

m MASTERCLASS | JAMES

DAILY DEVOTION

DAY 1

READ

JAMES 1:1-8

FOCUS

“BUT WHEN YOU ASK, YOU MUST BELIEVE AND NOT DOUBT, BECAUSE THE ONE WHO DOUBTS IS LIKE A WAVE OF THE SEA, BLOWN AND TOSSED BY THE WIND.

REFLECTION from PASTOR DOYLE SURRETT

You may not know this, but this book we are reading was written by James (the brother of Jesus) to Jewish followers of Jesus who had been run out of Jerusalem by the same people who had murdered Stephen. Since they are now living in other cities, James, as their Pastor, has some instructions for them from afar. He wants to help them deal with the persecution and other difficulties they are experiencing and even help them see that they can grow from these same difficulties. He also spends some time helping them to know how to live a victorious Christian life in general. In this beginning section, we see that he makes some interesting, somewhat counter-intuitive assertions. To name a few: the idea that we should take joy from difficulty; that the path to maturity is never easy; that wisdom is available to us if we ask for it; or that second-guessing God is counter-productive.

A part of faith is learning to live counter-intuitively: going beyond our urges and learning a better way. For example; BC (Before Coronavirus) working out was not a great source of joy for me. But--after all these months of the gym being closed, my weight increasing significantly, my clothes not fitting, and my back starting to hurt--I am convinced that a return to the “discomfort” of lifting weights and riding the exercise bike will be a “trial” that I enjoy. (I hear all of you out there saying you don’t need a gym to work out. Well, evidently, I do ‘cause...oh leave me alone). James is saying: Yes, right now is hard (living in a foreign city), but there will be a pay-off if you persevere.

Perseverance is not, as the KJV translates it, patience. It is a much more active and forceful word--carrying the idea of standing tall and facing an oncoming storm. Growing up in the Midwest, we experienced--not infrequently--storms that often include tornados. Californians are freaked out by these highly destructive twisters, but the initial reaction by locals (especially the men) was to go outside and watch it. Yeah, that’s right--standing there and watching to see if it was really coming your way or not. It is an awesome thing to stand--face to the wind--looking possible calamity in the eye without blinking (for those two seconds before you come to your senses and run as fast as you can to the basement, bathroom, or storm cellar and hang onto the plumbing for dear life). The picture in James is of Christians looking hardship in the face unflinchingly, even as we hold unswervingly to Jesus. He is telling us that if we will choose to do this, we not only will survive but become mature in the process.

It seems the only way to become mature is to go through some stuff. And the more often and the better we go through it, the more mature we become. The problem is, we don’t always know how to go through tough times...or we change our minds in the middle about how we are going to go through. One time my family was at Big Beach on Maui in HI. If you know the place, it has many warning signs about the dangerous surf there. Because I am a bit foolhardy (or because I’m not very smart, or because I didn’t value my children’s lives very much (just kidding)), I decided that me and the kids--who were elementary age--should play in this dangerous surf. My plan was for us to run out on the sand and, because it was a severe shore break, we could jump up through the waves before they crashed. It was really great fun; I held their hands and we would run toward the breaking wave and dive up through it. No problem. We were enjoying ourselves so much that we invited Connie (my wife, their mother) to join us. She finally reluctantly agreed, but there was a problem: both my hands were taken (by the kids). So I yelled, “Just follow me.” She did, but as she saw the big waving coming in, she changed her mind and froze partway there. The wave landed directly on top of her, throwing her back up on the beach as people came running to see if she was OK (she was bruised and shaken but OK--which is more than I can say for our marriage the rest of that vacation).

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REFLECTION from PASTOR DOYLE SURRATT

James says that if you go around changing your mind about living in faith, it's not going to turn out well for you. The old song "I have decided to follow Jesus" has a line that you should keep in mind when facing shore breaks, but, more importantly, in your Christian faith journey: "no turning back, no turning back!" James says choose Jesus, don't doubt, and you'll be fine.

QUESTIONS

- ARE YOU GOING THROUGH HARD TIMES?
- ARE YOU PERSEVERING OR PASSIVELY WAITING IT OUT?
- ARE YOU LIVING IN FAITH OR IN DOUBT?