**O Brother - Week 1 – Temptation**

**Series Big Idea:** James, the half brother of Jesus, shares wisdom on how to overcome challenges that can trip us up as Christ-followers and keep us from growing to maturity.

**Message Big Idea:** When it comes to temptation, it’s not an “if” but a “when,” and the key to maturity is how we respond.

**Scripture**: James 1:13-18

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**Introduction: Siblings**

How many of you have a sibling? *(raise hands)* Ok, a good number of you. As a kid, siblings can be great friends. A sibling can be someone to test out the new toys or someone to be your partner in crime. Yet any of us who have a sibling would say that sometimes things can get a little testy. Maybe your sibling wasn’t a partner in crime, but the crime patrol who ratted you out to Mom and Dad.

My (Mitchell) younger sister Margaret and I have a good relationship now, but it hasn’t always been that way. For example, once I ratted her out when I discovered that instead of taking her vitamins, she was hiding them in the air vent. Another time I accidently smashed her finger in a door and panicked when her face turned blue. Remember, I said accidently! I’m suddenly feeling judged. OK, maybe I wasn’t the perfect brother.

Siblings have their share of tension. Let me ask you a few questions:

* How many of you have a sibling who thinks they are smarter than you?
* How many of you have a sibling who thinks they are more athletic than you?
* How many of you have a sibling who thinks they are God’s gift to the world?

As God’s gift to the world, how could you possibly compete? Your successes and stories could never live up to theirs, right? …at least according to them. Although, if you think you have it rough, just imagine if your sibling thought they were God’s gift to the world…and they actually were! Imagine if your brother was Jesus.

**Series Recap**

Today we begin our series, O Brother, and for the next 5 weeks we are walking through the book of James in the New Testament. We’d love for you to journey with us as we study this powerful book of the Bible together. If you haven’t yet signed up for (graphic) Community’s Bible Reading Plan, I want to encourage you to jump in for this series. Each week in the reading plan, we’re going to closely examine one chapter in the book of James.

The author, James, was the half-brother of Jesus and also a son of Joseph and Mary. Talk about family pressure! Can you imagine if you were James and you wanted to sleep in on a Sunday morning, only to have your parents burst in and say, “Why can’t you be more like your brother?”

Despite the family dynamic, James actually did come to believe in Jesus, although not until after Jesus’ death and resurrection. The book of James is a letter he wrote to Christ-followers who had been scattered all across the region as a result of intense persecution in Jerusalem. Things are really tough for them, and James wants them to have a bigger perspective on their current circumstances so that they can grow in their faith, *(“…so that you might be mature and complete…” –James 1:4)* becoming **“mature and complete.”** Which is a great goal, right? A flourishing faith is what James has in mind for his audience, but he knows that there are some potential pitfalls that can trip Christ-followers up along the way…danger areas that keep us from maturing.

During this series, we’re going to look at 5 of these pitfalls starting with this one today: **Temptation**. Anyone here immune to temptation? Of course not! If you’re sitting in this room, this pitfall relates to you. We all have something that tempts us in some way, shape, or form. Perhaps some of us resonate with the great Oscar Wilde when he said, ***“I can resist anything except temptation.” –Oscar Wilde***

**Word: James 1:13-18**

So, let’s dive into James and see what wisdom he has for us. James comes right out the gate and talks about temptation. He doesn’t waste any time! Here’s what he says:

***“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 person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully-grown brings forth death. 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. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” –James 1:13-18 (ESV)***

When it comes to temptation, James says that it happens when we are “lured and enticed.” In other words, in that moment we are offered something that looks appealing and definitely draws our attention.

Kind of like this…

**Video: Finding Nemo** (0:22-1:15 of this clip - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNlSiEdf-wI)

*This is an “Improved” option for the message.*

That’s what temptation does! It “lures” us away from where we’re at, promising to take us somewhere far better. It’s a lot like what happens when you fish. When you fish, you place a lure on the hook of your fishing line. The point of a lure is to appeal and entice the fish you’re trying to catch.

Now, I don’t know how many are fishermen here today, but I can safely assume that most of us have at least tried it once or twice. Am I right? I still remember the first time I went fishing. It was with my uncle Bubba. I know. You immediately have this picture of a redneck wearing a trucker hat with a fishing lure pinned on it. I can’t believe you would stereotype my uncle like that! But… you’re exactly right. ☺

Anyway, he took me out on the lake he lived on one afternoon. I remember him telling me to just be patient and let the fish see the bait because once they saw the bait, they couldn’t resist. Sure enough, a few hours later I reeled in a largemouth bass and smiled for the Polaroid photo. No joke!

I wondered that day, how could the fish be so stupid? If they only knew that I was waiting on the surface of the water for them, and if they took the bait, it would lead them to being stabbed in the mouth and flopping around on the floor of the boat! If they only knew, they would never give in! And I think the same is true of us. If we only knew, too. And this is the first thing I want us to recognize about temptation.

**1. Someone is fishing for you.**

James tells us in a pretty straightforward way that temptation is real. It’s not made up. It’s not something that shows up only in sitcoms and chocolate cake, but is right in front of us on Monday at work or on Saturday night when no one’s around.

And, understand…where there’s temptation, there’s a tempter. In fact, Scripture tells us that the enemy isn’t some passive spectator waiting for us to trip up, but that he prowls around, looking for opportunities to destroy us, or at the very least, distract us from what truly is important.

But James says something very important in this passage. He says:

***“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.” –James 1:13***

Someone is fishing for you, and that someone isn’t God. James goes on to say:

*(add)* ***“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” –James 1:14***

The one who is fishing for us knows our desires. He baits the hook and waits for us to bite. He is evil. And not the evil villains of the movies, but the real evil that exists in our world. He is behind the slaughtering of millions of people through war and genocide, the immeasurable greed by executives who’re already unimaginably wealthy, the millions of men *and* women caught up in porn addiction, and the countless instances of sexual abuse we’ve seen recently. These are not simply explained by circumstances or a flawed system. They are explained by the very real presence of evil luring and enticing us with desire.

Someone is fishing for you, and on the other end of that line is a hook that wants to lead you away from those who love you or move you to cheat just a little on your expense report or get out your laptop while the wife and kids are out.

Someone is fishing for you, and it’s not a matter of “if” but “when.” James says, *(highlight)* “Let no one say *when* he is tempted,” not “Let no one say *if* he is tempted.” It’s not a question of if he’ll come after you, but when. He’s an expert fisherman, and he’s caught some prized fish over the years. You might wonder, “Why would he fish for me?”

* He’s fishing for you because he wants to lure and entice you away from God’s best for your life.
* He’s fishing for you because he sees that you’re beginning to find your way back to God, and that’s the last thing he wants.
* He’s fishing for you because if he lures you in, he won’t have to worry about you advancing God’s Kingdom anymore.

And the one fishing for you isn’t interested merely in you as an individual, but everyone you know as well. He wants nothing more than to break up our marriages, divide our communities, and distract us from the mission of helping people find their way back to God. The one fishing for you isn’t interested in taking the hook out and letting you go.

And this enemy, he’s not an idiot. Not like one of those dumb criminals that forgets their iPhone has a GPS tracker or who posts a selfie on Facebook after a crime. The tempter knows you and me very well. Which brings us to the second thing we need to know about temptation:

**2. There are different kinds of bait.**

You don’t have to be an avid fisherman or fisherwoman to know that different kinds of bait are used to lure and catch different kinds of fish in different kinds of conditions. You and I are the same way.

What lures you may not necessarily lure me, but we are all lured by something. You may be enticed by something different than the other people in your social context, but the goal of all lures is the same – to catch a fish. If we as humans understand the need to employ different kinds of lures to catch different kinds of fish, how much more so do you think our enemy knows how to use these same types of tactics? Which brings us to point number three:

**3. Maturity means resisting the bait.**

This one may seem obvious, but it’s worth stating – at the moment of temptation, we all have an option. We have a choice, and it’s a critical one. In order to resist temptation, we have to fight the urge to blame and recognize that we all have a choice. Scholar N.T. Wright puts it this way:

**“None of us starts off with a pure internal 'kit' of impulses, hopes and fears. If you are true to 'yourself', you will end up a complete mess. The challenge is to take the 'self' you find within, and to choose wisely which impulses and desires to follow, and which ones to resist.” –N.T. Wright**

Part of growing as a Christ-follower means choosing God’s best for your life over and over again. Each time we come to that fork in the road, we must make the conscious choice to turn toward life instead of taking the bait that ultimately leads to our destruction. The more that we do that, the more we consistently turn toward God’s best for us, the more we grow to be the “mature and complete” Christ-follower James is urging us to become.

**How to Resist Temptation**

So, how do we resist the bait? We can’t resist the bait if we don’t know what our bait is. We must learn what it is that trips us up and take steps to resist it. What lures you specifically? What pitfalls are you most drawn to? Regardless of how you answer that question, the answer to avoiding these pitfalls, this bait – is twofold. First, we must… **Choose God’s Good for Us.**

Listen to how James put it: *(add)*

***“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 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.” – James 1:16-18***

The truth is, every time there is an opportunity to choose the bait, there’s also an opportunity to choose God’s good. We have to remember that God has our good, our very best at heart. The invitation for all of us is to choose God’s best! And the way that we do that isn’t simply by “trying harder.” It’s not ultimately about digging deeper and finding more grit to simply “choose God’s good.” It begins by being honest with our struggles and asking God for help. It means that, not only is God aware of what we’re lured by, he wants to help! Possibly the most important component of choosing God’s best is recognizing that we need God’s help to do exactly that.

Now, for anyone who has ever seriously battled with temptation before, this all might sounds a bit easier said than done, and there is certainly some truth to that. And this is exactly why we need one another. Which brings me to the second thing choice we must make…we must…**Choose Accountability.**

We are built, hard wired for connection, and I believe that’s a very intentional aspect of how God designed us. If we want to resist and overcome temptation, we need each other because we often aren’t strong enough to resist temptation on our own.

In fact, science agrees. Science tells us that our strength to make decisions, persist at tasks, and control emotions can be spent just like a muscle that has been lifting heavy weights. Both behavioral scientists and neuroscientists have begun seeing self-control as a sort of finite resource, something that can be exhausted when you exercise it too long in the same way you can do only so many pushups before collapsing. Did you catch that? Self-control is a finite resource. Our brains, our wills get tired the same way our muscles do. Yet, unlike the strain and fatigue we feel in our muscles after a workout, we as humans are typically unaware when our will is fatigued and we’re more prone to give into temptation.

Which is exactly why we need one another. Part of how we can resist temptation, is to not go this road alone. We need to fight for one another. We need others who understand our temptations, and will love us enough to hold us accountable to resisting them.

This is why we talk about small groups almost every single week! A small group isn’t a magic wand to make all temptations and struggles go away, but it is one of the best environments to find true, sustaining accountability.

We passionately believe that life is lived better in a circle of friendship, that life-change happens in the context of authentic, vulnerable community. If you’re not in a small group yet, I cannot encourage you enough to join one. In fact, we’ve made joining a small group incredible easy to do. Simply text the word *(graphic?)* **SGINFO to the number 313131** and someone from our small groups team with connect with you this week. If we want to take steps to fight temptation and resist the bait, a critical step is to find accountability.

**Conclusion**

We can trust Jesus with our struggles because he knows what it’s like to struggle. He himself has felt the weight of temptation. The author of Hebrews says it this way:

***“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” – Hebrews 4:14-15***

Jesus understands what it feels like when someone is fishing for you, when someone is trying to lure you. Yes, he was the Son of God, but he was also fully human. In fact, he understands the full force of temptation better than we do. The only way you find out how strong an army has become is by fighting against it. The only way you find out how strong the wind blows is by walking into it. C.S. Lewis observed:

**“We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means — the only complete realist.” – C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity**

Jesus knows better than anyone the power of temptation, and he resisted it. And through his power, we can resist it too. We can trust Jesus and trust that what he has for us is good, because he, more than anyone who’s ever lived, knows not only the full weight of resisting temptation, but also the joy and life found in choosing God’s good. Let’s help one another choose God’s good and experience the fullness of life that God has always intended for us to enjoy.

**Communion Idea**

Every week we celebrate communion together as our way of declaring that it is always, all about Jesus – everything we do, is because of him. And when we eat this bread, his body, and drink this cup, his blood – we remember his life, death, and resurrection so that you and I can have peace with God and one another.

But there is another component of the communion table. While we do express our gratitude, the Apostle Paul tells us that, when we eat this bread and drink this cup – we also participate in the body of Christ. Sharing this meal isn’t simply a moment to be grateful for something Jesus did a couple thousands years ago, but it’s also a way of declaring again, that we are “all in” – joining God in the Jesus mission of helping people find their way back to God in everything that we do.