



Small Groups

Small Group Discussion Guide

God is Better

Part 2 of the Book of James

Message by Pastor Brian Howard

(Discussion Guide by Pastor Carolyn Taketa)

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What motivates you to do good? How do you resist sin and temptation? In this second message on the Book of James, we focus on the nature of temptations, heavenly rewards, and the power of knowing and trusting God. If we want to be victorious over sin and receive the “crown of life,” we must first be aware of the circumstances that make us more vulnerable to sin, acknowledge the influence of various temptations, and actively fight sin, not with our own will or self-control but with the power God offers. When we know and believe God is better, we can live a victorious life that honors Him.

Opening Question: If you made a New Year Resolution, share what it is and why it matters to you.

Read James 1:12-18 aloud.

I. Blessing of the Crown of Life

Whenever we read about a promise of blessing in the Bible, our ears naturally perk up. Perhaps that is why James starts verse 12 with a wonderful promise of a “crown of life” for those who love Jesus. The word for “crown” in the New Testament Greek (“*stephanos*”) refers to a laurel wreath, a symbol of victory and honor placed on the head of the winner after a race.

James 1:12 “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”

1 Corinthians 9:25 “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”

Revelation 2:10 “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer... Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.”

1. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. How does the metaphor of a race and a reward apply to a life of faith? What are some similar elements?
2. Just like James does in this passage, Jesus and other New Testament authors also consistently present heavenly rewards as a motivation for faithfulness in this life.
 - a. How does the promise of heavenly rewards motivate you to do good now?
 - b. What are some examples of blessings or rewards you have already received through your relationship with Jesus?

II. Satan wants to turn your test into a temptation

Though we sometimes want to blame God for the temptations in our lives, James makes it clear that the cause of temptation is not God, but our own sinful desires. To overcome temptation, we must recognize the situations that are likely to draw us into sin and acknowledge our need for God to help us through it.

James 1:13-14 "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed."

3. **Based on James 1:1-18, what are the differences between tests or trials versus temptations?**
4. Pastor Brian described three types of temptations: 1) the world will tempt you to think your sin is normal; 2) your flesh will tempt you to think your sin is necessary; 3) the Devil will tempt you to think your sin is good. **Brainstorm some practical examples for each of these categories.**
5. **What are some strategies that are helpful in fighting and overcoming temptations?**

III. God is Better

So how do we resist temptation? We focus on who God is and choose to trust Him. Trying to resist temptations by ourselves, through the strength of our will power is futile. When we attempt to take away the wickedness of the world and replace it with ourselves, we fail. Instead, we need to consistently fill ourselves with a life of worship, focusing on our God who is better than anything the world has to offer.

James 1:17-18 "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

Luke 11:13 "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

6. Pastor Brian commented that these verses reveal God to be "the incredible giver, the intimate father, the immutable creator, and the initiating savior."
 - a. **Which of these four aspects of God's attributes has encouraged you recently?**
 - b. **How does knowing God's character help you resist temptation?**
7. **If there is a specific temptation you are struggling with, share as you feel led and pray for one another.**

As you pray together, have each person affirm the goodness of God by filling in the blank in this sentence: "God is better than _____."

Thank God for who He is and what He has promised in His Word!