

Series: "GROW!"

For Message: James 1:9-18, Matthew 16:18, John 14:6, Mark 12:43-44

Message Title: "Who Made Me Do It?"

Introduction: How we doing, BMZ?!? Glad you are with us today as we continue our series called simply: "GROW!" The idea is ... If we are NOT GROWING, we are DYING. There really is no such thing as PLATEAU or STATUS QUO. Those are just INDICATORS of IMMINENT DEATH. We are studying the BOOK of JAMES to encourage us to GROW! James pulls no punches when it comes to our SINCERITY of faith in Jesus.

I believe that we need to GROW in our FAITH ... our TRUST in GOD. I believe that God wants us to GROW in our LOVE for PEOPLE (a deep caring about God's other Kids ... a caring that is willing to live Compassionately and Speak Truth). I believe that GOD wants us to BE the CHURCH that Jesus said we should be ...

When Jesus introduced the word CHURCH into the Disciples vocabulary (Matthew 16:18), He said, "I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH". Again, TWO THINGS there: 1) Jesus will BUILD / GROW the Church ... the intention is that it GROWS in FAITH and NUMBERS ... AND, Numbers Matter! Every NUMBER represents an ETERNAL SOUL according to Jesus (John 14:6 = *Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."*) We have to keep growing in our FAITH to trust that to be TRUE!

2) It's JESUS' CHURCH! I will build MY CHURCH! Do you all ever recite the Lord's Prayer? We pray that prayer almost every week, don't we? Do you understand what you are praying? We'll do a series on it soon... BUT, we say, "THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN"! It's GOD'S WAY, not ours ... it's JESUS' CHURCH, NOT OURS... that means when Jesus says, "Go into ALL the WORLD ... Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth ... and MAKE DISCIPLES" ... That's NOT a SUGGESTION! That's a COMMAND. If it's ON EARTH as it is IN HEAVEN ... Do you think there is a LOT of ARGUING in HEAVEN?!? I don't think so! I think that when GOD SPEAKS; HEAVEN JUMPS! On earth as it is in heaven... THAT'S OUR JOB!!

Which reminds us of LAST WEEK ... A brief recap of last week would look like this: James is a SLAVE of Jesus (and his younger brother), EXPECT TRIALS / TROUBLE in your lives, allow that TROUBLE to help you GROW in your faith, if you don't know what to do ... ASK God, but don't ask God if you don't EXPECT an answer...

That last part ... I believe that we all go through this at some time or another. We pray and ask God for something. Following the initial prayer we waver back and forth. "I believe that God is going to answer my prayer." "I'm not sure God is listening." "God will come through for me." "I'm not sure if there even is a God!" We've talked about the prayer ... "I BELIEVE, BUT, PLEASE HELP ME IN MY UNBELIEF!" Have you ever done that?!?

Missed it?? Watch, listen or read ... [www.bmzchurch.org](http://www.bmzchurch.org).

If you have your Bible with you, turn with me to James 1 (Stories of Jesus ... Matthew, Mark, Luke and John ... 2/3 of the way through your Bible) ... if you don't; no worries. All of our Scriptures for today will be up on the screen and much of what we are doing is in your program. If you don't own a Bible and would like one, please stop by Java Jct/Blessed Bean and someone will get you set up with your own Bible. Speaking of which...

*If you haven't already, I invite you to take out your message notes and merge card... On one side you will see our Scripture for today and on the other you will find a brief outline walking us through our Scripture. You will see that there are blanks to fill in ... Please take the time to do so. Grab a pen and write down whatever else you think is important to you and your faith journey. After worship, drop off your MERGE CARD and take your notes home and refrigerate them. Please Re-read the Scripture and the notes to keep growing and learning. For those of you watching on-line, you can hit the button for notes and for MERGE CARD and stick with us. If you are watching/listening later, or IPODing; you can download the outline off of our website so you too can take notes.*

Let's pray and then we will press on with where we are going today... **LET'S PRAY (turn off marked lights during prayer)!**

Over the last few months, Sarah and I have been blessed to watch our youngest daughter learn a lot. She's now 7 years old. Now, please understand that Sarah and I have done our best to tell Lily over and over again not to grow up. She's so cute just the way she is...

This younger child has been great to remind us of our other children being younger. I'm reminded of when we lived in Marshfield; I was entered in a tennis tournament. I actually played my way into the finals of that tournament. Although there were a couple of times that I had to stop play. I would toss the ball for my serve and then hear from behind me, "Doe Daddy!" Nicole, in Sarah's arms, was cheering me on.

As cute as she was, I'd be a little concerned about her if she was still doing that today!!

Today we continue in the first chapter of James, starting with verse 9. James 1:9-11 = *9Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them.10And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field. 11The hot sun rises and the grass withers; the little flower droops and falls, and its beauty fades away. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements.*

I love how James addresses the RICH and the POOR ... Everybody wins!

### **I. Rich and Poor**

Remember that James is the head of the JEWISH CHRISTIAN CHURCH in Jerusalem and that he is writing to that church as well as Jewish Christians elsewhere. If James is the head of this large church in Jerusalem (and he is), he knows what the struggles are that Jewish Christians are dealing with.

Remember how BIG this church is? Acts 2:41 = *41Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.*

Acts 2:47b = *“And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.” ...*

Acts 4:4 = *4But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so the number of believers now totaled about 5,000 men, not counting women and children.*

In Acts 5:14 = *“Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women.” ...*

Acts 8 = The church expands as “Persecution Scatters the Believers” across Judea and Samaria and beyond ...

In the Book of Acts, we find that in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century the Church (Jesus' Church!) and Christianity spread from believing Jews to non-Jews in 39 cities and 30 countries, islands, or provinces. That's a BIG CHURCH! And, it's BIBLICAL!

BUT, it seems that FINANCIAL STATUS might be one thing that James is seeing as a POTENTIAL SPLIT in the church. I'm sure this NEVER happens in OUR CHURCHES, but in many churches there are those who THINK that MONEY = POWER. And, it sounds like this might be going on in the EARLY CHURCH under James leadership.

In some churches, splits are caused by the wealthy utilizing their MONEY to influence the DIRECTION the church goes. Here's what I'm going to tell you as your pastor. I keep tabs on people's giving for one reason: DISCIPLESHIP! If I see someone stepping up and appearing that they are TITHING. I want to encourage them if I can. I hear Jesus loud and clear when he says of the widow ... Mark 12:43-44 = *43Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. 44For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on."*

Please don't think that wealth gets to set the direction of BMZ Church. It doesn't. As a PASTOR, I'm called by God to be a PROPHET, NOT a PROSTITUTE. In other words, I get paid to SERVE GOD, not make YOU FEEL GOOD!

Now, James has both sides worshipping in the churches there in Jerusalem, and he proceeds to level the playing field between the RICH and the POOR.

Rich or Poor; neither makes one better or worse ... people are equal in God's eyes. God is NOT CONCERNED about our MATERIAL WEALTH! God IS concerned with our STEWARDSHIP of HIS WEALTH!

Again, James is all about that slavery to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and Jesus wants us to mature as Christians.

When the rich are tested, it should be a reminder that their material wealth will end in this life. They better keep their wealth in perspective. They should not trust in their riches nor live for them ... they're temporary. They are HUMBLED because they KNOW WEALTH CAN'T SAVE THEM!

When the poor are tested, it is a reminder that they are rich in the Lord and cannot lose their SALVATION or their BLESSING from GOD. Many in those days thought that if you were POOR, GOD must not LOVE YOU because you had not been BLESSED with WEALTH!

Achievements and wealth fade away... GROW UP and get your eyes off of these!

You know, we have many ways that we EVALUATE OURSELVES as humans, including FINANCIAL status. James reminds us that GOD EVALUATES in a completely DIFFERENT way ... financial status not included! Again, we are reminded that JESUS looks at the HEART of the person!

Let's continue with our Scripture from James 1 ... James 1:12-15 = *12God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (REPEAT)*

*13And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. 14Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.*

Wow! That's a lot right there... So, here's a QUESTION: Who's Tempting Who?

## II. Who's Tempting Who?

In Ephesians, Paul writes about three (3) ways that God works in our lives to help us become who God wants us to be ... as Christians.

1<sup>st</sup> = God works FOR us ... Jesus on the cross offers us salvation (forgiveness of sins and a right relationship with God). John 3:16 = "For God so loved the world that HE GAVE His only Son and whoever believes in Him will NOT PERISH, but have EVERLASTING LIFE." This requires nothing of us except to accept it as a GIFT from God.

2<sup>nd</sup> = God's work IN us ... This work is called "Sanctification". God works to mold us and make us in the image of Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit. We become more "Christ-like" ... "Christian". This is called GROWING in our FAITH! It's a PROCESS!

3<sup>rd</sup> = God's work THROUGH us ... service. We are created to be like Christ in order to live like Christ ... loving and serving others, so that they might know about the GOOD NEWS of JESUS. "Good News" = God cares way more about your FUTURE than your PAST, because your PAST has been taken care of on a CROSS (If we will SWALLOW our PRIDE and ASK for FORGIVENESS). Do you know anyone who would like to hear that GOD doesn't CARE about their PAST as much as their FUTURE?!? Now, that's GOOD NEWS! Eternity? Paradise? We get to offer to other people that 1<sup>st</sup> one ... GOD'S WORK FOR US with JESUS and a CROSS!

The 2nd WORK ... "SANCTIFICATION" ... moving toward being who God wants us to be in this life ... is what James is writing about here. It's about DISCIPLESHIP! BUT, the only way that God can make us into what God wants us to be as followers of Jesus, is if we are open to that. We have to give CONSENT or PERMISSION for God to work at molding us into a DEVELOPING FOLLOWER OF JESUS.

This is where James' slavery comes in. Only when we become like slaves to the Lord Jesus Christ can God make us what God wants us to be! We have to be willing to SAY: "I am completely open to what God wants me to be." You'll hear me PRAY again and again, "God, please help us to know more about WHO YOU ARE and WHO You want US to BE."

When I started playing TENNIS in COLLEGE, I figured out pretty quickly that my College Tennis Coach, Tom Harper, knew a whole lot more about tennis than I did. If he said that a certain drill was going to make me a better player, than I did that drill ... over and over until I had it.

That's what God does with us. God KNOWS way more than we do about THIS LIFE and what's coming in the FUTURE. And one way that GOD TRAINS us is through TROUBLES or trials. As we work through those TROUBLES, our FAITH INCREASES and we become more who God wants us to be.

So, we need to understand though, that there is a DIFFERENCE between TROUBLES / TRIALS and TEMPTATION. James says that God can't/doesn't TEMPT us to do wrong.

God allows tests and TROUBLES to build FAITH and bring out the best in us (opportunity for joy!). Satan, on the other hand, sends TEMPTATIONS to bring out the WORST in us! Temptations cannot be from God. Only GOOD things come from God! God is not an EVIL God and cannot INFLICT EVIL on anyone. But TEMPTATIONS STILL COME, DON'T THEY?!?

Ever heard anyone say, "THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT!"?

In May of each year, my brothers and I used to go fishing up in the Rhineland area. We are usually going after Walleye and so every year we are trying to figure out what the Walleye are going to hit on. Most every year, we use MINNOWS on some sort of JIG. Then we try to figure out what COLOR and SIZE of jig to use. Hopefully, we figure out what is going to entice those fish into our boats before the fishing trip is over.

You know what I've figured out? I cannot MAKE those fish get into the boat! They have to CHOOSE to take the bait!

That's what James is saying here about temptation. We are like the fish ... we choose if we take the bait or not! The Devil did NOT make you do it! Get it?!? The DEVIL FISHED ... YOU BIT!

We have to stop blaming anyone but ourselves for the choices we make in this life!  
 Definition of MATURITY = “Taking responsibility for one’s own actions / behaviors.”

Temptations become sin because of the desires inside of us. The SIN is when we ACT ON those TEMPTATIONS!

Hear me ... Temptations are NOT lessened when we become slaves of Christ. What becomes less is our WILLINGNESS to TAKE the BAIT!

The things in this life that tempt us are things that are “all about me!” SELFISH things ... SELF-CENTERED things ... things that will make us feel good! We CHOOSE to OBEY the Temptation ... in other words; we become a SLAVE to that TEMPTATION ... to that DESIRE!

If we are SLAVES to Jesus Christ (as James claimed for himself), life is no longer about what makes ME feel good! And, IF it’s NOT about ME, the PULL of those temptations DECREASES!

Listen, I want to do just a little bit with verse 15 ... *15These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.*

Don’t miss this ... Have you ever noticed how SIN SNOWBALLS?!? If you do whatever you are tempted to do ONCE; it is SO EASY to JUSTIFY DOING IT AGAIN!?! We can talk ourselves BACK into something MUCH EASIER than talking ourselves into something the FIRST TIME ... *“Well, it didn’t hurt me last time...” “Well, no one found me out, so they won’t find me out this time...” “Well, no one else got hurt last time...” “Well, I know at least 3 OTHER PEOPLE who are doing the SAME THING, so it must be OKAY!”*

And EVENTUALLY, it leads to a HABIT and we didn’t see it coming ... But, soon ... DEATH! WE get so wrapped up in our HABIT that we forget about the LIFE that JESUS offers!

We get SO SELFISH / SELF-CENTERED that we NEVER ASK, “I wonder how Jesus feels about this?” We NEVER PICTURE that EVERY TIME I SIN, it’s like I have the HAMMER in MY HAND and I’m POUNDING the STAKES into JESUS’ WRISTS and ANKLES ... because that’s what FORGIVENESS for SIN COSTS!

When it’s ALL ABOUT ME ... I CANNOT be a SLAVE to JESUS as MY LORD!

Let’s finish up this section ... James 1:16-18 = *16So don’t be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. 17Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. 18He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.*

Again, here is our reminder that “WHATEVER is GOOD and PERFECT is a GIFT coming down to us from GOD...” God is NOT a TEMPTER to EVIL. Never has been and NEVER will be! This takes us to our last point for today...

### **III. He Never Changes**

Our GOD NEVER CHANGES! He has LOVED us enough from the BEGINNING that HE GAVE us BIRTH (God’s CHOICE!) and out of ALL CREATION, WE get to be God’s PRIZED POSSESSIONS! God’s LOVE for US does NOT CHANGE!

BUT, WE NEED TO CHANGE ... in our response to GOD! We need to take initiative ... remember, we have to CHOOSE to WORK AT IT ... We need to WORK at LESSENING the AFFECT of TEMPTATION in this life and make sure we are who GOD WANTS US to BE! We need to WORK at STAYING in a CLOSER RELATIONSHIP with GOD!

Take steps to CHANGE! We have to STOP BEING LITTLE KIDS (DOE DADDY!)

We need to START BEING SLAVES to GOD and JESUS CHRIST!

Here's where the rubber meets the road. This week, decide that you are going into slavery! If we are going to be "Christian" or followers of Christ, there is no other way!

Do me a favor? If you are NOT WILLING to give your WHOLE SELF over to GOD and declare, like James ... "I AM A SLAVE OF GOD and of the LORD JESUS CHRIST", PLEASE do me a FAVOR: Don't EVER TELL ANYONE AGAIN that you are a "CHRISTIAN"! A DEVELOPING (GROWING) FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST is a CHRISTIAN; NOT someone who talks a lot, but NEVER GROWS UP!

So, you know ... GROW UP!

Hey, if you have enjoyed worshipping with us today and maybe you've learned to GROW a bit, would you consider inviting a friend next week?!

NEXT SUNDAY: Take time to talk more about SLAVERY ... then, we'll talk about GARDENS and MIRRORS. Don't miss it!

Let's PRAY Together!

Next Steps: *I will memorize James 1:12*  
*I will attempt to attend/watch/listen to all of the messages in the "GROW!" series*  
*I will read the Book of James this week*  
*I Will Start a Bible Reading Program off of [www.bmzchurch.org](http://www.bmzchurch.org)*

"Truth without Grace is Fundamentalism (Brutality). Grace without Truth is Sentimentalism (Hypocrisy)."  
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