



## **TEST NO.2: THE TEMPTATION TEST**

There's a scene in the original (and hey, the best) *Matrix* movie, where Neo (played by Keanu Reeves) is chatting with Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) as they walk down a virtual street. An attractive blonde in a red dress walks past; Neo does a double-take ...

And there's a not-so-attractive Agent Smith holding a pistol to his head.

It's a great illustration of the theme today, as we look again at the letter of Jacob / James and his 10 tests of true faith:

### **Jacob / James 1:13-18**

When people talk about temptation, they often portray it as a trivial thing - to have another donut, play another game, buy another pair of shoes / trainers, or hit the snooze button one more time (though those things might be a temptation to some of us, I don't know!). But it's rare to hear someone talk openly and honestly about the seriousness of temptation.

About the 'Agent Smith' element.

It also looks different for each of us, depending on our situations. E.g. there are the temptations:

- That young people face – to give in to peer pressure, to centre on the self, or to fill the emptiness with porn or drugs or alcohol or whatever else is on offer.

- That couples face – to take each other for granted, to give up on the marriage, or to cheat on their spouse, whether it's physically or emotionally or virtually.
- That older people face – to live in the past, to lose sight of the opportunities, or to give up on life and even on God (and yes, it does happen sometimes).

So, what does James tell us about temptation? He tells us it's kind of inevitable (he says, "When tempted," not "If tempted"), and universal (it happens to "each of you").

But he also gives us some tips on how to combat it:

**1) Know Your Foe.** When people give in to temptation, the logic can sometimes go like this: "Well, if God has allowed this person to come into my life or this event to happen, it's obvious I'm supposed to do this," or "If God has allowed me to have these thoughts or these feelings, it's obvious I'm supposed to do that." And it seems some of James' original readers were falling into the same trap. Which is why he says, "Think again." God is not the tempter; He's not the bad guy in this story. *Satan* is (he's been doing it for thousands of years, in fact). On saying that, we shouldn't give Satan too much credit. Because yes, he can tempt us. But sin is always a choice – *our* choice. Which sets us up for James' next point:

**2) Know Your Fight.** And make no mistake: it is a fight. And according to James, it all begins with desire. Now desire in itself is not a bad thing – think food, drink, sleep, love, sex, family, fun-times. The problem arises when it becomes overblown, or twisted – hence "evil desire." And when that happens, it sparks a process, a temptation 'chain-reaction.' James explains it like this: from desire to enticement to sin to death. But it's not an unbreakable chain – if you recognise it for what it is. It's a bit like depression or anxiety: you've got to break the cycle. But you also need something bigger and stronger than the temptation to actually break it with. A greater desire, if you like. Which leads to James' next point:

**3) Know Your Father.** Now this is probably the most important point of all, because this is what can make the difference: God Himself. And James here tells us 3 things about God: He's a God who gives good gifts (so if it ain't good, it's not from Him!); He's the Father of Lights (not just the sun and moon and stars, but truth and wisdom and guidance); and He does not change (so when God says "This way is right, this way is wrong," He's never going to change His mind, i.e. His mind, His character, His will, His affections will always remain the same). Not only that, but this God is on our side – if we want Him to be. And He can give us the power to stand – or the good sense to run. All of which leads to James' final point:

**4) Know Your Future.** James wraps things up by saying, "He chose to give you birth through the word of truth." What does that mean? Well, the word of truth is the message of Jesus; and from the moment you believe that message, your status changes: you become a member of God's family, He becomes your dad, and He begins to change you, from the inside, out. So,

James, says, recognise whose you *really* are. But he also says we're a kind of 'firstfruits', the beginning of a harvest. Which is a biblical way of saying, you're a sign of what is coming; of the Kingdom of God. I.e. God doesn't call you to live according to your past, but according to your future; not what you *have* been, but what you *will* be!

### **The Score**

So how are you doing with test no.2: the temptation test? My guess is: this is a message that we can all relate to, because as I said earlier, temptation is a reality for us all.

Even Christians.

Because James is not saying, "The proof that you're a Christian is the absence of temptation." What he's saying is, "The proof that you're a Christian is the desire to fight it." Because it's not those who struggle who have an issue – it's those who *don't*. Remember: Jesus Himself knows what it is to be tempted (Hebrews 4:14-16). But He also knew how to deal with it – and He used the exact same techniques as James gives us here. He knew His foe, knew His fight, knew His Father, and knew His future. And He won!

And in Him, so can you.

Anyone here been to Niagara Falls? It's one of the places on my bucket-list. Now obviously you've got the falls themselves, 180 feet high – pretty impressive stuff. And as is usually the case, before the falls you've got the rapids. But further upstream, before the Welland River empties into the Niagara River, the current is gentler. And there's a bridge over that river, and posted on that bridge is a warning sign.

It says: "Do you have an anchor?"

Followed by, "Do you know how to use it?"

The good news is, we have the greatest anchor of them all. And His name is? Jesus! But do we know how to use Him? And are we?

Again, let's round things off with a question or 3:

- What are your main areas of weakness / temptation?
- What are you doing to fight them or flee from them?
- How are you sharing those things with God / others?