

Lesson 4: The Heartbeat of Our Faith¹

The Book of James

Scripture Passage: James 2:14-26¹

Growing Connected (10 min)

Take turns sharing about a memory of something meaningful someone else once did for you. As a group, spend time thanking God for these moments and asking him to help you serve others with your actions.²

Introduction (2 min)³

There are many sayings out there about the relationship between our words and our actions. Many of us have heard some of these sayings in English, such as: “easier said than done,” or, “actions speak louder than words,” or “talk is cheap.” Or maybe after someone makes an outrageous claim you’ve heard someone else quip, “prove it!” All of these sayings point out that our words are often meant to be backed up by our actions. When they are not, the results can be embarrassing, confusing, or even hurtful. Just imagine what friendships, marriages, parenting, and businesses would look like if words were never backed up by actions. When our actions don’t back up our words, our relationships break down, our credibility plummets, and our integrity is compromised.

This is also true in our spiritual lives. Without resulting actions, our verbal claims are called into question. In particular, the Book of James brings out the importance of actions (“works”) that back up our profession of faith. James shows us that:

Big Idea: Works are the heartbeat of our faith.

PLAY VIDEO- PT. 1- Video Notes

Think Tank (25 min)

This lesson pointed out that genuine faith in Jesus Christ is not limited to our lips, but produces works. Therefore, works function as proof of genuine faith. Take a moment to examine if this aligns with what you know from other parts of Scripture. In particular, the teacher compared this passage to Ephesians 2:8-10. In small groups, compare these passages.

Small Group Activity in Zoom Breakout Groups (Groups of 2-3). Discuss the following questions:

1. Read James 2:14-26 together once again. Then read Ephesians 2:8-10.
2. What words do these two passages share in common? Together write them down.⁴ How are these passages saying something similar? What differences do you notice? How do you make sense of the differences?
3. James and Paul most likely use the word “justify” in slightly different ways (see Romans 3:28). With Paul, the word “justify” has the sense of “*declared* righteous.” With James, it has the sense of “*proven* righteous.” Therefore, in James 2:14-26, Abraham and Rahab are “justified” in sense that their genuine faith was *proven*. What specific actions did Abraham and Rahab do to show their trust in God?
4. Now do a comparison between a demon and a genuine follower of Jesus (see James 2:19). What would be the key similarities? What would be the key differences?
5. The teacher of this lesson emphasized that works are “anything we do to serve and honor God.” In this part of James, the argument could be made that this especially includes loving our neighbors in need. Why is this an important way to demonstrate our faith? How would you lovingly help someone who realized there is no evidence in their life of genuine faith?

*Group Discussion*⁵

1. Ask two or three people to report back what they learned from the small group activity.

PLAY VIDEO- PT. 2- Video Notes

Group Training (20-25 min)⁶

The lesson concluded with a call to respond to this teaching in three different ways. It included:

- 1) A Call to Genuine Faith. This was directed at people who might realize that their faith has been limited to their lips only. It was for anyone who examines their life and is convicted about the need for genuine faith.

- 2) A Call to Greater Maturity. This was directed at people who might see the need to strengthen their acts of serving and honoring God, especially loving our neighbors in need. It included a reminder that God gives us the strength to do these works-- not to *earn* salvation, but as a *result* of salvation.

- 3) A Call to Renewed Energy. This was directed at people who have already been active in these ways, but may have grown tired and weary. It was an encouragement to keep going, being renewed in the faith-driven works of serving and honoring God.

Individual Activity

1. Take a moment to silently reflect on each of the three responses listed above. Which call relates most to you?
2. Spend some time individually praying about how you might respond to whichever call you relate to most.
3. Write down an action step you can commit to as a response. For example:

Example- I relate most to the "Call to Greater Maturity." I have been so busy with my life, my cares, and my concerns, that I have not paid much attention to the neighbors around me. I commit to finding ways to get to know my neighbors, and serve them in small and big ways.

Group Discussion

1. Ask one or two people to share their responses from the individual activity.
2. As a group, discuss the following questions: Based on the teaching of this passage, what response might we be called to as a group? For example, does it deepen our commitment to serve in an area in which we are already actively engaged? Does it encourage us to keep going? Does it lead us to begin finding new ways to actively serve others as a group? Discuss what action steps you might take as a group.

Training Session Wrap Up (2 min)

Summary: Genuine faith produces works. They are like a "heartbeat" or "proof" of our faith.

Knowing this helps us examine our faith, remembering that:

- 1) Faith without a heartbeat is a faith that is all talk.
- 2) Faith with a heartbeat is a faith that produces works. These works include the various ways that we serve and honor God.

*Closing Prayer:*⁷ Ask someone to pray that God would grant the group guidance and strength to serve him as an expression of faith.