

Today we move on in our sermon series about the book of James. A series that I'm calling "Jim Time". Did you notice something in our first 2 reading from this letter? James doesn't pull any punches. He is what we would call blunt, candid, and direct. He does not shy away from hard topics. In our passage today he tackles a topic that many really wish we wouldn't talk about. The impact of sin on our lives. But da-da-da-da-da-da...James to the rescue, with things that will help us build Temptation Resistance.

But first I have a question for you. How far along are you? You heard me. How far along are you? I know this isn't the typical question asked during a sermon. It's the kind of question that a pregnant woman gets asked when they are out in public. I'll be the first to admit this can be a dangerous question. I've had my share awkward occasions where I misunderstood what I was seeing.

Allow me to show you why this question is appropriate for today. It follows the illustration that James gives. It's the process by which a single sin can enter a person and grow like the process of a human pregnancy. Today, James delivers an ultrasound picture of the conception, maturation, and birth of sin in our lives.

Some might call this comparison a negative one. After all, bringing children into the world is extremely positive. Children change our lives in ways that you would never think possible. In becoming a mother, I immediately had no time for being self-centered. I found myself becoming more self-disciplined, patient, and understanding. I even grew to be more concerned about other people in the world. Raising children can be one of the toughest things you'll ever do, but thanks be to God who uses it to knock the rough edges off us and show us what's truly important.

Becoming a parent of a baby stands in total contrast to becoming a "parent" to sin. Paraphrasing what James says in vs 15. When sin is conceived within us, it has a way of changing us that is overwhelmingly negative. Sin makes us more self-centered, and less concerned about other people in the world. The ability to understand what is important slips further and further away.

Even the smallest sin has the potential to take control of us, to influence the way we think and act. These smaller sins burble deep down inside of us, so they aren't as easy to detect. But eventually, as we move closer to "full term" and "delivery", it becomes obvious to everyone that something is going on.

Think about people you've known. Family and friends who suddenly and without explanation radically change the course of their lives without any concern of how it might affect others. So often they are people with a good life and a good family. We hear stories of the partner who just up and leaves their entire family. One person in this situation said this, "I just had to do it." No other explanation offered. Self-centeredness carries itself inside, grows and matures, until it reaches full term. Besides the abrupt exit, other things like sorrow, misery, and destruction are left in this sin's wake.

What types of sins are capable of leading to such major consequences? ANY kind of sin. This may come as a shock, but did you know that everyone is different? This means some will have a weakness for this while others will have a weakness for that. But James points to a common starting place for any sin, DESIRE.

Merriam-Webster defines desire in this way. Desire is a strong feeling of wanting, wishing for, or craving something, often driving actions to obtain it. It encompasses both an intense mental longing and a specific, expressed request.

Now to be fair, not all desires are bad. For example, the desire for sexual intimacy is a good desire and a great blessing within the context of a committed relationship...but when sinful nature grabs hold, desire gets twisted. The desire for sexual intimacy is no longer a constructive blessing but a destructive curse. Hence, the many lives throughout all time ruined by sin driven sexual desire.

The desire to provide for one's family is a good desire. Worthy and altogether proper. But let that sinful nature infect this good human desire. Then you might find a mother or father so wrapped up in their work and their career that they never even see their family. The original desire, seized. The reality, creating the exact opposite of what was intended. To support the family financially, they sacrifice physical, mental, and emotional presence.

I think you get the picture. Good desire + sinful nature = bad outcome. Any good desire can be twisted by a sinful nature which leads to the conception of a potentially life-changing, life-wrecking sin. What follows is the whole gestation period, where sin is often kept inside and nurtured until it is finally "born".

When I found out I was pregnant with my first child, I thought a lot about this baby. I didn't know til she was born that she would be a Suzanne. I made changes in my life to assure the best for this little life growing inside of me. I ate better food, I walked regularly. I read books like "What to Expect when You're Expecting". I did everything I could think of to make sure this tiny human would be perfect when delivery time arrived.

It may seem odd to compare the gestation of a baby to that of sin, but both happen in very similar ways. When desire combined with sinful nature gets implanted into someone, it causes them to think more and more about that now skewed desire aka sin. This person begins making changes in his or her life to accommodate that sin. They may look at books, websites, podcasts, and other social media that supports what they are now thinking and feeling. This is a person who will find attraction to others with same sinful condition. Finally, they reach full term. But unlike the birth of a baby that brings new life and joy, the birth of sin, according to James, brings death. Death is the end point.

God created everything. God gave us life. God made everything good. Think of sin as an act of un-creation. Think of sin, taking what is good and turning it inside out. Sin is something good that has been turned inside out.

And we don't have to look hard to see that happening around us in real time. Marriages turned inside out. Families turned inside out. Love itself, turned inside out. Concepts of good and bad turned inside out: Confusion injected to the point where, "good" means "bad" and "bad" means "good." This is the work of sin in the world. Could this happen to you?

Makes that odd question I asked earlier not so funny... When I asked, "How far along are you?", what I was really asking was "Has sin implanted itself in you?" Are you at risk of un-creation? If your answer is yes, are you going to fight it?

This fight starts with examining your heart and questioning your own motives. Digging deeper to peel back the shroud that's been allowed to cover your inner desires and motivations. To weigh whether they are good, right, and true, or if a destructive twist was added to them? This examination requires soberness and vigilance. You must stay awake; you must stand guard.

Jeez Pastor Amy, this is a Debbie Downer kind of message. Well get ready because I finally have some good news. We have all that we need to examine ourselves. God has given this ability to us. There's a name for this ability. Oh I just had it. Maybe there's someone who can help us with this:

[Show Pinocchio Clip]

While we won't get a spunky little cricket or a blue fairy to help us out, we do get this wonderful, beautiful gift called a conscious. And today, James, writing to people like you and me, enlightens us on these gifts in verse 17 & 18. Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave birth to us by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Paul said it in Romans 3:23. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Each and every one of us has the potential to give birth to sin. But we have the word of truth. We have the

wonderful words of life. When we repent and turn away, we will be forgiven by God because of the sacrifice of his Son Jesus.

Jesus our savior, tempted in every way, did not sin. By his death and resurrection, His victory became our victory. This means we have what it takes to battle against those desires that would grow and take over our lives.

We also have the Holy Spirit. Any time unholy desires try to make their home in you, trust me, you'll hear about it from the Holy Spirit. Think of the Holy Spirit as a watchdog alerting you when evil is trying to work its way in. This happens through that word of truth. The word that uncovers thoughts and attitudes with great precision. When a moral compromise rears its ugly head, count on the urging of your conscience to bark like a dog.

Something better can grow in you. Along with the potential to give birth to evil, we have the choice of giving birth to good. To give birth to things like Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Gentleness, and Self-control. When released, these things will bring blessings to your family; to your neighbors; to your coworkers, to the world; and let's not forget, to you.

How far along are you?

Remember what God implanted in you. Maybe it's time to make changes in your life to accommodate the good that God placed within you. Maybe you could spend more time reading God's word, so that you can know more about what God wants growing inside of you. Don't be surprised if you start attracting other Christians. You might even find yourself using gifts given you to nurture and bring God's goodness to full term. And this is how we give birth to good. This is how we "overcome evil with good". This is how we build temptation resistance.