

April 18, 2021

Am I a Servant of God

"...each one is tempted, when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death."
James 1:14-15

A lot of us struggle to understand the difference between trials and temptations and so, we often lump them together. They are not, as James makes clear, the same thing at all. A trial is something that our God allows us to experience as a means to strengthening our faith so that we can remain faithful to the end. A temptation comes from inside us. Temptations are sourced in that part of our being we talked about several weeks ago; that drive to survive which is always self-serving.

Our desires are housed in our inherent animal natures and those desires are ultimately the source of our sin. The words that James uses to describe the way we are tempted and what happens when we ultimately sin help us to understand how sin works in our lives and also, I think, can help us to battle temptation more effectively.

First, James says we are ***"...dragged away and enticed..."*** by our own evil desires. While we have to acknowledge that we are absolutely accountable for our sins and that no one, including Satan himself, can make us sin, we must also acknowledge that Satan is constantly laying traps for us.

Think about those displays of candy bars that every single grocery store has. Satan put those there. As we pass through checkout with the items that we actually came to buy we have to wait by those displays. We did not come to buy candy, but suddenly that desire in us starts demanding candy. We are being enticed and as Satan sets the hook, we begin to justify the self-serving choices we are about to make. We are being dragged away by our own evil desires.

James continues in his description of our personal sin process when he says ***"...after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin..."*** We all know what comes next. Suddenly we surrender to our desires and we reach for the candy bars. We have sinned and James concludes, ***"...and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death."***

The process of sin in our lives always looks the same; no matter the sin. So, how do we begin to overcome the evil desires that we all have. Jesus told us it begins with self-denial. In Matthew 16, our Lord said, ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself..."*** Learning to say 'no' to the demands of our own desires is, I think, key. Nearly every self help and diet program begins with the same strategy; find a way to deny those desires.

It is important to understand that our desires, even though they can become very loud and demanding, are never essential to our survival contrary to what they may be claiming. Whether we are talking about that next candy bar, that next smoke, that next drink, that next lie, or that next broken vow denying myself will never lead to my eternal destruction.

The fact that what our desires demand is not essential for our ultimate survival is not to say that our self-serving evil desires, and the 'father of all lies' will not try to convince us that in fact, our very existence is threatened. In the Genesis account of Eve's sin her evil desires for the fruit of that tree convinced her that she had to have it. Her own evil desires dragged her away.

But, Satan's favorite lies also played a major role in her fall and they will in ours as well. That devious old dragon wants us to believe that what our evil desires demand is actually good for us and especially that fulfilling those desires can be done without consequence. But whatever his lies, it is always and only our choice to sin or not to sin. Sin is our choice. It is not from God and it is not from Satan. And, because it is always and only our choice we will always be always held accountable for the choices we make.