

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH

JAMES

FAITH AND WORKS

JAMES 2:14-26

05/21/2017



MAIN POINT

The kind of faith that does not show itself through good deeds is no faith at all.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When was the last time someone went out of his/her way to do something good for you? What did that act of service mean to you?

What kinds of things might keep us from putting our faith into action in our workplaces, our neighborhoods, and other parts of our lives outside of the church?

James emphasized demonstrating the authenticity of one's faith. A mere profession of belief, even if it is orthodox and sincere, is not enough. Such faith is not saving faith. Saving faith involves a vital relationship with Christ whose transformation of our lives overflows into our actions.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 2:14-17.

What do the questions in verse 14 imply about faith without works?

In what way should the lifestyle of a Christian verify his or her faith?

The word "faith" has the sense of trust in and commitment to Christ for salvation. The openness to receive God's grace brings redemption, and the redeemed live out that grace. The term "works" refers to good deeds—actions on others' behalf that demonstrate Christ's love (see v. 8). James's question called for an obvious answer: An inactive faith accomplishes nothing. Good deeds arising from faith give concrete evidence of commitment to Christ. The reality of faith is shown in a lifestyle characterized by ministry to others in obedience to Christ. Faith cannot be separated from daily behavior.

How does the illustration in verses 15-16 help you understand the faith/works balance of the Christian life?

James gave an illustration of the emptiness of words without actions. His illustration echoes Jesus' teaching concerning people who help the needy and people who do not. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus taught that not serving people in need is the same as not serving Him, and vice versa. As followers of Christ who seek to honor Him, we are called to serve Christ by serving and ministering to those in need.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 25:31-46.

How would you explain the message of the sheep and goats in your own words?

What did Jesus say that the sheep did? How did the sheep respond to the King?

On the other hand, what was the first thing Jesus said to the goats? Why were they condemned to eternal fire?

How are the sheep (the first group) and the goats (the second group) similar? How are they different?

Jesus told the sheep to come into the kingdom that was prepared for them from the foundation of the world. They had cared for the King by giving Him food, drink, and clothes. They welcomed Him and visited Him. The sheep did not know they had helped the King, they were just helping people in need. Jesus turned to the goats and said, "Depart from me." He called them "cursed" and sent them into "eternal punishment." They were condemned to hell. They were sent there because they had not done what the sheep did. Like the sheep they did not see the King in the needy, but unlike the sheep they did not help them.

How did Jesus summarize the parable?

How is it that by meeting the needs of others, we demonstrate authentic faith in Christ?

In addition to meeting people's physical needs, what are ways we put our faith in action?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 2:18-26.

What are the lessons from Abraham's and Rahab's examples? Read Hebrews 11:17-19,31 for additional insight.

For examples of authentic faith, James turned to the Old Testament. First he pointed to Abraham, the father of the Hebrews—the first patriarch. The example of Abraham and his offer of Isaac as a sacrifice (Gen. 22:1-19) affirms James's teachings about faith. Abraham's faith was proven genuine by his obedience to God's command. His faith made his good works possible. Faith's purpose in a believer's life is to produce good works; without good works, faith is incomplete. Good works demonstrate faith's integrity and maturity. James's second example of faith demonstrated by works was Rahab the prostitute (Josh. 2:1-24). James emphasized that she had demonstrated her faith by protecting the spies. Her actions were evidence of her having a right relationship with God.

Explain Paul's analogy in verse 26 and how it represents faith without works.

In what way is "faith apart from works" dead (vv. 17,26)?

What is the object of authentic faith?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What kinds of things in your life—even seemingly “spiritual” things—might cause you to look the other way when there is a person in need?

How would the world be different if every Christian demonstrated authentic faith as James describes it?

What are some of the things our church is already doing to minister to people in need?

PRAY

Close your time by praying for the way that all demonstrate authentic faith by loving one another and the community.

COMMENTARY

In this part of his letter, James emphasized demonstrating the authenticity of one’s faith. A mere profession of belief, even if it is orthodox and sincere, is not enough. Such faith is not saving faith. Saving faith involves a vital relationship with Christ who transforms our lives. The word “if” introduces a hypothetical but realistic example of an opportunity to show faith by acts of kindness (v. 15). This kind of faith, the faith that does nothing, is dead (v. 17). It has no life. If a person does not breathe, does not move, has no pulse or vital signs, then we must conclude that the person is dead, no matter how much someone might protest that the person is alive. If someone claims to be a Christian but does not give any evidence of having the life of Christ within, then James would question whether the Christ-life is truly present.

The phrase “but someone” introduces a hypothetical opponent to James’s position that true faith must reveal itself outwardly through good deeds (v. 18). James, however, did not buy the argument. He responded with a challenge. He knew it was impossible for authentic faith to remain hidden. Faith is revealed and validated by good deeds. The claim to faith that is not validated by action is an empty claim. James illustrated his point that authentic faith is always life-changing by pointing to the demons (v. 19). Even demons believe in one of the foundational doctrines of Christianity—the existence of one God. However, their intellectual belief is not a faith that is life-transforming. In contrast to the shuddering fright the demons demonstrated, James instructed believers to show the validity of their faith by their deeds (see also Phil. 2:12). James’s hypothetical opponent wanted evidence of James’s teaching (v. 20). James addressed his antagonist as foolish—empty or senseless. One who lacks understanding thinks and acts foolishly. James has already instructed his readers who lack wisdom to ask God for it (Jas. 1:5). A faith not accompanied by actions is useless, like land that grows no crops or money that generates no interest. James argued that genuine faith is more than believing the truth and that faith can be demonstrated only by actions.

The phrase “justified” also could be translated “declared righteous” or “set right” (v. 21) James pointed to Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac as evidence of His faith. James quoted Genesis 15:6 (v. 23). Abraham’s faith was established long before Abraham demonstrated that faith by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22). It wasn’t Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac that saved him. Rather, Abraham’s placing Isaac on the altar showed the faith he already possessed. The second example James used was that of Rahab who showed the genuineness of her faith by welcoming the Israelite spies who surveyed Jericho and by helping them escape after they had completed their mission (Josh. 2). God accepted her as He also did Abraham because of her faith. Her faith-based actions are remembered thousands of years later. The writer of Hebrews honored Rahab by calling attention to how she exercised her faith through her actions (Heb. 11:31).

In verse 26, James presented the imagery of a corpse. The term translated “spirit” refers to the breath of life in this context not to the Holy Spirit. If the body is alive, signs of life will be evident. Such signs include breathing, movement, and heartbeat. In the same manner, if faith exists within a person, signs of faith will be evident—signs such as acts of kindness, words of witness, spiritual growth, and worship. James concluded that, just as the body is dead without the breath of life, so faith is dead without deeds or actions. James’s words should give little comfort to

those who profess faith in words but live untransformed lives. Confession of faith is meaning- less unless it expresses itself in action.