

James - Sin in Slow Motion
Sign Title: Sin in Slow Motion

April 10, 2011

Good morning Faith Church. We had a great Easter service. If you would like to see pictures they are available on www.faithefree.com and www.christ2Rculture.com. This morning we continue our studies in the book of James. We are in the second part of a two part micro-series on how to beat temptation from James 1:13-15. Two weeks ago we learned God never tempts us but my sin is always my fault. Until we realize this, we will always blame shift our sin to others.

We also learned that trials provide two paths for us to follow. In a trial, there is the path of remaining steadfast in the trial which leads to spiritual maturity. In trials we are also tempted to sin. When temptation rears its ugly head, we can choose to give in to it. Doing so sends us down a completely different path that doesn't lead to spiritual maturity but sin and death.

This morning's message has two parts so we will move quickly. We will look at sin in slow motion to understand how it works in our lives. For the second half of the message, because I love you, I put together a collection of strategies to help us avoid falling to temptation.

James 1:13-15

Sin in slow motion

The set up for sin - The look, lust and lure.

...but each person is tempted when he is lured... James 1:14

Something catches our attention. It is a noise, a distracting thought, a woman's perfume that brings back memories we want to forget. It is a \$20 bill we find laying in the aisle at Wal-Mart. It is a wink, a lingering handshake or hug. It is a brief scene that flashes across the television as we change channels. That scene may only be 1/4 of a second in length, but it sparks a thought in our mind that we want to savor like a Reeses Peanut Butter Cup on our tongue. This is the doorway of temptation. There is no sin here. Jesus faced this first part of temptation just like we do.

...by his own desire...

The look connects with something we desire. For an alcoholic, it is the bottle. For a woman, it might be the look of a man and the mystery about him that sparks a romantic interest in her for him. The look connects with a desire for romance within her. These desires are not necessarily wrong desires. It is normal to recognize the attractiveness of someone of the opposite sex.

...when he is lured and enticed by his own desires...

There is still no sin at this point but we need to recognize we are being lured and enticed by our desires. There is a magnetic attraction that exists between myself and that which I am attracted.

Before we go further, let me be practical here. Face the fact that certain things we look at will entice us and it will take constant energy to hold those enticements away from the heart. Maybe you would call me a wimp, I prefer to think of this as wise. Practice steering clear of enticing zones.

One spring break In seminary, a friend had a relative in Florida who lived by the beach so we pooled our cash and drove to Florida to join the sun and fun. It was a great trip. As a single guy in my 20's, I just wasn't prepared for what I was about to see. We came to the beach and I instantly knew I had a problem. We are talking some serious enticement. Serious luring and enticing. I remember the first night at the house the Holy Spirit was riding my case big-time. I knew I needed to do something. I had \$300 cash to spend for the week. I combed through the classifieds and found a windsurfer for sale. I made an offer and bought it. I spent the rest of the week learning to windsurf in the bay. I was richly restored by that spring break and my purity was maintained. The biggest problem was figuring out how to strap the huge surfboard and mast to the top of my car for a trip back to Pennsylvania.

Sometimes the wisest thing we can do is realize it takes constant energy to fight the natural lures and enticements we face in temptation and just get them out of our life. Ladies, some of you are shopaholics. Tell your husband to cancel the catalogs, that way you won't be tempted to buy everything. Recognize it takes constant energy to fight some of these things. Don't worry about being a wimp, be wise and walk away.

The decision to sin

Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin...

This is the stage we need to focus on because this is where we move from natural desire to a decision to sin. As I studied how sin works, I learned there are three stages to it.

Feelings - It begins with our feelings. We see something as good, pleasing, desirable or beautiful. We feel it is something we would like to have. This is the first look. It is the second look where we get in trouble. That is when we move from *recognizing* the feeling to beginning to *enjoy* the feeling. This is fantasy land. We begin to stroke the feelings like we are trying to get a cat to purr. The more we let ourselves enjoy the forbidden feelings, it moves from our heart to our head. This is sin. It is sin in our mind.

Rationalization - Rationalizing involves the mind and it is the mind creating reasons to continue to expand the feelings. It is people struggling with porn saying this time they won't look at really bad sites on the internet, just a few risque pictures. What do you think happens? This is the mind providing justification to pour gasoline on the flames of lustful feelings. This is the mind saying, "Well, I know God will forgive me. Besides, it won't be that bad. Everybody does this. I deserve this for working so hard. Nobody will find out. I will just keep it to myself." Desire has gone from a feeling, to a cultivated feeling that is rationalized and justified by the mind. Finally, like an expanding balloon, the desires inflate so they overwhelm everything else in the mind and they must be satisfied no matter what the cost.

The Choice - It feels like the only way to solve this overwhelming desire is to make a decision to sin. Once the decision to sin is made, there is almost a sense of relief. OK, lets look at that web site. OK, I have felt like a divorce, my mind has rationalized the divorce, now I make the choice of divorce and I immediately feel better because the pressure from our sinful nature is off.

Sometimes this decision to sin can be fulfilled almost instantly. Sometimes it will take weeks or months to carry out. While there is a sense of relief that goes with the decision to sin, what follows on the heels of sin is worse. Sin, is like the cork screw on your Swiss Army knife. Once it is screwed into you, it is not coming out any time soon.

Why do I tell you about the three stages? It is helpful to know where you are in the process of struggling with temptation. It is the moment we take the second look and begin cultivating feelings that we have entered stage one. That is the time to get out of the process. When you find yourself beginning to rationalize and think about where you would go or what you would do, you know you are losing ground and losing it fast! Get out of there because rationalization will lead to a decision to sin.

The devastation of sin. - Sin, Growth, Death

...when it fully grows brings forth death...

Here is what we often don't realize. Sin is never satisfied with a one and done deal. We will swear it won't happen again. We will repent, feel remorse and ask forgiveness but sin has screwed itself into our life. Sin will push us to deeper and deeper levels of degradation.

Eventually, we are taken captive to do sin's will.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.
Romans 6:12 (ESV)

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:24–26 (ESV)

Not many of us realize where the path of temptation to sin leads. Now I didn't spend much time here because I want us to spend most of our time looking at ways to get ahold of temptation in our lives.

A ready defense against temptation.

Remember that God filters temptations.

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:12–13 (ESV)

We covered this last week but it is so important I want to review it again. God has set a limit on the intensity of every temptation we face. God knows us perfectly inside and out. He knows how much we can handle in every area of our life: finances, sex, anger, gossip, you name it.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Luke 22:31–32 (ESV)

What I want us to notice is that Satan had to get “permission” to tempt Peter, and he had to demand it! Before Satan could go after Peter, he had to check it out with God first! In the same way, God determines how far Satan can tempt us. All creatures, even Satan, are under God's authority.

If we are going to defend ourselves against temptation, we have to accept this simple premise. As long as we think we are at the mercy of the devil, we will only make half-hearted attempts to resist temptation. After all, why try to resist temptation that we know will overwhelm us anyway. Satan has many of us convinced we can not resist, when that isn't the truth.

The second thing we need to see in this verse is that God always promises a way out. Growing up, I thought the escape hatch would be something like a telephone ringing or the power going out to the building I was living in while I was watching late night television. That is not what this is referring to. Many times the escape hatch is as simple as turning off the television, or getting in the car and driving home, or getting out of the car and walking home. The escape hatch is often right in front of us, we just need to choose to take it.

There is supernatural power available to us.

God also provides us with supernatural power to overcome temptation.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Ephesians 6:10–11 (ESV)

Here we find that a power was available to the Ephesian believers that was not of them. When this power was harnessed, the Ephesian believers would be able to stand firmly against the devil's schemes. The apostle Paul is saying we have a power greater than that of the devil, the flesh and sin. We have the potential to say no to the devil, no to the flesh, and no to sin through God's power working in us. There are no exceptions.

Let me explain it this way. The Bible says we are born under the dominion of sin. It controls us. This is why nobody needs to teach children to say the word, "No." It comes quite naturally.

The apostle Paul described the battle everyone faces with sin this way.

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very

thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.... So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. Romans 7:14–17,21 (ESV)

Apart from Christ we do not have the supernatural power necessary to overcome sin in our lives. It is a different story through Jesus.

...How can we who died to sin still live in it? Romans 6:2 (ESV)

When Paul uses the term *dead* in relationship to sin, he is telling us sin no longer has the power to force us to do or think anything. He did not mean sin no longer remains as an *influence* in our life but it no longer is the power that *controls* our life.

Let me explain it this way. When Cindy and I were first married, we had a dog. His name was Sargon and he was a fun loving golden retriever. When it came time to train Sargon, we first used a choker collar. Since he was a strong willed dog, a standard choker collar didn't get his attention. We eventually found a choker collar that made him realize we were in charge. It was a metal collar with blunted spikes facing in. One good yank and a yelp later, we were back in command for doggie obedience class. In fact, it was amazing how quickly he learned with the collar on! He learned so well that we eventually didn't need the collar. We said sit, and he sat. We said heal and he walked next to us. He trained so well, he didn't need to wear the collar and he followed our every command. He could



have gone back to his rebellious behavior, but he didn't. He forgot we weren't forcing him to obey us.

This is what it is like when it comes to our relationship with Satan and our sinful desires. Before Christ, there was a collar around our neck. When Satan or our flesh say, "Lie!" we immediately responded because sin controlled us.

When we come to Christ, God removes the collar. That is what it means to be *dead to sin*. Satan and the flesh can still bark out commands. Impure thoughts can flash through our mind, but we are free to choose not to follow the commands of Satan and the flesh. We are *off the leash*. The problem is that, like Sargon, we are used to responding to the commands of our sinful desires. We don't realize we can say, "No!"

When you are tempted to sin, repeat this to yourself, "I am dead to sin and alive to Christ." Repeat it over and over again when you face sinful desires, even speak it out loud if you need to.

Avoid the danger zones.

When I was a youth pastor, one of the questions the kids in youth group always wanted answered was, "How far can I go with my boyfriend or girlfriend?" Can we hold hands? Can we kiss? They knew one thing that was absolutely wrong but where is the line before that? They felt that as long as they stayed on the right side of the line, things would be fine. In other words, as long as something is not clearly wrong, it was completely right.

We all have a tendency to think this way. We draw lines in our minds that separate right from wrong. As long as we are on the right side of the line, we

think everything is fine. And should someone try to warn us, we become defensive and say, “I’m not doing anything wrong!” because technically, we are right.

Along with this way of thinking comes another tendency. That is to move as close to the line of sin as we can without actually sinning. For instance, when we are driving down the highway and we see a police officer in the distance, we slow down to exactly 55mph. This is the way high school students think when asking the question, “How far is too far?” They want to know where the line is so they can camp out on the line. This question is constantly being asked in relationships, tax deductions, speed limits, expense accounts, rock music, dancing and anywhere there is a margin of vagueness. The problem with any answer we give to these questions is that we ask the question so we can position ourselves right on the edge of moral and ethical disaster. All that needs to happen is a little push and we cross the line.

Think of it this way. Cindy and I are on a diet. Not a crash diet but a healthy diet to keep our energy up and our weight down. We do decently well until we go out to Pizza Ranch. The all-you-can-eat pizza and fried chicken is amazing. I try to make sure I get my money’s worth when I go there. In fact, at Pizza Ranch, I consume more calories in one meal than I typically would in two days. It tastes so good. I can’t resist the temptation of the all-u-can-eat buffet.



If you were coaching us on our diet, what would you tell our family to do? Stay out of Pizza Ranch! How would you feel if I responded, “There is nothing wrong with Pizza Ranch, people eat there all the time. You are so legalistic to tell me to take Pizza Ranch out of my life!”

There is technically nothing wrong with Pizza Ranch, but there is another point,... isn’t there? There is nothing *wrong* with going to Pizza Ranch when you are on a diet, it is just not *wise* to go to Pizza Ranch when you are on a diet.

When we are faced with questions about the type of music we listen to, the type of books we read, the type of videos we watch or how intimate high school students can technically allow themselves to become, we should not just look at this from the angle of *right* and *wrong* but *wise* and *unwise*.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, Ephesians 5:15 (ESV)

If something tells me this isn’t a wise choice, though it is not technically a wrong choice, I should listen to the voice of wisdom.

Don’t Be a Lone Rangers

The final step in beating temptation is accountability.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. James 5:16 (ESV)

For those who have a sinful habit that has grown to the point it is controlling them, they need to humble themselves and find somebody they can meet with on a weekly basis who will hold them accountable. You say, “Pastor Kurt, I can’t do that, my sin is too shameful.” You know how embarrassing that would be? You think that if you keep trying to handle it on your own, you will

eventually get it under control, but that isn't happening right now. Let me tell you how radical Jesus says we need to be about sin in our life.

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. Matthew 5:30 (ESV)

Jesus doesn't want people to be missing body parts, he is telling us to do whatever we must to deal radically with sin in our life. It is that serious an issue. The eternal consequences of sin outweigh the temporary embarrassment of facing sin head on.

If you don't know who to go to, email me. I will hook you up with one of our pastors or elders. This is what we will do. We will love you, listen to you and hold you accountable weekly to help you break the grip of sin in your life. If you are a woman, email me, and I will hook you up with an older spiritually wise woman who can meet with you weekly to pray with you, hold you accountable and help you develop a strategy to beat the deeply rooted sin in your life.

Temptation is serious stuff.

Conclusion

Growing up on the East Coast, one of the things we did as college students was travel to the New Jersey Shore. A group of us went to the Jersey Shore to stay at a friend's parents' beach house. After the long winter, it felt good to have bare feet, shorts and a T-shirt. We were staying on the second floor of the house which you entered by stairs to a wood deck. Since we were full of energy, a couple of us were scuffling around in our bare feet on the wooden deck and you can guess what happened? I felt the splinter go into my foot. It didn't

hurt. I was walking with a limp but I didn't think it was a big deal. I told my friends to go to the beach and I would stay at the house and get the splinter out. I tried to get it out with tweezers. I tried needle nose pliers. I spent the entire day working on it, and still couldn't get it out. I even used steak knives to try and cut my skin so I could get at the deep splinter. I eventually decided to ignore it but that let infection set in. It was on the third day that I admitted the splinter was so deep and so infected that I couldn't handle it on my own, I needed help.

Many of you have a splinter of sin in your life. In public, nobody can see it, but you are walking with a limp. You have tried everything to get it out of your life. You have promised yourself it wouldn't happen again. You have tried to do radical things to root it out, like taking a steak knife to your own foot, but no matter what, it is still sunk deep in your foot and you wonder if things will ever change. You need help. Today, will you have the courage to seek it?



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