

# Faith that Works

## James 2:14-26



**Preparation:** Pray before people arrive. Ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit in your conversation. Read the scripture for today, and study Stulac pg. 107-120. Circle or highlight the discussion prompts from this study guide that seem to fit your group best.

**Beginning the group study:** Pray that you will not just hear the word, but do it.

### Read James 2:14-26

- What things stand out to you in the text from James?

### From Stulac (pg. 107), printed here:

“As an InterVarsity area director and now as a pastor, I have often been asked to fill out recommendation forms for people who are candidates for positions with various Christian ministries. Some of those forms omit the question that I always find the most revealing: How have you observed the candidate’s faith affecting his or her lifestyle? I try to imagine James at the head of any of these mission agencies or parachurch organizations, and I expect he would insist on including that question. Why would he want to hire someone in whose actions there was not good evidence of faith?”

We have already found James insisting that genuine faith must be put into practice. He began speaking of faith right away (1:3), and he was blunt in telling his readers to do what the word says (1:22). His letter thus far could be broadly outlined as follows:

- Maintaining faith in the midst of trials (1:1-18)
- Putting faith into practice by being doers of the word (1:19-27)
- An example of practicing one’s faith: impartiality (2:1-13)

It’s a natural flow of thought for James now to draw this together by explaining the theological unity of faith and actions. He argues his case first with logic (2:14-18) and then with examples (2:19-25). But he ‘sustains a single, theological argument throughout’ concerning the issue that ‘lies at the very heart of James’ concern’ (Moo 1985:99).<sup>1</sup>

If we take seriously this section of James’s letter, there will be important ramifications for various aspects of our life together in the church. According to James, faith without submission to Christ’s lordship is not genuine, saving faith at all. We cannot legitimately ask Christ to save us from sin and then go on managing our own lives; it is self-contradictory.

In this passage, James is pressing deeds *in completion of* faith, not deeds *instead of* faith. And the unity of faith and deeds means that deeds are simply actions taken because of one’s faith.”

<sup>1</sup> Stulac, George M. 2010. *James*. IVP Academic.

### Getting Started:

- When have you witnessed empty faith?
- When have you witnessed faith that “works”?
- Consider your own life – are you guilty of empty faith at times?

### Unity of Belief and Practice:

- James mentions in verses 15-17 that merely good wishes or sympathetic attitudes towards the needy doesn't mean that you have genuine faith. Talk about what you can *do* to apply the faith you have – to care for the needy.
- We can make statements in all sincerity of mind and emotion: “I don't condone racism.” But James will say, “What good is that if you aren't doing something to heal the distrust and injustice between races?” Talk about some of the statements that are easy to make but more difficult to act on.
- Some Christians attempt a stance of personal belief without personal action, saying, for example, “I personally disagree with abortion, but I won't try to change others' minds.” James persists in asking us: What are you doing to protect the victims – both the victimized baby and the victimized mother?
  - Changing minds can be a long process – talk about how you can do this in a kind and caring way while remaining faithful to scripture.

There are other places in scripture that complement what James says here. Using scripture to interpret scripture is a helpful practice. Talk about other scripture that comes to mind, or consider these:

- Hebrews 11 – discuss how the action of these people was a product of faith.
- Luke 3:7-11 – these are words attributed to John the baptizer
- Matthew 12:33-37 – these are words attributed to Jesus

James doesn't really disqualify faith; nor does he replace faith with actions. Rather, he paints a picture of what substantial faith looks like. He's saying that faith should make a difference in your life, and show by your actions. Genuine faith changes us. Faith in the power and Lordship of Jesus isn't just vague belief. Our faith in Jesus makes a difference.

Discuss what your faith prompts you to *do* – as individuals, and as a group. Where are you “doing” faith well, and where could you improve?