cat's paws and steals whatever joy might have flickered in our eyes. Confidence is replaced by doubt, and honesty is elbowed out by rationalization. Exit peace. Enter turmoil."

David was enticed and gave into his desires and then let them nurture and grow, and they gave birth to his deathlike experience. He writes about it in Psalm 32 when he chose not to repent. It says, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer."

Jesus would say, It's the death of the promise that I gave you to have the abundant life. Jesus offers us a life of abundance, and this will kill that.

Look how James uses the most beautiful human experience—childbearing, birth, a little baby—and he turns it into something horrible. He's trying to shock us. It's supposed to bother us. It is to make us nauseous. He's a coach here. He comes up to our bassinet and says, *What do you have there that has your name written all over it?* And you open it up and it's death—darkness, evil. And you turn away and think, *How did this happen? It's a horror movie.*

And he tells us this, not from hyperbole or exaggeration. James says this because this is true. Choose this if you want. And that's why you're supposed to feel him grabbing your helmet by the facemask and yelling, *Why are you playing like a freshman? You're supposed to know this. You should break the spell now before you surrender to these desires, before you're lured away. You should be afraid here. You should be afraid of the drawing that's pulling you out, drawing you out to a place of weakness.* He's saying, *Wake up!*

Look what he says in verse 16: "Do not be deceived"—and look—"my beloved brothers about sin."

There's an old saying that some of you might know, because it's somewhat of a poem. "Sin will take you further than you want to go, sin will make you pay more than you thought it would cost, sin is going to hold you longer than you can endure." And James is saying here that,

with all that in mind, *Don't be blindsided. You know better now. You know the source of sin and temptation and you know the stages of this.* And he's saying, "My beloved brothers and sisters ..."

Today he would say something like, *You play stupid games, you win stupid prizes.* I mean, we know the joke of "Hold my beer ..." is code for "Physics don't apply to me. Watch this." Well, people in the Church say, "Here, hold my Bible. I'm going to go do something that no one should be doing."

James would say that everything happens for a reason. And sometimes those reasons are that you're gullible and make stupid choices. *You should know better,* he's saying. James is saying that it's a trap. Look at the bait that's been set here. He's saying that you never should have been here in the first place. You're playing like a freshman and you're so far into the season. This should be trained out of you. "Do not be deceived ..."

James is saying, *Don't fight in an area where you can't win against your own desires.*

There's an old '70s movie that I like—I think I like it—I haven't seen it in a long time, so I'm not recommending it. You know how that goes, right? *Come on, kids, let's watch this movie. What? Um...* But it's called *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*. And I think it's fun because Paul Newman is in it. But anyway, it's about an old West Texas judge, a real person named Judge Roy Bean, and there's one section in there where Bad Bob, the notorious Bad Bob—he's the meanest hombre in all the west. And he shows up and he's crazy looking. There he is. And he comes and he's going to kill Judge Roy Bean. And he stands out in front of the courthouse, which is also the saloon, and starts trying to get Judge Bean to come out. Bad Bob is a very fast draw and he's a ruthless killer and Judge Roy Bean has no chance against the ruthlessness of Bad Bob. He's the original Bad Bob, the meanest hombre in the west.

And so, Bean isn't coming out. Bad Bob is starting to make fun of and call him out. Everything sacred to Judge Bean he's mocking and reviling. And while Bad Bob is waiting out there impatiently, the back door of that barn that's behind him opens up, that second floor. And Bean has a rifle with a scope on it and shoots him in the back, like graveyard dead. Just a few minutes later Bean is down and he's looking at the corpse. And one of the sheriffs comes over and says, "Well, Judge, you never gave him a chance." And Bean said, "Nope. I never did."

Who wants to go head-to-head with Bad Bob? Who wants to go head-to-head with your own personal desire? James says, *You know this source of temptation—it's you and your desires.*

You know the steps so you can stay away from those. So before you're lured away from safety, don't even entertain the desires! If you don't go there, you can't get caught there!

The *Star Wars* joke—right? *It's a trap!* That's what he's saying.

Shoot it in the back. Never give it a chance. Or have yourself a grandchild—it'll be death. That's what James is saying here.

James 1:16

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

And now he's going to break from all this scary stuff and say, *Now can I give you some reasons why you should commit to holiness and not give into temptation that are positive? Maybe you'll see the birth that Yahweh has for us.* And it says in verse 16—and verse 16 is a pivot verse—he's saying, *Do not be deceived about sin. Do not be deceived about the nature of Yahweh.*

James 1:17-18

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 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all He created.

Look what he says: “Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 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. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all that He created.”

So, he's saying here, *Do not be deceived about this. The goodness of God, the sovereignty of God ... don't be deceived about that. Every single good thing is from him.* And so, James is appealing to two reasons to want to obey God in the midst of temptation and sometimes in the context of trials. It's because of the goodness of God and it's because of the grace of God.

With the goodness of God, he's contrasting the Father of light to Satan, who is called the father of darkness. Because He is good, God is going to give birth to life, and Satan gives birth to death. James says that Yahweh the Father is the Father of all lights. That's the idea, again, of God being sovereign and loving. He created all lights. He filled the sky with stars. And even in the context of what we consider light, even that kind of casts shadows. He says, *No, no, God is so pure in His goodness that there can be no shadows.* It's impossible. Every single good and perfect gift has to have its source in Yahweh God. That's His nature. That's what we're supposed to have our trust and faith in during trials and when we're being tempted. That's from Yahweh.

Not only is His goodness our motive, but also His grace. That's when he's going to go into that section where he says that Yahweh gave us birth, as we are first-fruits of all of God's creation. Why stay pure? Because of our rebirth. We're born again and that's the nature of our spirits—born again. Or rather, our spirits are born from above. We're ignited in intimacy with God because of what He has done for us, His grace.

And now he piles on here by saying that we are first-fruits. And the first-fruits is kind of a reference to the older Testament. The first-fruits were generally the best of the fruits that came out. And they were the ones dedicated unto the Lord. They belonged to Yahweh. They were his. And he's saying that we, when we're born again, have that status. We are the best and we are belonging to him.

So, James is saying, *Look, you want to stay away from temptation? Stay close to the Father because you're born again; because your identity is based on belonging to Him. And when you look at those baited traps—hopefully they're just passing, not enamoring you and pulling you away—when you look at those baits you look and say, "Compared to what?"*

James is saying that there's no comparison when you compare it to what God has and what God says is what we are. That child he's talking about? Life. And so, during trials he said, *Be dedicated to perseverance. When temptations come, have an absolute passion for purity.* And this coach is telling us that our hope, our faith, our trust is in the goodness of God and His love for us, in the sovereignty of God. That means He has power, He has a plan for us, and He has the ability to execute that plan. He says, *Don't be deceived. Don't be deceived about the power and the nature and the destiny of sin. And do not be deceived about the power and the nature and the destiny of Yahweh God. You have to choose. What's the baby going to be that will be the identity*

of your existence here? Will it be death or will it be life? This author is screaming at us to choose life.

James is going to talk to us throughout this book in pretty straightforward, easy-to-understand ways, like a coach. He's going to say, like an old hymn (some of you know this one), "Trust and obey." Just "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus. Just trust and obey." It's not hard to understand. Sometimes it's very difficult to apply if we take our eyes off Yahweh; if we take our eyes off the goodness of God and the power of God. Don't try to understand or make sense out of whatever's happening. But do not take your eyes off that and be distracted by the desires of our own souls that will lure us away and have us living away. It won't glorify God and it's nothing we're going to be enjoying.

Profound, clear messages today from our coach James. I hope you hear him in his love and affection towards you. I hope you're seeing his passion by grabbing your facemask—even having some spittle hitting you as he's yelling. Do not be deceived by the power of evil and the power of the love of Yahweh God.

Let me close our time with some Proverbs that teach us these same things, and I'll pray after that. If you don't mind joining me, just bow your heads and close your eyes. Here are some things from Solomon:

"The fear of the Lord Yahweh adds length to your life, but the years of the wicked are cut short." (Proverbs 10:27) That baby is death.

"The truly righteous man attains life, but he who pursues evil goes to his death." (Proverbs 11:19)

"The teachings of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death." (Proverbs 13:14)

"He who obeys instructions guards his life, but he who is contemptuous of his ways will die." (Proverbs 19:16)

Lord, the signposts are all around us. So many times, the Word of God is absolutely clear. We try to rationalize and justify. It makes no matter. We're just quoting the devil himself, to give us license to be lured away in our desires.

Lord, I'd ask that You would help us see this for what it is, that we'd hear the Word of God coming at us maybe from the voice of James, screaming, What are we doing here in the first

place? *If we would shoot these desires in the back so that they never have a chance facing them, then maybe we'd live a life that's more pleasurable, more righteous and holy, that glorifies You and doesn't lead to sin that leads to death that leads to glory.*

Lord, I'd ask that You would give us passion of understanding for the panic that is in James' words; that we would persevere under trials and we'd be passionate about our purity and holiness. And we pray this because You are our good and holy King. You chose to love us so much that You gave Your only Son, that He would die so that we could live. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.