

James 2:14-19

August 4, 2024



INTRODUCTION

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

Play a game of “One of These Is Not Like the Others.” Create sets of four cards, writing the names of three objects that share a commonality and one that doesn’t. Or, to make the game more visual, print pictures. Either way, try to make it tricky so students must talk through the possibilities. For example: French fries, potato chips, candy, steamed broccoli; bears, beets, Battlestar Galactica, pencils. The game can be played with just one set or multiple sets, depending on the amount of time you’d like to connect in this way.

Have you ever noticed that some people who call themselves Christians don’t seem to act or speak like you would expect Christians to act and speak? It’s kind of like the game we just played, “One of These Is Not Like the Others.” Plot twist, though. It’s not always easy to know the difference between real and fake faith. Thankfully, the Bible answers that for us. We’ll see it in James 2. For faith to be real, there must be a response to God’s Word.

DISCUSSION

 HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 2:14-19.

What if someone asked you the question in James 2:14? How would you answer, “Is it any good if someone says they have faith but doesn’t act like it?”

How does James answer that question?

What examples does James give of behaviors we should expect to see in people who follow Jesus?

What are markers of fake or “dead” faith?

When James wrote, “Faith without works is dead,” does that mean if you don’t help feed a homeless person on the side of the road you’re not a Christian? What does it mean?

Does it make you feel defensive to learn that your faith should result in works? Explain.

In what part of your life do you have the hardest time putting faith into action?

What will you do differently to change that?

GOING DEEPER

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

In what ways did Jesus teach and demonstrate the kind of faith James wrote about?

APPLICATION

How is God speaking to you personally through James 2:14-19?

What changes would take place in your life this week if you were to live with the kind of faith James described?

How can our group pray for you to put these truths into practice?

PRAYER

Thank God that works is not the way we are saved but a natural overflow of our 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:

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. Only a faith that produces works can provide security in the final judgment.

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.

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.

2:18. James 2:14-17 warns that faith without works represents an empty claim. Beginning in verse 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.