

Day 2: Read James 2:14-19

1. What would a faith without deeds look like?

For example, a person may attend church services regularly and profess to be a Christian but treat her employees harshly. While one such instance does not mean that a person does not have faith, a life devoid of humility and concern for others may indicate a “dead faith.”

2. What is James saying in verse 19 and how does this relate to what he writes in verses 17-18?

One can believe in or mentally assent to the existence of one God without being a disciple whose life reflects true faith in God. Even demons can have this belief—and it frightens them.

Day 3: Read James 2:20-23

1. You may recall the story of Abraham’s offering of Isaac found in Genesis 22:1-18, or you may refresh your memory by reading the story. What stands out as you read this? How does this relate to what James writes?

Abraham obeyed without questioning God and was willing to give up the son whom God had given him in his old age—in a sense, his most precious possession. (*Group members may be struck by something else in this passage.*)

2. Why was Abraham considered righteous when he offered Isaac?

Because he obeyed God and thereby demonstrated his belief in God. “[H]is faith and his actions were working together” (James 2:22).

3. Read Hebrews 11:17-19. How does this passage help explain Abraham’s obedience?

He thought God could keep his promise by raising Isaac from the dead.

4. Recall a time when you had to sacrifice or give something up in order to obey God. Is there anything you are afraid that God might ask you to give up?

Day 4: Read James 2:20-24

1. How do we know Abraham believed God?

He obeyed God.

2. Read Romans 4:4-6. What is Paul saying here about this relationship?

Salvation—righteousness in God’s sight—is a gift, not payment for works.

3. What does this statement in verse 23 mean: “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness?”

Abraham, like all other human beings, was not wholly righteous, but because of his faith God treated him as though he were righteous.

4. What does verse 24 mean to you in light of what you have already read in James?

A person is not justified by mentally assenting to theological truths but by committing his or her life to faith.

To Dig Deeper: Faith and Good Works

Compare James 2:18 with Romans 3:28 and Ephesians 2:8-10. Does it seem that James and Paul have different understandings about faith and good works? How do we reconcile these apparently contrasting statements?

Readers of James often ask whether James' teaching about works is opposed to Paul's. It is important to distinguish the receiving of salvation through grace (Eph. 2:8,9) from the doing of works in grateful response to having received salvation. We receive faith as a free gift of God. Faith is not a reward for moral excellence or for anything else about our nature. It is a gracious gift; it is given out of the generous heart of God to a person who does not deserve it. But once we have received faith and forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his grace, in a spirit of gratitude we want to do things that bear witness to what we have received. Paul is saying that we are not justified—made righteous in God's sight—by our works, but by our faith. James is saying that if we have faith it will be manifest in our works or deeds and that if our faith does not result in any changes in the way we live, we have “dead faith” or intellectual assent without spiritual commitment.

Day 5: Read James 2:25-26

- 1. Verses 25 & 26 refer to the story of Rahab in the Old Testament. Read Joshua 2: 1-21 for background on Rahab. Why do you think James chose to use Rahab as an example?**
She was a prostitute. James may have chosen her to make the point that God accepts even those we hold in low regard if they believe in him and act on their faith.
- 2. Note verse 11 in the Joshua account. Why were Rahab and her family spared?**
She stated her faith in God and acted on it.
- 3. What is James' conclusion about Rahab and how does it relate to his discussion of faith and good works?**
Rahab's actions showed that she had faith in God.

Day 6: Reread James 2:14-26

- 1. Now that you have studied the first two chapters of James, list some of the kinds of “works” or “deeds” that he mentions. Which word—works or deeds—do you think is the better English word to get at James' meaning? Why?**

James mentions many things that Christians should do:

- Persevere in trial: 1:2-4, 12
- Do not doubt: 1:6-8
- Be humble: 1:9-11
- Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry: 1:19
- Do what the word says: 1:22
- Keep a tight rein on his tongue: 1:26
- Look after orphans and widows: 1:27
- Not show favoritism based on wealth or status: 2:1-9

The word “deeds” conveys the idea that real faith will be manifest not only in good works such as caring for orphans and widows, but also in daily behavior and in our inner life.

2. What does James say in these verses about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Write down two or three ideas about discipleship from this passage.
3. Identify a verse in this passage that is particularly meaningful or significant, write it down, and memorize it. (*perhaps verse 17 or 26*)
4. Think about a song or hymn that speaks to these issues – perhaps “So Let Our Lips and Lives Express” or “Christ of the Upward Way.”

*So let our lips and lives express
The holy Gospel we profess;
So let our works and virtues shine,
To prove the doctrine all divine.*

*Our flesh and sense must be denied,
Passion and envy, lust and pride;
While justice, temperance, truth, and love,
Our inward piety approve.*

“Christ of the Upward Way”

*Christ of the upward way, my Guide divine,
Where Thou hast set Thy feet, may I place mine;
And move and march wherever Thou hast trod,
Keeping face forward up the hill of God.*

*Give me the eye to see each chance to serve,
Then send me strength to rise with steady nerve,
And leap at once with kind and helpful deed,
To the sure succor of a soul in need.*