

1. Here in James and elsewhere in the Bible, various words are used and the right choice of words is hard: trials, temptations, tests. But the basic idea is: Satan tempts us and wants our downfall – God tests and examines us (like teacher) so that we come out better. We can't see the source of things/events: they could be our own nature, or God, or Satan. But James emphasizes that things which have bad effects are not from God.

Slide 2 offers a simple scheme.

2. Verse 2 sounds offensive: 'Hurray for trouble!' We don't know what was going on in the churches to which James writes; maybe extreme poverty. In any case, verse 2 is also realistic, because troubles overcome every one of us, then and now: just after Covid [long Covid] we have new crises, such as the cost-of-living crisis, although they are momentarily forgotten as a result of the death of the Queen.

Verse 2 is also a command: don't moan when difficult things happen; just respond in the correct way. And don't blame God.

3. We want to enjoy things; we want to obtain things; we want to achieve things. All that is natural, but our desires have to be controlled. It is natural, but it is not all good. We need to respond wisely. See the little poem on Slide 3.

4. Contrary to us, God is good, say verses 17-18; therefore bad things do not come from Him. And we pray to Him that we will be spared situations that might tempt us to sin. But if we sin, it is our own responsibility. Think of the Lord's Prayer, which we always pray at Renew 88: 'Lead us not into temptation.'

5. If temptation comes nonetheless, Matthew 5 is about things that cause us to stumble. And Jesus wants us to be radical in avoiding temptations!! Take your eye out, hack off your foot or hand.

6. Verse 4 says that the aim of God's testing is maturity. Likewise, in Matthew 5:48 Jesus says that he expects perfection. So we can and should grow as a result of adversities. Over the summer I visited you and asked about your growth. How is that now? Do you grow through crises? Through exams? Do keep in mind that God is not our opponent, he's on our side, like a good teacher. We pray that the tests will make us stronger.