

Author, Christopher McDougal, once said “Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up, it knows it must outrun the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning in Africa, a lion wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the slowest gazelle, or it will starve. It doesn't matter whether you're the lion or a gazelle-when the sun comes up, you'd better be running.”ⁱ

And sometimes life seems a bit like that, hey. Sometimes, our **Christian** life seems to be a bit like that. – Where we are striving, and striving, and striving, to live lives, worthy of the calling that we've received.

In 1st Corinthians and Hebrews, **Paul** talks about the Christian life, in terms of running a race.

1 Corinthians 9:24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. **25** Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. **26** So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. **27** But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Do you get this? – the action of running the Christian race????
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In the introduction to James (a few weeks ago), I said that if I had to sum up the message of James in one word, I'd use the word “non-passivity”... There's nothing passive about the Christian life. Living the Christian life, is a very **active** experience. We don't just have Christianity done to us –

Christianity is a life that we live – it's the life that **I** live – it's the life that **you** live, as we actively follow Jesus. And that's what discipleship is all about.

Including today, we've only made it 18 verses into James, and this is the 3rd message to come out of a mere 17 verses. And each one of these messages have had their own distinct flavour, but James' key message – the thread which has run through them all, has been an encouragement – (actually, an exhortation), to endurance – to a steadfastness of faith.

In last week's message, we learned, that the **only** thing (the **only** thing) which has **any eternal** value, is faith that endures. Money and riches are of no eternal value at all; Honour from men, and status, means nothing; having the nicest car or most productive farm, means nothing; sporting or academic achievements, count for nothing; nothing you have – even human relationships (**in themselves**), are of no eternal value. The only thing that has any **eternal** value, is your faith that endures. (that was last week)

The week before, we learned how trials and tests, lead to our perfection – our completion. Because **as** we stand fast – **as** our faith endures **through** the trials and tests, it perfects us – it completes us. When everything else is stripped away, and all that remains is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are being perfected – we are being completed and readied for heaven.

And we **also** learned, to pray and ask for Godly wisdom (Because Godly wisdom is where steadfastness of faith comes from). But what is it? What **is** Godly wisdom? Godly wisdom is being able to see things from **God's** perspective. It

is to gain an eternal perspective, and to not just be focused on the temporary things of this world....

And when we **ask** for Godly wisdom, God **will** give us that wisdom – don't ever doubt it. Don't be double-minded about it. Know, that when the time of testing comes, you **will** stand strong in your faith, because you've asked for Godly wisdom, and you have it – you've asked for an eternal perspective, and you have it...

Don't go being unsure of yourself – don't go feeling, "*Golly, I hope I'll stand strong, but how will I know until my faith is tested?*".... That's double-mindedness. Know that you **will** stand strong. Believe it. With Godly Wisdom – with His eternal perspective, you believe that Jesus is **the most important person** in your life – He's more important than life itself, and so believe that God **will** give you the Godly Wisdom, which gives you strength to endure, through **every** testing of your faith.

Alright, so that's the last 2 weeks.

This week, James continues with the same theme:

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial,

If you don't have Godly wisdom – if you're still making life decisions and judgment calls according to worldly wisdom – if you don't have that Godly, eternal perspective: well, this is just going to sound like a whole lot of nonsense to you.

Blessed??? **¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial ???**

Worldly wisdom says: “blessed is the man who doesn’t have trials” - “blessed are we when life is easy”, “blessed are we, when our faith is **not** put to the test”..... But James will have none of this – he says “**Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial**”.... Why??? Why would he say that???

Well, there’s a reward, you see: There’s a reward, for standing fast in the faith – James calls it, “**the crown of life**”. Now, the word used for “crown”, **can** mean a royal crown, but it more often describes the laurel wreath, that you give to the winning athlete. Our equivalent today, would be the gold medal.

Alright – it’s just like Paul’s analogy of running a race. We run the race of discipleship – we exert ourselves, to stand fast in the faith, and the gold medal – the prize, is the prize that God has promised to those who love Him....

Does anyone **here** love God?

Maybe I’m not in the right place? I’m sorry, I thought I was with the church - I thought I was at Bush Disciples.... Am I at the TAB or something??? Does anybody here love God????

Well the prize, which of course, is eternal life, has been promised to those who love God – don’t be shy about loving God...

By the way, have you ever thought about this: “People who don’t love God, wouldn’t enjoy that reward at all.”. We love God, and so the prize is pretty great – to be with the Lord for

eternity – that’s fantastic. But it wouldn’t be such a great prize if you don’t love God...

Anyway..., up until now, we’ve been mainly seeing “steadfastness”, in terms of faith in Jesus – standing strong in Jesus – never denying Jesus... And some people would like to leave steadfastness at that point – “*As long as you believe in Jesus, that’s all that matters...*” But not James. ... Because faith **isn’t** the only thing that matters – it’s what we do **with** that faith.

Today James stretches us, to not only consider what we believe, but how we behave. And he talks about temptation, desire, and sin.

*The one thing in **my** life, that I pray to be rid of, is my propensity to sin... I’m a believer – I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I’m a Christian – I’m His follower – I’m a disciple of Jesus... I’m a minister, for goodness sake.... I’m forgiven. I’m filled with the Holy Spirit. And yet, I continue to struggle with sin...*

I really identify with the Apostle Paul, when he said, “I keep on doing the things I don’t want to do. I want to do good, but I don’t do good. I don’t want to do bad, but I find myself doing, what I hate... You know the passage I mean? (Rom 7)

Where do these temptations come from? Aren’t I supposed to be saved??? Where do they come from?

Well, they don't come from God. God isn't tempted, and nor does He do the tempting. V14 says, **each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.**

Yeah, we know that Satan tempts us too,,,,, but I don't believe that happens nearly as often as what we give him credit for. I'm quite capable of tempting myself, with my own desires.

Our **own** desires, lure us. Our **own** desires, entice us.... There's something inside of us, which is this propensity to do evil. The Jewish Rabbi's would call it the "yeser hara" (the evil impulse)ⁱⁱ. Paul talks about it in terms of the battle between the Spirit and the Flesh. *Walt Disney would draw Donald Duck with an angelic Donald on one shoulder, and a devil Donald on the other shoulder. And one is urging him to do good, and the other is enticing him to sin.*

James uses a fishing image – we're lured and enticed by our **own desire**: *'desire' is like the hook with its bait, that first entices its prey and then drags it away*ⁱⁱⁱ.

You know what I'm talking about, don't you... When you know it's wrong, but your own desire, for that momentary pleasure, hooks you... And you allow the Spirit to be overcome by the flesh.

V15 ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

What do we do at this point? Is there anybody here, who, since they became a Christian, they haven't been enticed by sin, and been hooked by it??? Is there anyone here, who is that perfect at being a sinless Christian???? If there is, you're probably in the wrong church, because the rest of us are far from the perfection that you've managed to attain.

So, we still get hooked by our own impure desires. And if sin leads to death, what hope is there? Ohh, there's every hope. Jesus died, to save sinners from their sin. When we fail – when we get hooked by sin, and we do what we know is wrong, there continues to be, a way out. **Repent** (be sorry for your sin, and want to be rid of it), and seek forgiveness from the Lord Jesus Christ... We cut the line that we've been hooked on, and return to Christ... And you may have to cut the same line, over and over, and over again...

But if we don't do that – if instead, we embrace that sin... – if our desire becomes so strong for that temptation, that we allow that sin to grow and develop in us, and we stop repenting... – when sin is fully grown, it brings forth death.

I've seen it happen. A young man, an elder in a church, was tempted by homosexuality. But he fought it, and prayed and asked for forgiveness, and he seemed just like an ordinary Aussie bloke.... But then he heard the teaching of liberal theology, that told him, "No, that's fine – you do what feels good." ... And he gave himself over, to a homosexual lifestyle, and he totally changed.

In a matter of months: His clothes changed; His hair style changed; The tone of his voice changed; his mannerisms changed; he dropped completely away from church; he eventually left town, to further embrace his new lifestyle...

Last I heard, was when his partner committed suicide....

If we allow sin to go on, unchecked (unrepented), it grows, and it takes us over...

Most of us will have known someone, who has walked in faith, but they refused to forgive someone, and they got filled with bitterness, and eventually, the bitterness takes them over... sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Sometimes spiritual death – could even be physical death...

And so we strive to live righteous lives, and part of that striving, is not just the one-off repentance of our initial salvation – it is an ongoing daily repentance, as the Lord continues to reveal to us, areas of sin in our lives where we're getting hooked.... We confess these sins. We repent of them, and we continue following Christ....

I really didn't know where to stop the reading for today, and pick up again for next time. So, what I've decided to do, is to just preach on v12-18 today, and then I was going to finish by just reading to you v19-21. Because what we've studied today, sets us up, for the topic for next week.

James 1:19–21

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

There's our hope, you see.... I couldn't leave you hanging until next week. We put away our sin (that's what I've been calling repentance), and we **receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save** our souls...

The implanted word, of course, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And we receive it with all meekness, because there's no room for pride here. None of us have earned our salvation. None of us deserve it. It's a gift, which God gives, to we who are the **least** deserving.

If we don't repent of our sin (and we're going to be talking about some specific sins in a couple of weeks time, when we meet again)... But if we don't repent of our sin, it may lead to spiritual death – a falling away from faith.

V16

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth,

that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Isn't God good? It was God's will, that Jesus came... It is God's will, to save us...

He doesn't want to leave us dead in our sins. Eternal life, begins now. The Lord does His work in us, now. Every good gift, is from God, and we don't have to wait, for the best gift of all – forgiveness in Jesus' name.

God does not change. He is always keen to forgive. And He is always keen, to transform us into His new, perfect creation. It's never too late to make that break from sin. And it's never too early.

Continued repentance, to receive the crown of eternal life.

Amen.

ⁱ Christopher McDougall, *Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen*. On <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/292417-every-morning-in-africa-a-gazelle-wakes-up-it-knows>

ⁱⁱ Moo, D.J., 1985. *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Moo, D.J., 1985. *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.