

Life: The Pressure of Temptation

August 23, 2013

- *The Bible Studies for Life* lesson for Sept. 8 focuses on James 1:13-18.

When I was in third grade, I checked out a copy of *Bullfinch's Mythology* from the school library. The librarian thought I just wanted a big book to carry around. To her surprise, I actually read the whole thing and was able to answer questions about it. I was intrigued by Greek mythology and the soap opera-worthy stories about the pantheon of gods on Mount Olympus. The stories about heroes like Hercules and Odysseus lived in my imagination.

As an adult, I understand how different those gods are from the God we serve. The gods often seemed like only bigger and better versions of the people who worshipped them—both more powerful and more flawed. Although they wielded forces like lightning and thunder, they also lied, cheated and played tricks. Sometimes they acted rashly in anger. Sometimes people got caught up as pawns in conflicts between the gods. The gods of mythology were powerful and unreliable forces best treated with fear.

God is not a trickster

This is not the God we serve. Unlike the Greek and Roman gods who sometimes deliberately deceived their heroes or set people up to fail, our God has no tricks or shifting shadows. He is light and the author of all that is good. When we succumb to temptation, we cannot make the excuse God was tempting us. Temptation is contrary to the very character and nature of God. God cannot be tempted, and he does not tempt anyone (v. 13).

If temptation does not come from God, where does it originate? Our own evil desires are one source of temptation (v. 14). James uses the imagery of fishing to explain the danger of temptation. Our desires are like bait for the fisherman's hook, tempting us and enticing us into danger. When we take the bait, we find ourselves being dragged away by the very thing we once found so desirable—just like a fish caught on a hook. Desire cultivated and nurtured in our hearts leads to sin. Sin's inevitable result is death.

It's the same progression we saw in Eden. Eve looked at the fruit of the forbidden tree and saw that it was desirable, both pleasing to the eye and able to make her wise—or so she thought (Genesis 2:6). She had the opportunity to choose obedience, but her desire for wisdom and the appealing fruit tempted her to disobey God. She yielded to her desire and sinned by taking the fruit in disobedience to God's command. As a result of her sin, death entered the world. Humanity was separated from God.

Not the author of temptation

God may allow us to undergo a season of testing that reveals what is in our hearts, but God never is the author of temptation. God does not delight in evil. He never desires anyone to sin. Rather, God gives us what we need to resist temptation. Whenever we are tempted, God is faithful to provide a way out. He gives us the ability to triumph over temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God is good, and he gives us what is good. He is the "father of the heavenly lights" (James 1:17). The sun, moon and stars testify to the goodness and power of our creator God, but God surpasses their glory. When we look at the stars, they seem permanent and unchanging, but we know they change with the seasons. The moon goes through its phases each month, sometimes shining brightly and sometimes hidden in shadow. Even the sun changes position in the sky throughout the day, causing the shadows to shift and change.

Our God does not change. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). There is no darkness in him, no shifting shadow. When we come to God, we don't have to wonder if he has changed his mind. We don't have to fear what he delighted in yesterday he will reject today. We don't have to be afraid God will trick us or use us as pawns in some greater scheme. God is goodness and light. He does not tempt us; he blesses us.

First fruits

The same God who brought forth the sun and moon by the word of his power also brought us forth by the word of truth (James 1:18). When God spoke at the beginning of time he created the world. Through the gospel, God created the church as a kind of "first fruits" of all creation. The first fruits were an offering the Israelites brought to God at the beginning of the harvest season. Each person brought the first of their harvest as an offering to God. The first fruits were both an offering of thanksgiving for God's faithfulness and a pledge of trust that God would bring in the whole harvest.

James saw the early believers who first read his letter as the first fruits of the church—both the beginning and the promise of the harvest of believers God would bring from every nation. Yet James also says we are the first fruits of all creation.

We know creation still longs for the day of redemption (Romans 8:22-23). We, the church, are the first fruits of the redeemed. The church is God's promise he will fulfill his word. There will be a day when Christ returns and the world is put under his rightful authority and rule. Instead of living in slavery to sin, our lives should demonstrate the freedom found in submission to our holy and righteous God. God does not tempt us. He sets us free.