

James 2:14-19
August 4, 2024



CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?

What Scripture has been shaping you recently?

Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?

What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?

What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?

What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?

What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

MAIN POINT

Real faith always leads to action.

INTRODUCTION

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

A statement or idea that seems contradictory but is true is called a paradox. What are some examples of paradoxes you know?

What are some examples of paradoxes in the Bible?

In chapter two of his letter, James dealt with the nature and foundation of real faith. There are a few things we need to know about biblical faith. First, real faith is based on the Word of God. In Romans 10:17 the apostle Paul wrote, "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ." Second, real faith involves the whole person: intellect, emotion, and will. Third, because it involves the will,



real faith always leads to action. For faith to be real, there must be a response to the Word of God.

UNDERSTANDING

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

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JAMES 2:14-17.

James explained what it looks like for the believer to live out and fulfill the law of love. Because his focus was on true religion or faith, he stressed different ways to recognize the validity of a person's faith. He began by asking a few hypothetical questions and presenting a hypothetical scenario to his readers. The questions essentially ask how useful or beneficial one's faith can be if it isn't displayed in actions. There is no point of faith if it doesn't move us to act, respond, and live out what we say we believe.

What are some examples of how Jesus demonstrated and taught about this kind of faith?

Jesus never missed an opportunity to reach out and care for those who needed Him most. He called out the religious elite of the day for neglecting to live out the law they knew in detail, and James reminded his readers we are called to do the same. Jesus demonstrated what it looks like in both word and deed for faith to work through love. He called His followers to also demonstrate the love they have received themselves.

Most people who call themselves Christ followers know the right things to say when encountering someone in need. It is easy to give a religious cliché or even kind words, but how much more effective is it when we combine the right words with actions that minister to others on another level? James stated that faith without works is dead. Dead things are not breathing, moving, or active. Conversely real faith is alive, active, and revealed in what we say and do. The two go hand in hand and when they do, real faith is displayed.

What are some indicators of genuine faith?

What are markers of counterfeit or dead faith?

Why is it important to know how to recognize whether faith is alive or dead?

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JAMES 2:18-19.

We tend to separate our lives into different compartments and sections. James posed a hypothetical question to stress that real faith cannot be separated from good works. They go together, and when you have an authentic, living faith, your life will show it



through your works. Though you can't see another person's faith, you can see their works.

What might cause a person to feel defensive when challenged that their faith should result in works? Why is this something we should continually assess in our lives?

Going on, James shared that belief itself is not the goal. We can have faith even when we struggle with doubt. But when you have faith and no works, your faith is only head knowledge. Real faith should move from our heads to our hearts to our hands. If we have right theology and doctrine but never put those into practice, what does it matter? Head knowledge or even belief in God is not real faith.

Belief is a starting point, but if you don't move past belief that God is real into putting your faith and trust in Him, you are missing the point. Even the demons believe God exists. The demons know so deeply that the doctrines of God are true that it causes them to shudder. However, their intellectual belief is not a faith that is life transforming. Genuine faith is dynamic, active, and productive. We can believe in something and still not possess faith that results in action. True faith demands that our theology affects our actions. We must trust God enough to live by His Word and not only acknowledge it on an intellectual level.

In what parts of life do you have the hardest time putting your faith to action?

What will you do differently to be intentional about changing that?

Why and how are you tempted to be content with head knowledge that doesn't lead to action?

APPLICATION

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

Why does true belief in the gospel always lead us toward obedience to Christ?

Where have you been content with intellectual belief that stops short of action?

Where might God want to grow your faith beyond an intellectual concept?

Where might God be calling you to demonstrate your faith?



PRAYER

Close your time together by sharing prayer requests, praying for each other, and the group.

Thank God that acts of mercy are not means to salvation, but a natural overflow of salvation. Ask Him to show you new ways you can demonstrate your faith by works that show His love to a world in need.

LOOKING AHEAD

*Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study, **Faith and Works: A Study of James.***

August 11, 2024 --- James 2:20-26

COMMENTARY

James 2:14-19

2:14. Two rhetorical questions here expect negative answers. Three features of the questions are important. First, they accept the reader's claim to faith, but do not assume that the claim without works represents saving faith. The absence of deeds of obedience in this person's life makes the claim highly suspicious, if not outright wrong!

Second, the topic is not faith in general but a specific kind of faith, one which has no deeds. Such in the NIV text implies this focus. The question is not, "Can faith save the lost?" Of course, faith saves the lost. The question is, "Can a faith without deeds save the lost?" The answer to that question is "no."

A verbal testimony alone is not an adequate evidence that true saving faith is present. Only works of obedience can prove the presence of genuine faith. Verse 15 provides an example of such deeds.

Third, save refers to acquittal at the final judgment. The question is, "What type of faith can guarantee a favorable verdict in the final judgment?" Only a faith that produces works can provide security in the final judgment.

Prospective drivers of automobiles and trucks must pass a written test on road rules and a skill test on the road. Lawyers must pass the bar examination, and accountants must pass the CPA exam. Students in all institutions must show their knowledge on examinations. It is only reasonable to realize that our profession of Christianity demands a test. That test is the production of works. Without works to demonstrate faith our claim becomes false, and we show our deception.



2:15–16. These verses offer a parable in miniature, illustrating the person who has the type of faith that cannot save. Verse 15 pictures people who needed clothes and food. Cold and hungry, these believers desperately needed the necessities of life!

Verse 16 shows how the person who claims to have faith approaches these needy people: with an offer of good wishes but no practical help. Go, I wish you well offers a good-bye to the needy person. Apparently, the speaker could have helped, but he chose to do nothing except offer kind expressions. Both John the Baptist (Luke 3:7–14) and Jesus (Matt. 7:15–27) condemned professions of piety without action.

Sympathy is valuable when this is all a person can give to the suffering. This speaker, however, had the ability to feed the hungry and clothe the needy. First John 3:18 gives us the proper response, “let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” James concluded his illustration by wondering aloud, “What good is a faith which can only give pious wishes but no practical help?”

2:17. Verse 17 concludes the matter. Good wishes consisting of mere talk are empty of all reality and lifeless. Offering only good wishes to the cold and the hungry serves to depress further those who are starving and chilled. They need more than good wishes. They need practical help.

A faith not accompanied by action, that is faith alone, having no works to distinguish it, is dead. Anything with life produces fruit. The living are the acting, creating things that reveal their nature and character. Faith in Jesus produces actions revealing the nature and character of Jesus. The dead lie still doing nothing. So faith that lies still, inactive, proves it is dead. True faith brings salvation and life, not death.

Christians should show works of love to prove their faith is real. When Paul warned that a person could not be saved by “works,” he referred to the works of obedience to the Jewish law (Rom. 3:20). When James called for deeds, he was not suggesting that these deeds resulted in salvation. He was calling for Christians to do what living faith naturally does: show care and concern for those in need. Acts 6:1–4; 9:36–43; 20:34–35; Romans 15:25–27; 1 Timothy 5:1–16; and many other Scriptures show Christians and churches in action meeting needs. This type of loving, caring interest in others made early Christians distinctive. Likewise, today people who show loving, caring interest in others stand out as visible representatives of Jesus Christ.

2:18. James 2:14–17 warns that faith without works represents an empty claim. Beginning inverse 18, we are warned against a faith which merely accepts a creed. Here are the limitations of mere intellectual faith. Saving faith involves a commitment to Jesus Christ which produces works or deeds.

Verse 18 represents a dialog with an imaginary opponent. The opponent says: You have faith; I have deeds. James responded: Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. In other words, the opponent claims, “James, you



ought to let some people emphasize faith while others emphasize works.” James insisted, “Real faith shows itself in deeds.” You simply cannot find an example of real faith that does not show itself in works. We have no room for some people to emphasize faith while others stress deeds. You must have both. Genuine commitment to Jesus Christ demonstrates its presence by deeds. Faith produces works. You can’t have one without the other.

2:19. Verse 19 speaks to the person claiming to have faith but lacking works. This kind of person merely gives intellectual assent to the creed of monotheism. This basic creed of Judaism appeared in Deuteronomy 6:4–5. The statement is intellectually true, but it doesn’t proceed far enough. A person must believe in God to be a Christian, but not everyone who acknowledges the existence of God has made a commitment to Jesus Christ.

Even demons believe in the existence of one God. They shudder with fear at the thought of God (see Matt. 8:29). The behavior of demons demonstrated that someone can believe the right thing and still have an evil character. Verse 19 concerns intellectual faith, a faith that touches only the mind. Saving faith involves the will as well as the intellect (see Rom. 4:16–22).

