



Faith on Display in Your Actions

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WHERE
HAVE
YOU SEEN
FAITH IN
ACTION?

The POINT >

What you believe is seen in what you do.

> JAMES 2:14-26

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him?

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed,” but you don’t give them what the body needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder.

²⁰ Senseless person! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless? ²¹ Wasn’t Abraham our father justified by works in offering Isaac his son on the altar?

²² You see that faith was active together with his works, and by works, faith was made complete, ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ In the same way, wasn’t Rahab the prostitute also justified by works in receiving the messengers and sending them out by a different route? ²⁶ For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.



FOR LEADERS (15 minutes)

THE POINT // WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS SEEN IN WHAT YOU DO.

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // PEOPLE

Our response to God's love is to remain pure in all aspects of life—with our bodies, thoughts, attitudes, actions, and speech—and He empowers us to obey His commands as we live by the Spirit.

Message to Leaders

Faith is essentially believing the truth about Jesus and trusting Him in a way that leads to obedience in all areas of life. True faith leads us to live in ways that reflect Jesus, including our actions and words, as well as our thoughts and attitudes.

› Engage Option 1

Select two students to come up front. Give the first student a category (e.g., sports, dance, superheroes) and ask them to write down the first thing that comes to mind. Then ask the second student to act out what they think the first wrote. See how many the student can correctly guess. Say, **“True faith in God is going to be displayed through our actions, and God works through our actions to accomplish His purposes.”**

› Engage Option 2

Decorate the room with objects from a construction site (e.g., hammers, drills, hard hats, etc.). Say, **“Living out our faith can be hard work, but we can make a difference for God's kingdom when we put our faith into action.”**

› Engage Option 3

Search the internet for “Faith & Works - American Gospel: Christ Alone.” Play the video as you begin the session. Say, **“If we have experienced salvation in Jesus, it will be evidenced by the fruit of our works.”**

NOTE: Always make sure you preview any video clip you show students and ensure it is appropriate for your church and ministry.

LEADER PACK ELEMENTS

If you have the optional Leader Pack, consider the following:

ITEM 3: Consider using the **Real Faith Poster** to introduce students to the main idea.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

THE POINT // WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS SEEN IN WHAT YOU DO.



THE SETTING

People tend to gravitate toward one of two extremes: an overemphasis of faith while forgetting works, or an overemphasis on works while forgetting faith. In the last half of chapter two, James challenged both of these extremes. Some conclude that James contradicted what Paul had taught about faith and works. While Paul emphasized that salvation does not come through works, James emphasized that true faith always leads a Christian to live out their faith.

FACT:

You're likely familiar with the idiom, "Talk is cheap." But that's only half the story. Originally, the commonly used phrase was, "Talk is cheap, but it takes money to buy a farm."³ Don't be all talk.

In the US today, almost seventy percent of people identify as Christian, and among teens specifically:

- **Thirty-four percent attend church at least once a week.**
- **Ten percent attend regularly, though not weekly.**
- **Sixty percent claim that religion is important to them.¹**

You would assume that with so many people seeing religion as important and going to church, the ethical and moral standards of our country would be more in line with the Bible. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Some want to blame our morality issues on social media, music, movies and TV, or the opposing political party. However, the responsibility rests on us as individuals.

Across all ages, sixty-eight percent of people in the US claim to be Christian, so where are our ethics and morality?²

The problem is not with what people believe. The problem is that too many of us don't live what we claim to believe. There is a large disconnect between our belief system and our conduct. James, in his letter to the church, pointed to a better way.



IMPART (30 minutes)

THE POINT // WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS SEEN IN WHAT YOU DO.

JAMES 2:14-17

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed,” but you don’t give them what the body needs, what good is it? In the same way faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself. **JAMES 2:14-17***

Like we saw in verses 1-13, James again used the socio-economic diversity of his time to make his point about living out our faith. He gave the example of a desperately poor person who doesn’t have food or clothing. When we encounter people facing difficulties, it’s not uncommon for Christians to offer quick encouragements:

- I’ll pray for you.
- Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help.

Of course, these are perfectly appropriate—assuming we do pray and we’re actually willing to help. However, if these words come automatically out of our mouths, but without follow-through, then the encouragements are meaningless.

James referred to someone who needed real help, but all he received was well wishes: “go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed” (v. 16). We need to understand that, though our words are certainly important, words alone will never fill hungry bellies or provide warmth for someone who’s freezing. Perhaps even more than kind words, this person needs food and clothing!

Have you ever stood in front of an overflowing closet and exclaimed, “I have nothing to wear!” For us, this usually means we don’t feel like wearing the things we have. The man James described faced a different nothing-to-wear reality. He probably had one set of clothes, and he’d worn them so much that they were absolutely worn out. He was without clothes! He had so many holes in his clothing that they weren’t worth wearing, or perhaps he was wearing only an undergarment. He was in a desperate situation. And to make matters worse, he was starving. He had absolutely nothing to eat.

In James’s example, though the church members said all the right things, their words were empty and meaningless. James’s message to them: “faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself” (v. 17). True faith is displayed in the ways we live. Otherwise, our faith is dead. It’s lifeless and useless. Further, inactive faith does not merely fail to do good—it makes the situation worse. In James’s example, the man sought the warmth of Christian love, but instead felt the cold of apathy. He sought food for his soul, but was instead filled with the sense that those in the church didn’t care about his needs. Let us make sure that we see others as God sees them and take real steps to show the love of Christ.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 22)

1 What does a useless faith look like?

2 What are the characteristics of a faith that is alive?



IMPART

THE POINT // WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS SEEN IN WHAT YOU DO.

JAMES 2:18-20

But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works. You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder. Senseless person! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless? **JAMES 2:18-20**

As believers, we have beliefs and doctrines that are important to us. But if we really want to know what we truly believe, we need to consider how those beliefs impact the ways we live. And when our actions don't line up with what we say we value, it's hard for people to trust what we say. Real evidence is seen in what we do, not simply in what we say.

1. When a pro-life member of Congress found out his mistress might be pregnant, he asked her to consider abortion. When the news broke, he resigned his office.⁴ Pro-life people do not merely make pro-life statements, they take pro-life actions.
2. In Sweden, a man complained to police about speeding cars driving by his house.⁵ The police took his complaint seriously and the next day stationed officers in his neighborhood. Guess who got a ticket? The man could say publicly he was opposed to speeding, but his actions said otherwise.
3. The Greater Yellowstone Coalition works to protect the lands and wildlife in the area. The director had to resign, pleading guilty to illegally hunting and killing two elk.⁶ Believing conservation is important must be accompanied by actually protecting the land and wildlife.

Even the world sees that there must be a connection between what we believe and what we do. In matters of faith, this is especially important. Our greatest blessing is our relationship with God, and if we truly believe this, it will be evident in the ways we live. Faith and works are inseparable. Our works—how we live—are the demonstration of our faith.

Like most Americans today, the people James addressed believed in God. James didn't correct their beliefs. In fact, he praised them for believing in God. For these Jewish believers, believing in the one true God was essential (see Ex. 20:3), as it was the cornerstone doctrine of their faith and heritage (see Deut. 6:4). However, simply thinking correctly about God isn't enough. James stressed that even demons shudder at the thought of God's power. But their belief didn't change their hearts or lead them to follow Jesus.

Genuine faith must begin with good theology, but it doesn't stop there. Some people believe the right things intellectually, but if it doesn't lead to their wholeheartedly following Jesus, it isn't genuine, saving belief. True faith leads to a life-changing relationship with God. It is one thing to talk about God, and another thing entirely to obey God by putting that faith into practice.

True faith leads to a life-changing relationship with God.
#BSFLFaithLivedOut

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 23)

3 Why are right beliefs so important?

4 Why are right beliefs never enough?

5 How can we demonstrate our faith to a skeptical world?



JAMES 2:21-26

Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works in offering Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was active together with his works, and by works, faith was made complete, and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works in receiving the messengers and sending them out by a different route? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

JAMES 2:21-26

At first glance, James's question—"Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works in offering Isaac his son on the altar?"—seems to contradict Paul's teaching that salvation comes from faith and not from works.

- **Paul wrote:** "But to the one who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5), and, "A person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Rom. 3:28).
- **James wrote:** "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24).

By faith, Abraham had waited for years for his son Isaac (see Gen. 21:1-5). Nonetheless, when God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering, Abraham obeyed without delay (22:1-3). Abraham fully trusted God—therefore, he did what God told him to do, even if he didn't understand. In fact, Hebrews teaches that Abraham believed God was able to raise Isaac from the dead, if necessary (see Heb. 11:17-19). Abraham's faith drove his actions. In turn, his actions gave evidence of his faith.

It makes sense that James would appeal to Abraham, because the Jewish believers considered him the father of their faith. However, his argument takes an interesting twist when he mentioned the faith of a Gentile prostitute. Initially, Rahab didn't belong to God's people, Israel. Still, she had faith which moved her to act. By faith, she protected the spies (see Josh. 2:1-6, 15-16), and because of her faith, God spared her life and the lives of all in her house when Jericho fell (2:17-20; 6:17, 22-23). Rahab believed what she heard about God, and she chose to trust Him. Rahab didn't simply say she believed; she put her belief into action.

There is no disconnect between James and Paul's teachings. Paul wrote that salvation comes because of God's grace through faith (see Eph. 2:8-9). He also wrote that the purpose of our salvation is to do the good works that God has planned for us (Eph. 2:10). Good works are the natural result of real faith. Godly works always accompany saving faith. Likewise, James wasn't teaching that faith and works are opposing forces or that works save apart from faith. Instead, faith and works are complementary. Faith activates our works, and those works complete our faith—"Faith was active together with his works, and by works, faith was made complete" (James 2:22).

Works are not what we do for salvation, they are what we do because of salvation.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 23)

- 6** How would you describe the connection between faith and obedience?
- 7** What sometimes keeps us from living out our faith?
- 8** In real ways, how does your faith influence the ways you act?



LIVE IT OUT (10 minutes)

THE POINT // WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS SEEN IN WHAT YOU DO.



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // PEOPLE

Our response to God's love is to remain pure in all aspects of life—with our bodies, thoughts, attitudes, actions, and speech—and He empowers us to obey His commands as we live by the Spirit.

Faith is essentially believing the truth about Jesus and trusting Him in a way that leads to obedience in all areas of life. True faith leads us to live in ways that reflect Jesus, including our actions and words, as well as our thoughts and attitudes.

> CHRIST

9 Read Psalm 139:23-24 and write it below:

10 Pray asking God to expose the areas in your life where you are not living what you claim to believe. After praying, develop an action plan for life changes to help align your actions with your faith.

GOD
JESUS
HOLY SPIRIT
BIBLE
SALVATION
CREATION
CHURCH

PEOPLE

FAMILY
COMMUNITY
& WORLD



LIVE IT OUT

THE POINT // WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS SEEN IN WHAT YOU DO.

> COMMUNITY

Ask a trusted friend to speak into your life and tell you how consistent you are at living your faith.

11 Listen. Avoid getting defensive and prepare to make some life changes based on what you hear.



> CULTURE

We are called to share the gospel with lost people, including (or especially) non-believing friends. It's incredibly important that our actions line up with the things we claim to believe, and this kind of consistency is one of the most powerful ways we prove our faith is real and makes a difference.

12 What are some examples of faith in action? How do your non-believing friends see your faith lived out?

13 How will you use this to help your non-believing friends understand the difference Jesus could make in their lives?