



JAMES 2:14-26

FAITH & WORKS

BEGIN BY READING JAMES 2:14-26 TOGETHER:

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? **17** So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. **19** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! **20** Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; **23** and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. **24** You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. **25** And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? **26** For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

NOTE: *After you read the passage together, pray, and then allow for a few minutes of silence so that you and your students can read over the passage again and start to think about it. This may feel awkward at first, but it's vital to allow for some reflection time before diving into the questions.*

When you're ready, begin the discussion by going through the following questions:

CONTEXT QUESTIONS

1. How does James 2:14-26 connect to what has come before?

NOTE: Since James 1:19 James has been discussing how hearing God's Word leads to doing God's Word. In James 2:14-26 the author gets more specific in discussing the categories of faith (hearing and believing) and works (doing), and how genuine faith always leads to works.

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

NOTE: As you go through these questions, give your students time and silence to really look at the text to see what God is revealing to them personally. Be patient with them as they seek to flesh out what they are seeing in God's Word.

1. Is there anything that encourages you as you read this passage?

2. Are there any questions you have about this passage?

RESPONSE QUESTIONS

NOTE: This section is one of the most challenging sections in the book of James. At first glance it seems like James' teaching on works is going against the rest of the Bible that says salvation is by grace through faith.

But if we dig deeper we will see that James' point is not that we are saved by works, but that good works always follow genuine faith. As James writes in vs. 17 "So also, faith by itself if it does not have works is dead."

The point of this passage is not to call Christians to work harder to produce more good deeds. The point is to call believers to examine whether their faith has actually made a difference in how they live, whether their hearing and believing has led to doing.

1. What do you think James means by “faith” in these verses?
2. What do you think James means by “works” in these verses?
3. What does this passage say about the relationship between faith and works?

CHRIST CONNECTION

NOTE: *In reading this section, it is natural to be challenged or convicted about the lack of works in your life. Our response to this might be a desire to work harder to put our faith into practice. But if we come away from this passage with just a to-do list we will fail to live out the kind of genuine faith and works to which we are called.*

If you are genuinely convicted about the lack of works in your life, the first person to take that conviction to is Christ. In Christ we find the only One who lived a life of perfect works, but then on the cross He exchanged His perfect record for our failure and sin. He was perfect for us, He worked for us, so that in Him we can be declared righteous before God.

So we can come to Christ with our failure, and find in Him a righteousness, or a perfection that is given only by grace, and received only by faith. If we genuinely accept this righteousness that Christ achieved for us, if we are awed by His grace and mercy for us, then we will discover a new, genuine desire to obey and live for Him. When we are impacted by the truth and wonder of God's grace for us in Jesus, then we will be moved to produce works for Him. Our faith will genuinely lead to works that honor our Savior.

So our call is not to work harder to add works to our faith, but to dig deeper into Christ, who alone makes faith possible and inspires and empowers us to genuine good works.