

INTRODUCTION >

Illustration: Federal Reserve Stress Tests

The tests are meant to reveal underlying issues in the bank that will not be seen or realized under normal circumstances.

But because of what's at stake, the Federal Reserve runs computer simulations of stressful circumstances to reveal the bank's health and see if it will endure.

Again, the test is not meant to destroy the bank; it is meant to make it better for what could be coming.

In this life, we will face hard times.

It is unavoidable, and we certainly are not meant to enjoy suffering.

In times of ease, we can tell ourselves and the rest of the world, "This is what we believe," but it's in the stressful moments of this age that the true foundation of our lives is revealed.

- What will we run to, what will we place our hope in, what will we cling to, what will we pursue, what do we **actually** believe...

Christian, we will be tested.

ALSO, in the testing we will be tempted.

And in the temptation, the purity of our hearts' belief is revealed.

This is a grace.

Do we know what's at stake in the belief of our hearts?

So then, the test is not meant to destroy you; it is meant to lead you to life.

This morning's passage from God's Word is meant to help us better understand and see what is happening in testing and temptation.

If you are able, would you stand with me as we read God's Word to His people?

Read James 1:12-15

Pray.

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Purpose Statement

In the already, we walk in wilderness trials that reveal our sin and death, but for those who love God, we have an assurance of Eternal Life.

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Today, we will look at the following:

1. The Trial
2. The Path
3. The Promise

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I. THE TRIAL >

VERSE - 12a: [12] Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial,

Summary Statement

Hard circumstances reveal our hearts

Blessed

As we have seen in the past month, James, the Brother of Christ, draws heavily on the teaching of Jesus, specifically the Sermon on the Mount.

- So, at the beginning of vs 12, we read a beatitude, or blessing, which reminds us of how Christ begins his message in Matthew 5.

James writes Blessed is the man.

- Blessed refers to a deep happiness.
- This is more sturdy than an emotional feeling - it's a heart-level joy.
- It's more than a passing emotional happiness; it's a lasting bedrock of gladness.

So, Blessed is the person who remains steadfast under trial

If you were here when we started the book of James, we saw the posture of the one who would be able to remain steadfast in the test:

James 1:2-3

[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

So then

The trials, the stressful circumstances in this life, are meant to be understood as something that purifies our joy, and in that process our faith, our true beliefs, are being made steadfast.

The blessing in James 1:12, then, is for the person who indeed counts trials as a revealing purifier.

- They see that while God does not cause us to suffer, He allows it, and then He uses it to remove impurities in our faith.
- God is present and sovereign in the trial, and so we can trust Him and the work He is doing.
- And so, even though the testing may silence our emotional happiness, it's actually an invitation to lead us to blessedness: a deeper joy.

To help us understand this beatitude, let's consider the opposite:

- Woe to the person who counts the trial as God's neglect or inability to protect us.
- For/Because in counting trials that way, it will add alloys to your joy, and instead of refining your faith, it will melt it.

And we see this very thing play out in Biblical History.

The Children of Israel in the Wilderness

At the beginning of Exodus we read this:

Exodus 1:11–14

[11] Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. [12] But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. [13] So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves [14] and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

The Children of Israel were being oppressed, and their lives were bitter with hard service as slaves in Egypt.

Then the Lord called a man who had been working as a shepherd for 40 years to lead His people out of their captivity and into a land of Promise and Rest.

- And the Lord assured Moses that He would put His word in His mouth before Pharaoh.

And through the power of God, the Israelites were not only **set free** from their captors, but they were also **rescued** from their enemy through the waters of the Red Sea.

And after the great victory of God at the Red Sea, Moses led them in singing this:

Exodus 15:17–18

[17] You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.
[18] The LORD will reign forever and ever.”

And then came the trials of their hearts that would test the songs on their lips.

Three days later, as they made their way through the wilderness TOWARD the Promised Land, we read that they grumbled against Moses about the bitter waters at Marah.

A chapter later, we read that they grumbled against Moses because they needed food, and they even said, we would have rather died in Egypt with our bellies full than die out here starving in the wilderness.

A chapter later in Exodus 17, we read that they were thirsty and they grumbled against Moses and Moses asked why they were “testing God.”

- By testing God in this trial of their hunger, they put God on the stand and questioned His character and faithfulness.

In Numbers 11 we read that they “wept” and cried out, Oh, that we had some meat to eat! We had fish and vegetables in Egypt, and now all we have is this manna.

In Numbers 14, after the spies spent 40 days in the Promised Land, they reported that it was full of giants.

- And the Children of Israel were filled with fear, and so they responded to their fear with weeping all night and saying, Our children are all going to die; let’s choose another leader and go back to Egypt!

And then one more example, in Numbers 21, we read that the people had grown impatient with the wilderness wanderings, and they spoke AGAINST God and Moses, and said, why did you bring us out of Egypt to die like this?

So then!

After being **freed** and **rescued** from their captors, and given a promise of great provision, they sang, the Lord will Reign Forever!

And then quickly moved to grumbling, complaining, and putting Moses and God on trial for the stressful circumstances they were walking through on their way **TOWARD** the land of Promise.

The trials of thirst, hunger, frustration with the menu, fear of new enemies, and long journeys revealed the hearts of those who sang to the Lord!

For Us

Does this mean that we should NOT cry out to the Lord when we are thirsty, hungry, frustrated, and afraid?

By no means! The Psalmists cry out!

But what it does mean is that we do not put God to the test.

- That while we take our very real human understanding of trials to the Lord, we must at the same time, confess that He is still our Lord.
 - He is our foundation.
- Therefore, He is not the one being tested.
 - That we are not making judgments on His goodness; rather, we are groaning in our own humanity.
 - And that even in our sufferings, we trust that He is Good, even when, in our own shortsightedness, we do not understand how this could lead us to blessedness.

And so, in the wilderness between having been set free from the great enemy and rescued from its authority, we now count the trials as a purifying joy that is producing steadfastness, which will then, as we will see later, lead to eternal life!

And before we move on, see clearly here.

God is not testing us to see if **we** are good enough, or self-sufficient enough, or strong enough to make it through the wilderness.

- He is revealing the trust of our hearts; He is graciously helping us see what He sees in us.

He is pulling back the decorations on the walls; He is using the storm to take the praise of our lips down to the studs, to graciously reveal what JOY and TREASURE are beneath the facade and melody.

We love to sing Gospel Songs, and we should!

- We also need to let those true songs of His love for us remind and shape our hearts through the various trials of this life.

And so, James tells us here, that blessed is the one who trusts God in the various and inevitable trials of the wilderness.

Summary Statement

Hard circumstances reveal our hearts

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II. THE PATH >

Summary Statement

Who and What leads to our sin

Blame Game

James then drills down into what happens in our hearts during trials.

He writes: 13-15 - [13] 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 and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

In the testing of the trial, we must see what is happening in our hearts.

- Do we see the trial we’re going through as God tempting us to sin?
- Do we think of it as God trying to weed us out, or lead us to go against Him?
- If so, we remove our responsibility for our rebellion and become victims of the circumstances God placed us in.
- And the problem is not in the mirror; it is outside of us.

And we know this has been the danger from the beginning.

Adam blamed Eve, and then Eve blamed the serpent.

- In their sin, the first man and woman pointed away from themselves.
- Eve was to blame for Adam’s sin, and the serpent was to blame for Eve’s sin.

God’s Character

In all of this, humanity says that under and behind all of our sin is God’s design.

Therefore, how can he be a Good God?

- How can we trust Him?
- When our fears, appetites, and impatience get the best of us, who will we go to if God is actively trying to lead us to death and AWAY from life?

The Soil for Sin

And James says, LET NO ONE SAY, I am being tempted by God!

God tests us, but does not tempt us to sin.

Do we think that in the trial, He is tempting or enticing us to seek ourselves to save us?

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12 that when we are tempted, He provides a way of escape! And Paul then writes, THEREFORE flee idolatry!

Again, remember the Children of Israel in the Wilderness.

- They grew impatient with Moses when he was talking with God on the mount, so in that trial, that testing of waiting, they were tempted to the sin of idolatry.
- Of creating a god that they could see, instead of trusting through waiting upon the Lord and His servant.

And so James here unpacks the path to our sin.

He writes: *each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

There is a desire in our hearts to be god.

- To be in complete control of all things.
- And so we ascend the throne of king and judge, to decide what is good and what is evil.
- What we need for life, and what we believe is death.

And our hearts take that belief that we are sovereign into the wilderness, and we go through tough times, and our heart's desire is activated.

- It is lured by an internal algorithm that affirms that we are the I Am - the self-existent one-and judge over our lives.
- We know better than God.
- And so we sin.
 - We rebel in wickedness, in idolatry, in lust, in greed, in slander, in gossip, in complaint, in the disobedience of the things we do, and the disobedience of the things we know we should do and don't do.

The sin of our hearts was always there; the test graciously brought it to the surface, and our hands revealed it.

Our Hearts, not our Circumstances

And hear James clearly!

Again, why does the Federal Reserve Stress Test big banks?

Is it because they like computer games?

Are they meaningless, arbitrary exercises that are meant to get rid of a bank?

No! The Reserve understands the great danger to the whole economy.

And so it is here: James is dealing with life and death itself.

Again, the TEST itself is NOT the death; it is the revealing of Death.

The eternally grave danger is seeing God as the source of our problem, and so we run away from Him, instead of pursuing Him as the relief of our problem.

And so, we are not guilty; we are victims.

Repentance is not necessary, and the only thing we need salvation from is the God who is the underlying cause of our temptation and therefore our rebellion.

We are inherently good, but we have been defiled by the death around us.

- Our heart's joy is pure, but it has been defiled by what is around us.
- We live in a broken world, and that's why we are broken.
- And so we are passive in our guilt.

And hear clearly: Yes, this is a broken world!

Broken systems abound.

Broken governments.

Broken policies.

Broken workplaces.

Broken relationships.

Broken churches filled with broken people.

But let us not misunderstand the cause of the brokenness.

Again, we are not passive. The cause is sin.

- And it is not just around us; it is still in our flesh.

The Children of Israel were convinced the problem was their circumstances.

That the wilderness that God was leading them through was the cause of their death.

But we know that is not true!

They would have been just as sinful in the land of Milk and Honey.

- They would have just never seen it.

Is that not clear to all of us living in a land that has more milk and honey- that is, provisions and prosperity- than any other civilization that has ever existed?

Which then demands a solution that is beyond NEW CIRCUMSTANCES and NEW LOCATIONS!

Our hearts travel, so we need a new one, which is a work that is beyond us.

- Our hope will not find true blessedness in a new stage of life or a new job.
- We need the Mercy and Grace of God in His Gospel to create in us that which we could never manufacture by our human wisdom.

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III. THE PROMISE >

VERSE - 12b: for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Summary Statement

The Assurance of our Love

The Crown Which is Life

What was revealed by the rebellion of the Children of Israel in the wilderness was that their hearts did not trust God for the Promise He was leading them to.

- And so when their spies declared the Promised Land was only full of danger, they wanted a new leader and god.
- The issue is that the land itself became their motivation, and so, when it looked like death, they lost all hope and desire.

So for us, we need to look closely and consider, what we are being promised by God is on the other side of the wilderness.

Read James 12.

So, is the ultimate reward a shiny crown for our heads?

Is the thing that gets us through the testing a promise to be a king and queen?

First of all, the language of a crown here is not a royal crown; rather, it carries the weight of the laurel wreaths that ancient athletes were given as winners.

And secondly, the crown **of life** should be understood as which is life.

- The Laurel Wreath which is life.

And what is that life?

- Is it simply physical existence?

No! This points to what the Bible calls eternal life.

Which points not to a length of existence but to a type of existence!

Jesus makes this clear in **John 17:3**

[3] And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Eternal life is to know the Father, the Son whom the Father sent.

To KNOW is not to know about; it is a personal relationship.

So then, therefore,

The hope through the testing of the wilderness is the prize, the inheritance: that is, the relationship, the unfettered fellowship with our God, to dwell with him as his people forevermore!

As great as any image of our mind's eye about the beauty of the new creation, we must not see its beauty as the prize!

The beauty is the perfect presence of our God.

The Condition: Christian

And then we get this concluding condition: For those who Love him?

And maybe our minds reason, so this is another condition of Eternal Life?

But in reality it's all part of the same condition.

And that is the love of God.

Can we agree that a Christian is one who loves God?

And I know that seems like an impossible condition to fulfill in perfection.

BUT! Just like no husband loves his wife perfectly, just like no parent loves their kid perfectly, just like no friend loves their friend perfectly...

So this is not saying Eternal Life is for those with perfect love, but that the love of God is the bent of their heart.

The Firstborn

AND ALSO!

In all of this, we are not left to our own merit!

Remember when Jesus Christ went into the wilderness and was tempted?

Let's remember the characters in this narrative:

The Holy Spirit of God leads Jesus into the wilderness where he is hungry and tired.

- God leads Jesus' humanity into the place of testing.

And in that testing, Jesus is tempted not by God, but by the enemy.

- And the enemy tempts him to find relief, to be sovereign, and to go against God's will, and it is in that moment that the heart of the Son of God was revealed.

As it says in [Hebrews 4:15](#)

[15 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.](#)

Again, being tempted is NOT the sin.

- The thought and the question are not the death.
- The test is found in what we do with that thought and questions - it is in who we run to.

The truth and reality is that our Love that is revealed in the trials must be first received by the God over the trials.

The ONLY way we can love God in the Wilderness is to first see, understand, and know His love for us!

- As John writes in 1 John 4, we only love Him because He first loved us!

If that's not first, then we will go out into the wilderness trying to prove OUR Love and trying to earn HIS love.

And also,

It's not enough for US to have a God-man who did not sin in the wilderness!

We need someone to pay for our sin in the wilderness.

And so here is the good news:

Jesus, the Son of God, who was led into the wilderness and was tempted in every way but did not sin, THEN went to the cross of death deserved by those who test God.

And He died in our place so that everyone who would look upon him and turn away from their idols would be saved unto the crown which is life, an inheritance, that is, a relationship, a fellowship with him!

And on the third day he arose, becoming the firstborn among many brethren to walk in a new life!

- A new life that does not mean we will no longer suffer and be tempted in this age.
- But rather, that even in the test of the wilderness, that is, the remaining trials of this world, we would then, by his grace, trust Him and not ourselves in our need.

That we would count those trials that reveal the lingering sinful desires of our heart as a purifying joy that leads us to repentance and refinement.

So then, as we abide with Him in the valleys and times of need, we grow in our understanding of the dimensions of His love for us.

- And we then, in turn, with our hearts melted and shaped by what we have received, we run, we walk, we limp to Him when it seems we will be consumed by the difficulties of this life.
- And we know in all of this that He is ONLY leading us to Life!
- He does not seek our death in the trial; He is aimed at revealing the remaining death in our hearts, that we might repent and run to Him!

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CONCLUSION >>>

Turn Your Eyes

Again, know this!

The question is not whether we will be tested.

The question is: How will we respond to the test?

Will we give in to the temptation to sin?

Or will we trust God?

What song will we sing when we are downcast, fearful, and confused?

- Will we turn to Him, or will we turn inward for the life of our own design?
- Will we spend our lives in this age believing that we are meant for death?

Or...will we see that every trial is meant to lead us to Him?

- And that in running to Him, we find life.
- In their fear and need, the Children of Israel ran to Aaron for something to put their hope in.
- And Aaron failed the test of his own heart's fear of the people by providing them a false god.

A good pastor, a good ministry leader, a good friend points you to go to the God of the Mountain, and not to the relief of an idol.

Church family, this is what the community of God's people needs!

- We will walk through trials.
- Some of them will be personal, and some will be corporate.

And in all of these things, we will be tempted to turn inward for relief.

- To become convinced that we are being led to death and that our wisdom is the way through.
 - And so, maybe, we will find life in new circumstances.
- But we are those who declare that we will not be consumed and condemned by our circumstances; we are those who run to Jesus in the testing.
- And it is ONLY IN HIM that we can ever have hope of being made whole.
 - It is only in Him that we will find true blessedness.
 - And any test that then leads us to seeing is to be counted as eternal grace.
 - And if necessary, a trial of our being made whole.

And Church Family, He is faithful in the Promise He has made!

To the world, the book of Revelation may seem like a land of giants who will destroy us.
But look at what it is for those whose hearts Love Him!

Revelation 21:3–6

[3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. [4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

[5] And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” [6] And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. (ESV)

He will dwell with US, and we will be His People! And He will be WITH US!

- And all the tears and mourning of the wilderness will be no more!
- And the thirst we have in this age of testing will be eternally satisfied in Him!

These things are true, and this eternity is very near!

May we not simply sing these things; may we believe them, and may we run to Him in every temptation that arrives in the test.

- That by His grace the joy of our hearts may be made pure!

Pray

Consider

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Questions to consider:

What is my heart tempted to run to when I am being tested?

When I am tired, bored, suffering, hurt, confused, afraid...Where will I seek life?