

Screen Doors on Submarines / The Book of James #1 / James 1:1-8

What good is it, my brothers, and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save them? No it can't. For faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

If you suffer from that dreadful vexation of a disease known as Closter phobia, then I would put earnest money on the probability that you have never even remotely considered the thought of hitching a ride on one of the greatest traveling vessels known to man to get you from one coast to the other. It's not a Plymouth Prowler, Nissan Cube, Pontiac Aztek, or a Ford Pinto. All of those fine pieces of machinery - that fall short of the glory of Henry Ford in the looks department - travel on top of the land. Nor is it an ocean liner, pontoon, or Styrofoam john boat. All of those fine vessels of maritime engineering are designed to travel on top of the water. Instead it's that watercraft capable of moving from one coast to the other completely submerged and underwater known as the submarine (not to be confused with the sandwich). Without these vessels, America as we know it would not exist. One class of them carry ballistic missiles. Another class has only one job: to carry nuclear missiles to sea in order to deter other countries from a surprise attack. Another class can even hide under the polar ice caps or drop to 10,000 Leagues Under the Sea during covert spy missions to keep our nation safe. On all of these, you'll find periscopes, chow halls, bunking quarters, armaments, and fuel supplies. What you won't find on any of them is a screen door. For what good is a screen door on a vessel that only occasionally rises above sea level? It would be useless for practical purposes.

The Bible contains 66 individual books, all of which will find their way into your life in a particular season or circumstance if you walk with Jesus long enough. Those new to faith in Jesus take refuge in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. That whoever believes in him shall not perish; but have eternal life." Those in a season of soul searching take great comfort in Psalms 91:1: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty's wings." But there is a book of the New Testament that's applicable in every season of life because it's the most practical book in all of the Bible. It's the Book of James. Though it's only 5 chapters, every passage has immediate application in our lives in some way because of James' purpose for writing. He wrote it to contrast a faith that works much like a periscope on a submarine with a faith that doesn't, much like a screen door. And James' first lesson is also one of his most important: how to deal with the trials of many kinds going on in your life right now. And that will certainly go on in the future. I like to call it: how to win with a bad hand. Turn with me James 1:1-8 and let's try to develop a viewpoint of our trials and tribulation that works like a periscope instead of one that functions like a screen door.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. ² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ 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. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Seeing Trials Through the Practical Periscope Requires:

1. A Practical Temperament (2)

- **The Evolution of Bad Attitude/Temperament in A Child's Life:** (1) Toddler – "Clean your toys off the floor and I'll give you a whole quarter." "Ok. Daddy." (2) Adolescent – "Clean your room and I'll give you 5 bucks." "What about ten?" (3) Teenager – "Take out the trash because I'm your dad and I'm King of the House, not you." "Whatever. Have you seen my iPhone?"
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The temperament of joy in every single trial that you face in your life isn't a suggestion or an ideal, it is an absolute imperative command.
- **How Often Trials of Many Kinds Come:** Not if. Not maybe. But when. As if to say you have just come out of a trial, currently in one, or about to go through one.

- **The Types of Many Trials That Come Our Way:** (1) Some you cause, personally: Aninas and Sephira died in church because they lied to the Holy Spirit and God judged them. (2) Some you don't cause, personally: Job experienced every kind of trial and suffering known to man, none of which he brought upon himself. (3) Some the people of God cause, personally: The Israelites went into Babylonian exile because of unfaithfulness. (4) Some the people of God don't cause, personally: The bride of Christ in the Book of Revelation suffers because of their testimony.
- **The Practical Temperament in Every Single Trial:** (1) Consider it pure joy; (2) It's empathic – "surely" (3) It's an absolute – have joy and nothing else; (4) It's an order – an imperative command, not a suggestion or ideal.
- **App:** Biblical joy isn't a feeling or emotion. It's a state of being; a disposition; and an outlook.

2. A Practical Reason (3-4)

- **Sand-Paper:** (1) The best sandpapers have levels of grit; (2) If you need to shave off some serious wood, 60 grit will do you; (3) If you are in the process of finishing a piece of furniture, start with 120. Then 220. Then 400. Then 600. (3) If you want to get that piece of furniture smooth as butter, get 1200, then 2000, then 4000, then 6000. (4) Rough paper has a purpose: to smooth the object to make it more useful, beautiful, appealing and valuable to the owner of the object.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** All testing through various trials have a purpose (even the bad ones): smoother objects refined by grit.
- **What Trials Produce from God's Perspective:** Perseverance. The idea is the continuation that wouldn't come if you have the wrong view of trials. You'll be disgusted with God if he doesn't give you everything and keep your life pain free. That false view is why people leave the faith and church. They want sugar and roses. But life suggests otherwise.
- **What Trials Produce in Our Lives:** Maturity and completeness in Christ. Not lacking in anything. That's not to say you have everything you ask for. It's to say that trials are providently designed to show you that what you needed you and what you wanted were entirely different things.
- **The Creed of the Disabled:** I asked God for strength that I might achieve. I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey. I asked for health that I might do greater things. I was given infirmity that I might do better things. I asked for riches that I might be happy. I was given poverty that I might be wise. I asked for power that I might have the praise of men. I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. I was given life that I might enjoy all things. I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for. Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

3. A Practical Approach (5)

- **Working at Glass Company with a Boss Who Thought He Was Confucius:** (1) I worked at a Glass company in high school for a guy who thought he was Confucius and liked to tell you. (2) It was enough to make you want to go work at another job. (3) In the interview: "what other jobs have you had." "I worked at a pool cleaning company." "Confucius say "man who work all day for a pool maintenance company feel drained." (4) "Derrick you are going to be working with molten glass." "Sounds good. Sign me up." "But be careful. Confucius say "man who fall in vat of molten glass make spectacle of himself."
- **Main Idea of Point:** Route to wisdom in trying circumstances is to ask the One who is all-knowing and exceedingly wise. We don't receive wisdom from him in our trials if we don't bother to ask.
- **The Place of This Verse In the Passage Is One of the Most Important Lessons:** Before we ask God for wisdom, we have to have the proper attitude about trials – "joyful." And we also have to understand them from his perspective: they are designed by God to produce perseverance and maturity.
- **Then and Only Then Do We Get Advice on What to Do In Them:** Ask the Wise One for wisdom. Notice it's not giving you all the answers. It's wisdom. Which is knowledge, experience and personality rightly applied. Which he will give if you ask.
- **It's Also A Lesson That Has An Extension and Neighborly Component to It:** If you lack wisdom and seek only the advice of those who agree with you and tell you what you want to hear, that's a foolish thing to do. Equally, it is also foolish to seek the advice of those who are destructively critical. Neither have your best intentions in mind.

4. A Practical Confidence

- **Doubleminded Ordering at a 5 Star BBQ Restaurant:** (1) Good authentic BBQ is proof that God loves us. (2) But the worst thing a BBQ connoisseur can see on the menu is this: Meat and Three for 15\$. (3) Not because of having to choose three vegetables. That's easy: Fried Okra, Corn on the Cob and Collard Greens. (4) It's choosing the meat: hard to pick between Chicken, Pork and Beef. (5) Leads to doublemindedness and mental torture.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Asking God for wisdom and NOT believing he's going to show you is doublemindedness. It lacks confidence. If you can't approach and ask God with confidence, believing he will answer, James cautions against approaching God to ask at all. Why? Because it ceases to be faith when you lack confidence. That's why.
- **What Doublemindedness Is:** It's the propensity to vacillate in life that extends to our relationship with God here. To be and act one way today and act some other way tomorrow.
- **How Doublemindedness Is Revealed:** By instability, thus "like a wave of the sea driven and tossed."
- **How Doublemindedness Is Manifested in Our Spiritual Life:** Doubt today. Faith tomorrow. This instability will absolutely manifest itself in our prayers. We have the faith to ask and then doubt not to believe.
- **App:** Doubting and inquiring do not go together when it comes to God. God desires confidence before His throne, not trepidation. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.