

From Trials to Temptation  
James 1:12-16  
ABC 2/17/19

The question always arises when studying James, what's the difference between *trials* & *temptations*? How would you answer? One answer is there is no difference because it's the same Grk word translated both ways. Others say that every trial brings temptation. For example, financial difficulty can tempt us to question God's care of us & the death of a loved one can tempt us to question His love for us. I believe almost every testing includes temptation & temptation itself can be a test. The trials God allows into our lives to strengthen us can also become temptations, an enticement to evil. Every trial that comes into our lives either strengthens us because we obey God & stay confident in His care & power or leads us to doubt Him & disobey His Word. The difference between a trial & a temptation is how you respond to it. Every trial has the potential to become a temptation. Persevering under trials demands we overcome these kinds of temptations. While God may test His people in order to strengthen our faith, He never tries to get us to sin. Despite the fact that the same Grk word is used for both the outer trial & the inner temptation, it's crucial to distinguish between them. Because trials are allowed by God but He has nothing to do with the temptations. James ends his discussion on trials & begins his section on temptation with a beatitude promising eternal life. **12-16** PRAY

**1. The Reward of Persevering Blessed** means more than happy. Happiness is a momentary emotion, whereas blessedness refers to a lasting condition of inner joy & satisfaction from God. The one who perseveres under trials is blessed in this life but the emphasis here is on the rewards of heaven. & we can't understand life without factoring in eternity. God has made this amazing promise to us as His children, that as we live a steadfast, focused, enduring life, there's at the end a **crown of life**. There will be a day when everything we've suffered, every trial, difficulty, & sorrow, will pale in comparison to eternity with God. This isn't a king's crown but a victor's wreath in an athletic contest. The picture is of a believer struggling & striving in the contest, knowing the reward of the crown that awaits him at the end if he perseveres. It isn't that we earn eternal life as a reward for our perseverance. Rather, eternal life is God's gift of grace (Jn 5:24; Eph 2:8-9), but we

don't enter into the full enjoyment of it until we've persevered in the race that God has given us to run in this life. & we aren't competing for a small pile of crowns that God will give to super-Christians. No, all who believe will receive the **crown of life**. Perseverance verifies God's approval because it gives evidence of salvation. In other words, perseverance doesn't result in salvation & eternal life, but is the result & evidence of it. Want proof of your faith? Are you persevering under trials faithfully, with God's wisdom? If so, that's an indication that your faith is real.

We might expect James to say, *the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who persevere, or to those who obey, or to those who believe in Him*. But rather, he says, **to those who love Him**. Why does he say this? Because love for Christ keeps us from loving the world. Love for Jesus motivates us to persevere under trials. Love for our Lord is the inevitable result of faith in Him. If we don't love Him, we don't really know Him (1 Jn 4:8). When Jesus restored Peter after his denials, He asked him 3x, **do you love Me?** (Jn 21:15-17.) Why? Because love for Jesus is the necessary motivation to serve Him, especially when it causes hardship & persecution. If you're struggling with endurance in trials, examine the quality of your love for Christ. One commentator put it this way: *Our progress to the crown is expedited not by our powers of endurance but by the depth & reality & pervasiveness of our love for Him. We live by what we love; the shape of our lives is determined by the joys of our hearts.*<sup>1</sup> Joy is found when one endures trials. In fact the Greek word **endures** is the picture of patient & steadfast staying power, remaining under, rather than deciding you're out & quit. **Endure** isn't so much the picture of patiently waiting in a doctor's office as it is the quality that helps you finish a marathon & endure the pain as you train. Again, this endurance & testing doesn't earn saving grace (which is by definition, unearned) it evidences true faith & true enduring love for Christ. It's not just one person who receives this crown, but all who truly love the Lord have this promise. Think of it this way: Jesus wore a crown of thorns when He suffered & died on a cross so that all who trust in Him will receive a heavenly crown where there is no suffering & dying ever again. Christ wore a crown of death so all who love Him can wear a joyful crown of life. He endured the cross for the joy set before Him so we can glorify & enjoy

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<sup>1</sup> JA Motyer, *James*, p 49

Him forever. But in the meanwhile temptation seeks to rob our joy & cause us to sin & fall short of the glory of God. True believers will endure, but vs 13-16 make it clear that sin is still a big struggle while we're here on earth. Ultimate victory is secure for all God's children in the end, but James wants us all to experience more victory over sin & temptation now as well.

## 2. The Source of Temptation 13

As I said earlier, the same word can mean *test*, *trial*, or *temptation*. Context determines what the author means, whether a test that lets people prove themselves or a temptation that leads them to sin or to endure faithfully. In Js 1:2 the word means **trial**. In 13 it clearly means **tempt**. Because of indwelling sin & the existence of Satan, every test may become a temptation to sin. So if the same event can be a test or a temptation, does it mean God leads people into temptation & sin? Is God toying with us? Is He setting us up to fail? No. James says if a test becomes a temptation, it's our sinful human nature that makes it so. God is sovereign in trials (2-12) but He never solicits us to sin (13). God cannot & will not ever tempt us to sin. God brings trials to us to test & grow our faith but He doesn't tempt us to sin (13c), & we should never even think such a thought. Vs 13 implies *let no one say, even to himself, in his own mind, God is tempting me*. We must never say or think God is tempting us. He never has & never will. He's unable to be tempted & because of that, James conclusion follows, **nor does He tempt anyone** to sin. Most of us would deny we ever blame God for our temptations. But don't assume this verse doesn't apply to you because you don't say the words, *God is tempting me*. You may say it in ways you don't realize. For example, saying, *God made me this way* is excusing our sin in what we do or in what we fail to do because *that's just how God created me*. Or we say, *I can't help it, the temptation was too strong for me to bear*. But God promises in 1 Cor 10:31 that isn't true. Or we blame our circumstances or upbringing or what others have done or not done that cause us to sin. You're accusing God of tempting you to sin if you think, *If I had a more understanding spouse, I wouldn't be so irritable. If my children were more obedient, I wouldn't be so cranky. If my neighbors weren't so hard to get along with I wouldn't bad-mouth & gossip about them. If my boss wasn't such a jerk, I'd work harder*. Whenever you look outside of yourself & point to those kinds of circumstances, you're implying that God

brought those things into your life. In a subtle way, you're saying, *God, if You'd given me a better mate, better children, or a better boss, then I'd be the person You've called for me to be.* In many ways we blame God for our sin. Maybe we think it's because of others that we sinned. That goes back to Adam & Eve. Adam said, *The woman You gave me handed me this fruit, that's why I ate* (Gen 3:12). *God, I went to sleep single. You could have given me any woman You wanted. Why did it have to be her?* What did Eve say? *Not my fault. The serpent deceived me* (13). We're like them wanting to blame others but God holds all of us individually responsible. Kent Hughes writes,

*Blaming the gods was typical of the pagan mind-set in Biblical times because their gods were capricious, vengeful, soap-opera deities who taunted & tantalized humanity. We read over & over again of Zeus & his pantheon in classical Greek writings like The Odyssey. Jewish believers, dispersed in various pagan cities by persecution, were not immune to this mind-set. Evidently in their misery certain of their people were saying God was tempting them to fall; that He had lost patience with them & was deliberately bringing them down. This being so, God was to blame for their sin.<sup>2</sup>*

Or as someone has said, *To err is human; to blame it on the divine is even more human.* But God is always sovereign & man is always responsible for his sin. **13**

God cannot be tempted. God is without the capacity for temptation. The very nature of evil makes it inherently foreign to God. Understanding that God has absolutely no vulnerability to evil, or even temptation to evil, the prophet Habakkuk declared, **Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, & You cannot look on wickedness with favor** (1:13). The Lord Jesus, God in human flesh, is described as **holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners** (Heb 7:26). This is different than how the Greek gods were portrayed. Their gods were often tempted to sin. But God has no inner attraction to evil; in fact, He can't even tolerate looking at it. Jesus, fully God, therefore had no inner attraction desiring sin like we do. But, fully man, Satan did tempt Him & it was a real temptation. The difference between His temptation & ours is explained this way:

*Jesus had no sinful desires. Temptation came only from without. We differ from Him at this point. But He did have desires. Like Him, you are tempted to fulfill even your good desires in wrong ways, at wrong times, for wrong purposes. Satan's ploy was to appeal to the fulfillment of right desires, wrongly (Matt. 4:1ff). Christ's temptations came from another, but they did appeal to His inner desires (He just had no sinful desires). Our temptations come both from within & from without. You, like Jesus, have one way of resisting temptation: by countering it with the appropriate Scripture which you must choose to obey rather than the desire.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> James: Faith That Works, p 44

<sup>3</sup> Jay Adams, A Thirst for Wholness, p 34

God permits temptation or sin but never produces or promotes it. Not even temptation before it turns to sin is of God. In fact, the Greek grammar indicates that not only is God not directly responsible, He isn't even remotely responsible in any way, shape, or form with any sin or form of temptation to sin. Some of you are already thinking, *Then why does Jesus teach us to pray, do not lead us into temptation (Mt 6:13)?* What does the next sentence say? **But deliver us from evil** which completes the whole thought. We pray for deliverance not only from sin but even temptation to sin. Don't just deliver us from evil, but lead us away from even the temptation to evil. God allows the trials in which temptation can occur, not to get us to sin, but to move us to greater endurance & joy. God intends trials to promote growth & endurance, so that those who love Him receive the **crown of life**. To endure trials we need faith & wisdom. If we fail to endure, we shouldn't blame God. If we give in to temptation, it's because we let our desires drag us into sin. We have no more right to blame God for our sin than the Israelites had a right to blame Him for their grumblings. God had shown His love abundantly. If they doubted Him, the failure was theirs, not His. Likewise for us.

**3. The Steps of Temptation A. Desire** We've seen the source of temptation isn't God. James doesn't even point the finger at society, others who provoke us, situations that entice us, or even Satan. James knew that Satan tempts us to sin (4:7), but he knew the root of the problem was our own desires. What's the source of temptation & sin? James couldn't be clearer: it's our own sinful desires. It's nothing outside of us that ultimately causes temptation or creates our sin. **14**

**Each one** emphasizes the universality of temptation, no one is immune. To overcome temptation, it's important to realize that although the initial thought to sin stems from my sinful desires, it isn't sin unless I pursue it. James says in 4:1-2, **What is the source of quarrels & conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust** (same word as 1:14) **& do not have**. The word **lust** means *desire* or *craving*, but not necessarily a sinful desire. It depends on the context. Jesus *desired* to have the Passover with His disciples (Lk 2:15). The **desire** in 4:2 (like in 1:14), by itself, may not be sinful, but the problem occurs when you desire something, anything, even a good thing strongly, & you don't get it. The NIV puts it this way: **What causes fights &**

quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You're so fixated on what you desire (which may or may not have been sin to start with), but now your desire has become a lust or an idol & you're willing to sin to get it or sin if you don't get it. You may not kill, but you covet, complain, or quarrel & the cause is laid at your feet because of **your desires that battle within you**. The blame is never anywhere outside of you for the sins you commit. The responsibility & guilt is yours & yours alone before God. That's hard to accept because we want to believe we're righteous. We want to think that somehow, some way, the biggest problem of our struggle of obedience exists outside of us. & so James says something very important, *You're lured away by your own desire*. James's tells us the buck stops with us. Sins of others & Satanic temptations may have been involved, but God holds each individual personally responsible, answerable, & accountable for their sin. Jesus tells us,

**For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting & wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride & foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within & defile the man (Mk 7:21-23).**

1 Pt 2:11 tells us to **abstain from fleshly lusts** & sinful desires **which wage war against the soul**. The battle must be fought here. Sin always begins in the mind. If we judge these sinful thoughts the moment they pop into our heads, we won't head down the path toward sinful behavior. If we entertain sinful thoughts, sooner or later Satan will present the opportunity & we'll fall. If we make it our habit to take **every thought captive to the obedience of Christ** (2 Cor. 10:5), we won't sin in thought or deed. We never sin except for one cause & that's because we want to sin. Nobody makes us sin. We do it because we desire it. Vs 14 is perhaps the clearest verse in Scripture on the source & steps of temptation within. Why do I sin? Because there's something wrong within me. I want things I shouldn't want. I crave what I shouldn't crave. My problem is me! & that means the thing that we need to be rescued from is *us*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Temptation*, describes how this works:

*With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh.... It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame & power, or greed for money.... Joy in God is ... extinguished in us & we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, He loses all reality, & only desire for the creature is real; ... Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.... The lust thus aroused envelops the mind & will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination & of decision are*

*taken from us. The questions present themselves: "Is what the flesh desires really sin in this case?" "Is it really not permitted to me, yes—expected of me, now, here, in my particular situation, to appease desire?" ... It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God.<sup>4</sup>*

We are drawn away & lured to the hook by our own lusts. If we're in the grip of evil desires, the fault is ours & ours alone. The 1<sup>st</sup> step is desire. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is...

**B. Deception** Carried away & enticed our hunting & fishing terms. You lure prey out with the goal of hooking, netting, capturing, or killing it. Animals & fish are lured to traps & hooks because the bait is too attractive for them to resist. Their desire for the bait is so intense it causes them to overlook the danger until it's too late. The reason a fish can be persuaded to come out is its desires are drawn to the lure which is attractive. The longer the look, the better it looks. The more you look, the sooner you're hooked. The process of temptation is now in full force because desire & deception are working together. We yield to temptation when our own desires draw us toward evil things appealing to our flesh. Eve's desire plus the serpent's deception was a deadly combination. Gen 3:6 tells us, **When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, & that it was a delight to the eyes, & that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit & ate.** With our sinful nature, we have an inner desire to sin, so the fixation quickly leads to persuasion. Once we're fixated & persuaded by it, we're not far from being in the frying pan. The 2<sup>nd</sup> term in vs 14, **entice** is the related idea of catching with bait or trap. Both enticement & entrapment are contained in these terms. When used of animals, the delicious food hanging there persuades it to come out where there's danger. 2 Pt 2:18 uses a similar phrase of false teachers who **entice by fleshly desires**. Sin can look attractive & pleasurable, & usually is, at least for a time. It never comes along with the pitch, *Would you like to destroy yourself & your family? Would you like to disgrace God?* If it did that, it would have little power over us. Instead, it comes with the enticement, *This will be fun! This will meet your needs. This will get you what you've been looking for.*

Vs 14 says, **his own desire**. In other words, each fish or animal has different desires so the sportsman must design his bait or traps differently for each. While we're all vulnerable to the sins Scripture forbids, each of us have our own set of desires. Temptation which has a powerful pull on

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<sup>4</sup> p 33

one person may have absolutely no appeal to another. So don't look down on someone who struggles with something you have no desire for. As one commentator says,

*What one person finds as intense temptation another person may never experience as even a faint enticement, & vice-versa. Temptations are tailored to the individual, & so we as believers must never belittle a person for struggling with something we think of as inane. Instead, we must realize that each of us has particular battles nuanced specifically for us, & we need to give both grace & exhortation to one another to stand firm in times of testing. Conversely, we must always flee temptation, regardless of how "little" it may seem to us. These inner longings, James says, busily work to pull us away from the Lord.<sup>5</sup>*

What pulls us so strongly to the bait? It's not God. It's not Satan or his demons, or the world's evil system, although they bait the hook. It's the sinful desires of each of us that pulls us to take hold of it. Our flesh, our fallen nature, has a desire for evil. One writer called vs 14, *Snared by One's Own Bait*.<sup>6</sup> Another explains: *Desire & the object of desire combine to produce real attraction & appeal. Temptation is never simply a problem with the object of desire. Temptation entices or lures us by our own appetite or imaginative relation to the object of desire.*<sup>7</sup> John Owen said it concisely: *Temptations & occasions put nothing into a man, but only draw out what was in him before.*<sup>8</sup> We aren't tempted even indirectly **by God** (13), but we're directly carried away & enticed by our own desires. The fault is entirely within us, in our unredeemed flesh. *Desire, Deception, & vs 15* continues with the 3<sup>rd</sup> step by saying, **when lust has conceived...**

**C. Conception** James switches metaphors here. Desire & deception have gone to bed. The seed of sin has been sown & impregnation has occurred. What started small will grow to something far bigger. Seduction led to an unexpected pregnancy that will go full-term. The fact that this is an internal process doesn't mean it's not sin yet. Jesus said when you look with lust at another, you've already committed adultery in your heart. That's where it starts. Sin isn't an isolated act or even a series of them. It's the result of a specific process which James is explaining. Think of David's example.

**Now when evening came David arose from his bed & walked around on the roof of the king's house, & from the roof he saw a woman bathing; & the woman was very beautiful in appearance (desire). So David sent & inquired about the woman (step 2, deception). & one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" David sent messengers & took her, & when she**

<sup>5</sup> Craig L Blomberg, *James*, p 71

<sup>6</sup> [www.preceptaustin.org/index.php/james\\_113-15](http://www.preceptaustin.org/index.php/james_113-15)

<sup>7</sup> KA Richardson, *James*, p 81

<sup>8</sup> *The Nature, Power, Deceit, & Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin*, p 12



came to him, he lay with her (step 3)... The woman conceived; & she sent & told David, & said, "I am pregnant" (2 Sam 11:2-5).

David's problem started with a desire within. Did David fall into sin because of something that happened on the outside of him or what Bathsheba did? No. Who or what is to blame? David. He desired, deceived himself, & sin was conceived.

**D. Gestation** Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin (15). What's the gestation of a walrus? 15 months. An elephant? 22 months. Rabbits about 30 days. North American opossum? 12 days & gives birth to 16-20 babies! The gestation period of our evil desires? Not long. As MacArthur says,

*If we allow the process to continue, the design inevitably produces disobedience to God's law, by which it **gives birth to sin**. That which is desired, rationalized, & willed is actually done, committed, & accomplished. Desire leads to deception, deception to design, & design to disobedience...<sup>9</sup>*

The conception, pregnancy, birth imagery of sin is vivid & each time we find it in Scripture there are lies in this birthing room. Ps 7:14 says, **Behold, the wicked man conceives evil & is pregnant with mischief & gives birth to lies** (ESV). Job tells us, **They conceive trouble & give birth to evil, & their womb prepares deceit** (15:35 (ESV)). Is 59:4-5 puts it this way, **they speak lies, they conceive mischief & give birth to iniquity. They hatch adders' eggs; they weave the spider's web; he who eats their eggs dies, & from one that is crushed a viper is hatched** (ESV). Sin hatched in the heart is now born & comes out in real life. Life begins at conception & sin begins before it comes out. It's alive & well within & comes out kicking & screaming in sinful deeds. Finally...

**E. Reproduction & Destruction** ...it gives birth to sin, & when sin is accomplished (when it is fully grown), it brings forth death. Sin personified continues to grow & will become bigger than you & will destroy you if you let it have its way. **Brings forth** at the end of the vs is another term for birth but the offspring here isn't what any parent would want. The ultimate end of sin is death. Paul says, **the wages of sin is death** (Rom 6:23). Adam & Eve were promised death if they sinned. Spiritual death was the instant result of their sin, sin also brought forth physical death, & all their offspring who die without Christ suffer eternal death separated from God. For David, his sin caused

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<sup>9</sup> James, p 52

the death of Uriah & God decreed the child conceived would die as well. There are 2 potential paths in any test. Testing met with endurance makes us mature & complete & leads to life. Or testing may be met with selfish desires which lead to sin & death. James has shown us the reward of persevering, the source of temptation, the steps of temptation, but he doesn't leave us there. He also gives us ...

#### **4. The Solution 16**

James warns us against being deceived & blaming God for our temptations & sins. You've got to deal with it at the deception stage. Don't let your desires & thinking be deceived. The battle must be fought in the mind where sin is conceived. Since none of us is successful in resisting every temptation by immediately rejecting our wrong desire, we need to understand ways for dealing with sin at every stage. We can avoid many temptations simply by avoiding places & situations where we know they're most likely to occur. Instead, we make sure we're exposed to things that feed us in godly ways. We not only gain from the spiritual benefit of those things, but the godly joy we receive from them makes the ungodly things less attractive & even repulsive. We must also be on guard at the level of our minds. We train our minds to keep watch over our desires. Instead of rationalizing temptations, we prepare in advance to oppose them with God's Word, just as Jesus did in the wilderness.

What if it's already too late for you & you've sinned like everyone else in this room? Repent & make Ps 51 your own prayer. If you're an unbeliever? **Repent of your sins & turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away** (Acts 3:19, ESV). If you're a believer? **If we confess our sins, He is faithful & righteous to forgive us our sins & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (1 Jn 1:9). 2 vss later: **My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. & if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; & He Himself is the propitiation for our sins** (2:1-2). He doesn't tempt us to sin but takes away & atones for all our sins. This is the glory of the gospel. It breaks the power of sin & halts its inevitable path. If you're in the grip of temptation, admit that you're to blame & no one else. Then, having confessed your responsibility fully to God, thank Him for forgiveness & appropriate to yourself the strength you have in Christ.

Stop blaming other people, circumstances, or Satan for your temptations & sins. Above all, don't blame God. Take blame yourself, where it belongs. Realize your desires, weaknesses, rationalizations, & sins are within you & have to be dealt with from within. Here are 4 practical ways to overcome temptation:

1) Study & know yourself. Know where you're vulnerable & have strategies to protect yourself ahead of time. Others may be able to handle situations where you'll fall. Don't go with them if it's a temptation for you. Develop a deep distrust of yourself that drives you to a desperate clinging to Jesus.

2) Avoid tempting situations. Don't push the boundary of what you can take. Don't walk on the edge. If you do, you're pouring gas on the fire.

3) Have a predetermined commitment to follow Christ & to flee temptation. You have to decide this before you get into a tempting situation, because when temptation hits, your emotions & the deception factor kick in. Those who receive the **crown of life** love the Lord. Keep your love for Christ fresh & strong & the lure of the flesh & the world won't seem so attractive.

4) Keep before you the gruesome end of temptation: death. The world glamorizes sin. It portrays beautiful people enjoying sin as the ultimate in pleasure. Skeletons or rotting corpses would be a more accurate picture! This is serious because you won't make it as a Christian if you don't learn to overcome temptation! Recognize its source. It doesn't come from God, but from your own desires. Recognize its force. It dwells within & is powerfully deceptive, with a life of its own. Recognize its course. If you don't abort it, it leads inevitably, not to life, but to death.

One of the ways you can deal with temptation is like Ulysses did. Remember him? He was sailing by the Sirens & was afraid he'd be tempted by them. What did he do? He tied himself to the mast & said, *No matter what I say, don't let me out.* That's one way to deal with temptation. In a pinch there's nothing wrong with that. When it's severe, tie yourself to a mast & tell everybody, *Watch me like a hawk. Don't let me do it.* But in the long run, people get tired of that. They'd rather live their life instead of having to watch & police you. Thomas Chalmers was a Scottish preacher in the 1840s. His most famous sermon was *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*. In it he said the only

way to break the hold of a beautiful object on the soul is to show it an object even more beautiful.<sup>10</sup> You can't just say *NO* & tie yourself to the mast when you find your desires luring you to sin. The answer to temptation is spiritual passion, not just restraining yourself. No, you have to fall in love with Somebody. You have to bring Jesus out of the realm of the conceptual into the realm of the passion of your heart. Remember what Jesus has done for you. He died so you could live. Remember what Jesus has done for you. Fall in love with Him. That is the only way.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/Chalmers>