

The Marshmallow Principle

James 1:2-4

Introduction: In the early 1960's, a study was conducted at Stanford University using small children and marshmallows. Basically, children were placed in a room one at a time. An adult would enter the room and place a marshmallow in front of the child. The adult would tell the child they were going to leave the room for 15 minutes and if they could wait until their return, the adult would reward the child with a second marshmallow.

Of the 600 children that took part in this study, roughly one-third of the children waited and were rewarded a second marshmallow. Two-thirds of the children were unable to resist the temptation before them. Yet, the interesting part was the follow up study that took place many years later.

One hundred of the children in the original study groups were tracked down to learn what kind of person each of the children became. It was learned that those who resisted the marshmallow did better in school, got along better with others, and managed stress better than the children who ate the marshmallow shortly after the adult left the room. It was also learned that the marshmallow resisters were far more successful in life than the marshmallow eaters.

I. "Blessed is the man who endures temptation" (Jas. 1:12).

A. Those who endure temptation when tested will receive the crown of life.

1. Self control in the face of temptation not only results in the blessing of eternal life but it also results in blessings here on earth.

2. Marshmallow eaters (a term we will use to identify those without self control) seek instant gratification instead of thinking of the consequences of their actions. They don't endure temptations.

B. In order for us to reach our heavenly goal, we can not be marshmallow eaters (Phil. 3:18-19). If all we think about is satisfying our bellies, we won't think about the long term goal of heaven which is necessary to resist the temptations in this life.

II. All temptations are like those marshmallows.

A. They are either something we should not have or they are something we could have if we wait for the proper time.

B. For example, the temptation presented by Bathsheba was the marshmallow that David should not have had (2 Sam. 11:2-4).

1. The consequences for eating that marshmallow lead to murder, the loss of his house, his wives, his son and his kingdom (2 Sam. 12:9-14). It also ruined David's reputation and had "*given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.*" Did David think that marshmallow was worth it?

2. If David had not eaten that marshmallow, God would have given him much more (2 Sam. 12:8)!

C. Jesus gives us a proper example when He was tempted to eat Satan's marshmallow. On the third temptation, notice the marshmallow Satan offers Him (Matt. 4:8-9).

1. Satan offered all the kingdoms of the world right then and there!

2. However, Jesus didn't eat that marshmallow. In return, He is now at the right hand of God (1 Pet. 3:21-22). Not only does he have all the kingdoms of the world, but he also has all powers, angels and authorities!

III. Giving into temptation (eating the marshmallow) is taking a short cut to gratification.

A. Esau got the gratification of bread and a bowl of lentils (Gen. 25:34). However, he could have received greater blessings via his birthright.

B. We all have God given desires for intimacy, closeness, physical contact, and affection. Yet, to give into the temptation by having sex before marriage is to fulfill those desires in a temporary way that seems to satisfy. It is eating the marshmallow before the proper time.

1. The consequences for such instant gratification can be devastating. Relationships are ruined, diseases are introduced, trust is lost, and heaven is forfeited (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

2. Yet, if we wait until marriage to eat that marshmallow we not only will enjoy the sexual relationship with our spouse, but we will have far more opportunities including an intimate relationship that will last a life time.

C. Let me illustrate it another way. If I was to offer you one million dollars today or the sum of a dollar doubled every day for 30 days, which would you choose? You're probably thinking, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Yet, if you take the one million dollars you will lose out on more than 5 million dollars 30 days from now. The desire to eat the marshmallow to reach quick gratification is strong.

IV. "But I really like marshmallows!"

A. Everyone will have marshmallows put in front of them (Matt. 26:41).

B. Paul liked marshmallows too and he occasionally ate them (Rom. 7:15-21).

C. The trick is to control our desire to eat marshmallows. That requires the Lord's help (Matt. 6:13).

D. God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to control ourselves (1 Cor. 10:13). In other words, He will not allow us to be tempted by a marshmallow beyond our ability to resist it. In fact, He will give us a way to avoid eating it!

Conclusion: (For the benefit of our young children who might be thinking that eating marshmallows is wrong; I'm not talking about real marshmallows. We are talking about giving into temptation like the children who were tempted by the marshmallow put before them.) It happens to be that if we control ourselves by avoiding temptations we will be blessed. Wouldn't it be worth not eating those marshmallows while we live and then having more marshmallows than we can imagine here and in heaven?