

# A Living Faith

James 2:14-26

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Baby Dedication: Samuel Medina

1. Prayerful Beginnings: Samuel's life began with earnest prayer from his mother, Hannah, who was deeply devoted to God (1 Samuel 1:10-11). This can serve as a reminder of the importance of praying for our children and dedicating them to the Lord from the very beginning of their lives. 2. Dedicated to God: Hannah made a vow to dedicate Samuel to the Lord all the days of his life (1 Samuel 1:27-28). There is significance of dedicating a child to God, acknowledging that they are a gift from Him, and expressing a commitment to raise them in a way that honors Him. 3. Hearing God's Voice: As a young boy, Samuel learned to recognize and respond to God's voice (1 Samuel 3:4-10). It's essential to cultivate an environment where children can hear God's voice through Scripture, prayer, and the example of faithful parents and community. 4. A Life of Service: Samuel served in the house of the Lord under Eli's guidance (1 Samuel 2:18). The value of serving God and others from a young age and how parents can model servant leadership.

## Scripture

James 2:14-26 (NKJV) [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.

Introduction:

## Illustration

A while ago, I ran across a cartoon that appeared in a Christian Magazine which showed a church marquee. It was advertising to the community... It read... "The Lite Church... 24% fewer commitments, home of the 7.5% tithe, 15 minute sermons, 45 minute worship services, we have only 8 commandments – your choice. We use just 3 spiritual laws and have an 800-year millennium. Everything you've wanted in a church... and less!"

## Application

That cartoon, drawn in the 80s, was prophetic in its depiction of the church's future trajectory over the next 40 years. It seems that more and more cultural Christians want a faith that has enough of Jesus to ease a guilty conscience, but not enough to change their life, require obedience, or produce action. In many ways, a problem facing the early church still exists today. There are people who believe they can "try on Jesus" like they try on a new shirt or dress... if they don't like it or He doesn't work to their agenda, they can discard him. Scarier yet, how many people have been self-deceived, or deceived by the modern "Christianity-lite", into believing that they are going to heaven because they said a sinner's prayer or went forward at an event? Yes, people can genuinely be saved, but the only way to differentiate between whether that was an emotional moment or a heartfelt conversion is by what follows afterwards. Are there tracks in the mud of that faith? Are their works and fruits or repentance and wholehearted surrender? Is there obvious loyalty to Christ above all others? James recognized that not everyone who says they have faith that leads to salvation actually has faith that leads to Salvation! In response, he discusses the evidence of a living faith that is authentic.

True are the words of Martin Luther, the reformer, when he stated:

## Quote

— Martin Luther

"We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."

While my works will not impress or earn me extra favor with God, if I have been truly touched by the cross, transformed by the Spirit, born again, and renewed in my mind, then evidence of that genuine faith will abound in my life. So as we look at our passage, we will divide it into three categories:

The evidence of authentic faith   The essence of authentic faith   The examples of authentic faith

## Main Point

### Point 1

## Scripture

James 2:14-17 (NKJV) [14] What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can (that) faith save him (a hypothetical kind of faith that “says”)? [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.

This is both an example of sincere faith and an analogy of the DNA of faith. Just as words without action don't profit anything, faith without works is the same.

Faith is more than Christian platitudes or religious activity. True faith reveals itself in practical expressions of the love of Christ that we claim we possess.

Brother or sister - do good to all, but ESPECIALLY the household of faith.

What is the true expression of love? To wishfully hope for someone's best or to practically sacrifice your resources to see their need met? It's taking our faith beyond mere words. Just as someone might look at another and think, “That person talks a lot, but there's nothing that backs up their words,” so it is with a living faith. James says that faith without works is dead. This is one of two analogies he gives regarding faith being alive or dead. The second closes the chapter. Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. Here, it is, just as words without actions are dead, faith without works is dead.

## Illustration

In the earliest days of photography, it was rare to get a family portrait. There were no iPhones with unlimited digital storage! There was a popular trend back then called “Post-mortem” photography where a family would take a portrait or family picture with the deceased child looking as if they were still alive to be able to capture their memory. I know it's a bit of a grotesque thought, yet that's the kind of faith many cultural Christians adopt. It appears to be something on the outside, from the place of profession, but when it comes to what that proclaimed faith produces, there's no fruit of the tree, no works under the hood, no tracks behind it. James says it's a dead faith; it has a body that is perceived, but no life or substance beyond words.

## Quote

— John Calvin

"It is not good enough for a man to say he has faith, if he does not live according to his faith."

## Main Point

### Point 2

The Essence of True Faith

## Scripture

James 2:18-19 (NKJV) [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!

The essence of authentic faith is not merely believing that something is real. There is an implication of surrender and loyalty associated with the kind of faith that saves us.

## Scripture

Romans 10:9-10 (NKJV) [9] that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

We often talk about salvation as a free gift you receive, which it is to a certain degree. But it's also a treasure you seek, find, and are willing to give up everything to possess.

The heart and the mouth must both be fully engaged. Righteousness is received through sincere belief that captivates our hearts. The implication in the ancient view of the heart is that “where your treasure is, there your heart is also.” It's not something I merely mentally agree with, but it's something I'm fully committed to. If you loved and believed something with your heart, you were fully committed in every other possible way.

### Demons

James compares a faith that merely professes God's existence as in line with the demons!

Trust me, out of all created beings, demons are at the top of the list when it comes to believing in God! In the gospels, demons knew who Jesus was and trembled at his presence. There are no atheistic or agnostic demons! But demons are not in favor with God simply because they profess his reality. Realize that demons are orthodox doctrinally. Clarity is not their problem. Yet apparently, just knowing the truth – being theologically accurate – isn't enough to constitute real faith. Demons have chosen their allegiance. They chose a king, and it was Satan, not Yahweh.

## Application

And this is always how it's been with God. Whose team are you on? Because when you own someone's team, you submit to their authority and leadership, it shows! This is why Joshua told the children of Israel, "Choose this day whom you will serve." This is why Elijah (1 Kings 18:20-21) challenged the people of God before the prophets of Baal, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."

## Illustration

You know, I rejoice when I see people come to Jesus. Sometimes, a cultural celebrity, musical artist, or politician will "come to Jesus and get saved." When that happens, they sometimes get immediately thrust into the spotlight by the Christian community. I have always said, "Praise God! Now wait and watch." How many times have we seen a profession that has skyrocketed album sales or popularity, only to realize a couple of months later that their loyalty hasn't changed, their lifestyles aren't transformed, and they are not operating or speaking in a way that reflects submission to Christ as King?

Big Questions:

Are you trusting in a prayer or a profession today, or has Jesus changed your life? Do you have faith that acts, obeys, and is loyal to Christ? Yes, true faith has room for failure and imperfection, but it's also always moving forward, closer to Christ-likeness.

## Main Point

### Point 3

The Examples of True Faith

## Scripture

James 2:21-26 (NKJV) [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.

James gives us two examples within Jewish history of what living faith looks like. And you couldn't get two more polar opposites! You have Abraham, the revered Jewish father. and Rahab, the despised gentile harlot. If anything, James is indicating that salvation is available to anyone, from the seemingly righteous to the most obvious sinner.

#### A. Abraham

Genesis 15 – Abraham was declared righteous long before he obeyed the promise and took God at his word, and in that moment obtained righteousness from the Lord.

But his willingness to obey Isaac, his only son, in obedience to God was the evidence that he possessed that faith. He truly trusted God to fulfill His word.

### Quote

— Sandy Adams

If you pray for rain, then walk outside without an umbrella – you obviously didn't pray in faith. If you really believe God, you'll obey Him.

### Illustration

In the late 1800s, Charles Blondin became famous for his tight rope escapades, walking across Niagara Falls on a 3" rope, 160 feet above the water. Blondin would get pretty daring, pushing wheelbarrows across the falls. He even cooked an omelet once in the middle of the tightrope and lowered down to a boat of onlookers to eat before finishing his crossing. One day he asked a group of bystanders if they believed he could carry a man on his back all the way across. They all cheered, yes! He asked if they would like to see it. They all gave a resounding, "Yes!" Then he asked for a volunteer from the audience. Their enthusiasm quickly faded. Their faith and excitement to see an attempt were undermined by their lack of follow-through. They believed enough to watch and be entertained, but not to take the risk themselves. Finally, a man named Harry Colcord [image], who was Charles's manager (but no one else knew) hopped on his back and successfully crossed the river.

The works showed that the faith was a complete, sincere faith.

Verse 24 by itself could be dangerous: [24] You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

WARNING!

This chapter has often been misinterpreted in light of the entirety of scripture regarding salvation. Many have fallen into the trap of creating a “works-based” theology, claiming that it is our good works that earn us favor with God. They emphasise the works as the pathway to salvation, as if we can hit a certain level of goodness that impresses God and causes us to be worthy of His grace and salvation. The Bible is very clear, we are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves, not of works lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8-9). Paul warned the Galatians that

## Scripture

Galatians 2:16 (NKJV) [16] knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

The law is not our mediator; it was our tutor to reveal our insufficiencies and inability to earn righteousness based on God's perfect standards. It revealed that we needed a righteousness not our own to be accepted by God, and that righteousness does not come by our efforts, but from our full trust in Christ.

## Quote

— J Vernon McGee

“Paul and James are not two enemies fighting each other face-to-face - but two allies back to back fighting opposite enemies, with the same truth, but from different angles. Paul fought the legalist who said the Gospel is faith in Christ plus works. James fought the liberal who said faith has nothing to do with how we live.”

Again, the kind of faith that merely professes, the demon kind of faith can't justify you. The faith that justifies is one evidenced by works of love toward God and others.

In the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 25:23 reads, “for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.”

The most significant problem in that is the order. Works proceed by grace and faith. Grace is the fallback after we've tried our best to prove our worth. This is NOT what James is saying. Faith comes first, just like Abraham believed God. Works followed faith, thereby proving its authenticity.

Abraham's works justified him in that they proved his faith claim was true.

B. Rahab

Joshua 2 – hid the Israeli spies from the soldiers.

Her faith in the God of Israel led her to do something that required trust and loyalty to God. She didn't just say she believed God could rescue her; she risked everything because she was fully convinced that God was able to save her.

## Scripture

James 2:26 (NKJV) [26] For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

This chapter isn't designed to make you go away afraid that you aren't good enough to earn God's salvation... you're not. Neither was Abraham nor Rahab. The point is to test our true loyalty and trust. Is our faith real? The only way we can know is to look at what it has done.