

faith, hope, love

James 2:14–26
Inductive Discovery Lesson 3

Working Your Faith This section continues to make a connection between hearing and doing, between faith and action. James confronts his readers with a question that exposes a problem we still face today. What good is faith if there's no evidence of it in your life? What kind of faith is that and how real can it be? In answer to his own question, James reasons his point through with an imaginary "someone" who takes issue with him.

Words like *faith* and *spirituality* have been recycled by the world. Like plastic bottles, emptied of truth and tossed out, many are glad to scrap a nickel's worth of faith for a re-packaged version more to their liking. Popular opinion says that faith is a "personal path" you choose to enrich your *own* soul, but be considerate—after all, others may take a different path on their journey for truth. We may give it a modern spin, but shallow faith was a problem in the early church too. As James warns all Bible-studying believers, we need to take care that diluted versions of faith don't creep into our own practice.

Background

"The remainder of chapter 2 is often cited to show that the teachings of James and Paul were completely contradictory. **James:** 'Faith is dead without good deeds.' (2:26) **Paul:** 'We are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.' (Romans 3:28). However, careful reading and understanding of both Paul and James will show that instead of contradicting, their writings really complement each other.

First, consider the writers' viewpoints in light of the situations they were addressing in their letters. They were confronting different issues. Paul was responding to the Judaizers, who said works—such as circumcision and observing Jewish ceremonial laws—were necessary for salvation. James was responding to those who believed that mere intellectual agreement was enough to obtain salvation.

Second, there is a difference in the time frame in the believer's life as they make their statements. Paul began at the very beginning—at conversion. No one can ever **earn** God's forgiveness and salvation. We can only accept it. James spoke to the professing believer, one who has already accepted that forgiveness and salvation, explaining that the person must live a new life. No one can be saved by works; no one can be saved without producing works. We are not saved *by* good works, but *for* good works. James' point was not that works must be added to faith, but that genuine faith includes works."¹

¹Life Application New Testament Commentary, p. 1079, ©2001 by Livingstone Corp. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? **17** Thus 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 without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. **19** You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! **20** But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? **22** Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? **23** And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. **24** You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. **25** Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? **26** For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

OBSERVE

Start by reading the entire chapter at least once. Now read each section and record what you see. **Use the first column to keep track of what you find in the Bible passage.** (Who? What? When? Where?) Briefly describe, *in your own words*, what it says.

Use the second column to keep track of information you get from other sources such as scripture references, a dictionary, concordance, maps, etc. You can also use this section to jot down **your thoughts, impressions or questions**. *Do your best to follow James' train of thought.* Does he use a word or phrase repeatedly, or emphasize a particular topic? Are his words urgent? Encouraging? Commanding? What issues or problems does he address? What questions does he ask?

James 2:14-17

Facts from the passage:

My Research and Personal Observations:

[illegible]

Facts from the passage:

[illegible]

Write the definition of the following words and phrases. Use a regular dictionary or a Bible concordance with Greek Dictionary if you have one.

“faith” _____

“works” _____

“justified” (vs.21, 24-25) _____

INTERPRET

Look for a spiritual lesson. Be careful not to read into the Bible an idea that is not there. Examine each verse in light of the verses around it. To help you find a spiritual lesson, ask questions such as: Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a condition to that promise? Is there a warning to heed? Is there an example to follow or avoid? **State the lesson in one simple sentence.**

APPLY

We don't study the Bible just to gather information—we want to spiritually grow. Our heart needs to be open to change. The only way to move truth off the pages of your Bible and into your life is to **put it into action.**

To apply a spiritual lesson, we must examine ourselves and take deliberate steps to do something with what we have learned. Ask yourself: Is this a new insight for me, or does it reinforce what I already know? What does it challenge me to do? Does it point out error in my attitude or actions? What changes does it require? Think of how the lesson relates to you and what specific course of action you will take. **Write your application in the form of a question to make it personal.**

James 2 :14-17

Lesson: _____

Application: _____
_____?

James 2 :18-26

Lesson: _____

Application: _____
_____?

Summary

Write a simple sentence that summarizes what the chapter is about. _____

Give a title to the chapter to help you remember what it says. _____

Up close and personal

Someone will say, "You have faith and I have works."
Show me your faith without your works, and
I will show you my faith by my works.
James 2:18 NKJ

Memorize God's Word

Choose the translation you prefer to memorize the verse in and re-write it here.

Meditate on God's Word

While you memorize this verse, let it work into your heart and mind. Scripture meditation is like a good cup of tea—the longer it steeps, the richer the flavor. So give yourself permission to slowly savor God's Word! Use the questions below (like a tea bag) to keep dipping into this verse.

Challenge alert: You won't always see an obvious answer directly from the verse. Just *think and pray* about it and share what the Lord brings to your heart and mind.

Look up. What does this verse teach you about God? (For example, look for signs of His character, His attributes, His works, His promises.)

Look around. What does this verse teach you about the world and people in general?

Look within. What does this verse teach you about yourself?

Look ahead. Does this verse give you reason to hope? Briefly share your thoughts.

Look alive! Given the opportunity, how would you express the truth found in this verse to someone who needs to hear it?

Make God's Word Your Prayer

As you memorize and meditate on this verse, pray it back to the Lord. Let the Holy Spirit examine your heart, increase your understanding, and help you to pray. Ask Him for faith and strength to *act* on the truth of God's Word.



God's Word Bearing Fruit

For you personally, what has been the most important lesson from this chapter? How will you put what you have learned into practice?

Something to Think About . . .

"You, dear hearers, are not good hearers so long as you are only hearers;
But when the heart is affected by the ear,
And the hand follows the heart,
Then your faith is proved.
That kind of obedience which comes from faith in God is real obedience,
Since it shows itself by its works."

- Charles Spurgeon -

