

*Read also Genesis 3:1-6. Joan Brown tells it today. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

The choir sang. “Blessed is the one whose truth is in You.” What does that mean in this culture today? What drives our actions? What drives the decisions behind our lawmaking? What is your guidepost for how you live? Is it your desires or something else, something more foundational?

Today’s passage is about the deception of desire vs. the truth of God. You heard the most famous story of deception in Joan Brown’s storytelling.

The snake tested Eve. He twisted God’s command: “Did God really say you can’t eat from the fruit of *any of the trees*?” Then he refuted God’s Word: “You won’t die; *you will actually be like God*, knowing both good and evil.”

It was like taking candy from a baby. Eve was convinced.

She looked at the fruit. It looked desirable, delicious, juicy; and, it would give her knowledge! She was hooked. So she ditched God’s truth and followed her desire. Just like a fish goes for the worm; a mouse—the cheese; a bank robber nabs the cash.

Desire persuades.

In today’s passage James talks about temptation and what causes it. READ James 1:12-18:

God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.

Temptation happens all the time and this passage teaches that we should expect it. If we do well and don’t give in, we will receive God’s honor and blessing. But doing well during temptation is another story. How do we endure? How do we stay the course with God so we get blessed?

First, we do not blame God. Think about the first scenario. God did nothing to cause the temptation in the garden. It was the snake—the opposition we find in the world who plays on our desires.

James says, “Temptation comes from our own desires which entice us and drag us away.” That gives me the mental picture of a child who sees his parent’s cell phone on the counter and just has to play that game on it.

Can't you hear the voice in his head . . . *Did your dad really say you can't touch his cell phone? You won't die . . . you'll get better and wiser about that game the more you play it!*

Or then there's that purchase you made . . . and the voice that enticed you:

*You really need that. Everyone else has one. Why should you wait? No one else is denying themselves. You can pay it off.* That's not God speaking!

What happens to the fish when it bites? It's captured; it can't get loose; you become someone else's slave.

In China there was a cat stealing ring. These people were luring people's cats into cages with a live sparrow which was tied inside where it could still flap its wings. When the cat entered, it tripped the door shut. The trappers then sold the cats to restaurants.

Or, think of a fish after it's caught. It's a thrill for the fisherman but all loss for the fish.

The language James uses in this passage gives the exact image of a fish caught by a hook. We are lured, enticed, and dragged away. This happens on many levels.

- Solomon talks about being lured away by a seductress. Watch the Bachelor and you see that the lure of sex has not changed much.
- Many kings in the Bible were lured by power and ambition, like happened to Solomon. Today's leaders follow suit. How many become captured by the power of their position?
- Listen to the news about celebrities and professional sports and you'll be aware of the challenges of fame and wealth. In an interview with *Vanity Fair* in 1991, Madonna describes her own struggle with fame: "My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. And that's always pushing me. Even though I've become Somebody, I still have to prove that I'm *Somebody*. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will."<sup>1</sup> Years later upon releasing a new album she talked about what she had learned about ill-focused desires: "It's about my relationship to fame and how my image spiraled out of control," Madonna told *USA Today*. "I convinced myself that [fame] was going to be enough to take the place of real intimacy. I was incredibly naïve."<sup>2</sup>

So following desire—whether it's sexual desire, or ambition, or desire for money or fame or something which we want at all costs—those things birth sin and sin brings death. Madonna's desire for fame was killing her.

How do we recognize the difference between something God wants and when our desires kick in? First, we need a commitment to want to know what God's Word says.

One help is to have a picture in your mind of desire so that you can ask yourself, does my situation resemble this picture, or God's Word?

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<sup>1</sup>Lynn Hirshberg, "The Misfit," *Vanity Fair*, April 1991, Volume 54, Issue 4, pp.196-202.

<sup>2</sup>*Madonna Biography*, <http://rockhall.com/inductees/madonna/bio/>, accessed January 14, 2015.

For instance, the picture in Genesis is that of a snake. He was described as sleazy, crafty, shrewd, and cunning. He deceitfully twisted what God said.

When you want something, you might ask yourself, does this desire resemble the snake, twisting what God says, and potentially ensnaring you? Does it cause you to abandon good character or insist that you must have something now?

Here's what God's Word says:

“God withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly.” (Ps 84)

If your circumstance challenges God and tempts you to disobey God, it's more like the snake.

God's Word also says: “His every word has proven true” (Ps 84).

Is the voice in your head challenging God's ways as if God is outdated and you need to embrace new ways of living?

Desire says it's all about what I want now.

God says, “Resist that thought.” It's a temptation and a test. Stand strong and patiently cling to God's Word. God has not tempted you.

We say each week, “God is good, all the time.” God always has your good in mind, too. Paul explains, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corin 10:13).

When the bait of desire is dangled in front of you, stop, get a picture of the snake in your mind and trust that God's ways lead to much deeper blessing.

Although God often gets a bad rap and a lot of blame for things going wrong, listen to James and believe that God will reward you. Keep these Scriptures in mind:

“Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, *so that you may be successful wherever you go*” (Joshua 1:7).

Therefore, “Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD” (Ps 31:24). YOU are “his prized possession.”

Be empowered by James's message. And remember, if you have fallen like Eve, God can redeem anything. So press on with each new day. God will make you strong.

AMEN