

A Faith That Shows James 2:14-26

George Verwer is someone most of you have never heard of. I hadn't. He gave his life to Christ in 1955 at a Billy Graham Crusade in Madison Square Garden and then enrolled as a student at Moody Bible Institute. There were two compelling forces that drove him. He was committed to spread the gospel through soul winning and he was a successful motivator. As a student at Moody, he mobilized classmates to join him in going to Mexico over their Christmas break to evangelize. After getting thousands of Spanish tracts and testaments and preparing to head to Mexico, some Christian leaders bluntly told him "George, you can't do it in Mexico." Rome still ruled Latin America with an iron hand and sharing the gospel in Mexico was both difficult and dangerous, if not illegal to do what he was proposing. He armed himself with Matthew 17:20 "Nothing shall be impossible unto you." His was a faith that moved mountains, the kind of faith that believes God and takes God at His Word. Someone told him he would never get past customs with all the gospel literature he had. They prayed all the way to the Mexico border. When they arrived at the border, all the Mexican customs officials were drunk. They drove through without a problem.

During school breaks, he took regular trips to Mexico to share the gospel. He opened several Christian bookstores in key Mexican cities. He decided to get on the radio to share the gospel. Again, people told him it can't be done in Mexico. He went back to his verse "Nothing is impossible." George had two things that helped him out. He had a faith that works and a lot of common sense. Approaching the stations on a business basis, He bought airtime to tell people about the books he had on sale at his bookstores. One book he featured was Billy Graham's *Peace with God*. As he would pitch the book, he would ask the listeners if they had peace with God. He would then read a paragraph from the book.

After graduation from Moody he went to Spain,

which at the time was virtually closed to missionaries. Again, people told him he may have gotten away with stuff in Mexico, but not in Spain and said he could end up in prison. He went back to his verse "nothing is impossible". He didn't enter Spain as a missionary, he went as a student and enrolled in the University of Madrid. He took the minimum number of required classes to remain a student and spent the rest of the time evangelizing. He spent a lot of time reading the early church fathers, writings that were endorsed by Rome. He compiled from their teachings passages that were biblically solid. He published them as tracts, all quotes from church fathers that Rome revered. He found a testament that they accepted. How could they attack him for using the writings of their own church fathers?

He then set his sights on Russia at a time when the Iron Curtain was still tightly closed up with atheistic communism controlling the nation. He and some friends made it past the Soviet customs and headed to Moscow. Along the way, they left a trail of tracts and Bibles. They were stopped, searched, arrested, and jailed. Believing strongly that they were in God's hands, they boldly witnessed to the jailers. Undeterred, they told them they had come to Russia to share the gospel. He asked why they were afraid of the Bible if they believed it was full of lies. They were given an armed escort out of the country. All their literature was confiscated, but that didn't bother George. He believed the guards would read the literature even if only out of curiosity.

It was around this time that George began praying for a ship. Looking at an atlas of the world, it dawned on him that many major cities were located on the seacoasts and great rivers of the world. As he was praying about this venture, he felt the Lord asking that if he got a ship tomorrow, what would he do with it? He told the Lord his plan was to have onboard Bible teachers, counselors, and people knocking on doors passing out tracts. There would be an onboard printing press to make tracts. He would have books for sale, including textbooks and reference books, so desperately needed in Third World countries. There would be teams onboard

who would deal with officials and dock authorities in advance of their arrival. Others would mobilize local churches and pastors for a major evangelistic effort once docked. He would invite local people, dignitaries and officials to tour the ship. He would hold seminars, Bible classes, and gospel meetings. The white sides of the ship would be used as a movie screen so those waiting to get onboard could watch gospel films.

That was his answer to the Lord's question. But then he felt the Lord say that he couldn't do any of that because he didn't have a captain for the ship. They would never be able to leave port and they would go bankrupt from docking fees alone. So George began to pray for a crew. During this time, George recruited hundreds of young people from the US, Europe and Latin America to go to Europe with the purpose of door-to-door evangelism after participating in a week long orientation and Bible teaching. John Phillips was invited to speak at one of those conferences at which time he was introduced to an Englishman. As they talked, the man asked John what he thought of George. Looking around at hundreds of young people who had been willing to sleep on the floor and eat peanut butter sandwiches, Phillips recalls wondering about the spiritual audacity of someone who believed a person would give up the captain's chair for this kind of life. The man looked at John with a smile and said he was that man. George found his first captain. He was given his first ship and so began the venture of global evangelism and a ministry known as Operation Mobilization. At one point they estimated that the ministry had encountered some 250 million people in face-to-face conversation about the gospel.

Our passage today is about faith, one that will cause us to examine the kind of faith we may have. It is a passage that I hope will have a profound impact on your faith, not just in what you believe, but in what you do. I hope that it will challenge you not just to consider what kind of faith you may have, but perhaps even change your faith. Some of what we discover today may even surprise you. If you haven't yet, please turn to **James 2:14-26**.

No one would question the kind of faith George Verwer had. No one would argue that faith is an essential component of the Christian life. We learn from **Hebrews 11:6** that without faith, we won't please God. In **Ephesians 2:8**, we are saved by faith. From **II Corinthians 5:7** we are told to walk by faith. And **Romans 14:23** says that whatever we do apart from faith is sin. As we look at our passage we discover there are different kinds of faith. **The question for you to answer is what kind of faith do you have?**

Let's remember that the book of James is about practical Christian living, not just in the kind of character we display, but also in our actions. Faith is active and is always moving forward, doing because of what we believe. From this passage we will talk about dead faith, demonic faith (and yes, you heard me right), and dynamic faith. We notice in **verses 14-17** faith that is dead.

I. FAITH THAT IS DEAD – vs. 14-17

One would think that the word faith in itself refers to something that is active. The dictionary defines faith as unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence. That certainly doesn't sound like something that is dead or lifeless. So what is James talking about here? In **verse 14** we see the illusion of dead faith.

A. The Illusion of Dead Faith – v. 14

Some conclude that James is referring to a works-based salvation, that both faith and works are required for eternal life. But that isn't what James is referring here. His emphasis is on the false nature of faith. He asks two rhetorical questions: **What good is it if someone claims to have faith but doesn't exhibit any works? Can such faith without works save him?**

The inference is that faith without works is useless, worthless, of no value. This person makes a claim that he has faith when there is no evidence to support that claim because the proof of real or genuine faith is seen in some kind of action. James is saying that a person just can't claim to have faith

without proof. The person with dead faith knows all the right things to say, they have the Christian jargon down, they pray, they read their Bible, they hold to sound doctrine, they attend church regularly and they may even be able to quote lots of Bible verses. What they lack is any real outward evidence. There is a disconnect between what they say they believe and how they actually live. I'm not necessarily talking only about godly conduct, although that is certainly part of an active faith. Our faith should affect our character in things like how we live and how we talk. You wouldn't think very much of my faith if you heard me swearing like a sailor or cheating other people or lying or always in a fit of anger over something. So, yes, faith should affect our conduct and character. But James has something else in mind. James is speaking about an intellectual faith that may only be in head knowledge that has not made it down to the heart and out the hands in good works.

Because of faith we are in Christ or Christ is in us and **Ephesians 2:10** says that **"we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do."**

Galatians 6:9-10 says that we are to do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about the correlation between faith and good works. We read about it in **Matthew 5:16** **"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."**

It is an illusion to think that faith without some kind of external evidence is saving faith. James calls faith without evidence dead faith. Such a person knows all the right words to say but has never really submitted to God by trusting in His Son for salvation. **One author wrote that "any declaration of faith that does not result in a changed life and good works is a false declaration or a dead faith."**

In **Acts 8** we have the account of Simon the sorcerer who heard the gospel preached by Philip. We read that he believed and was baptized like many others.

John and Peter heard the great news of people turning to Christ and took a little trip to see for themselves. When they arrived on the scene, they prayed for these believers to receive the Holy Spirit, Simon was awed by he saw them do and wanted to pay money so he could do the same thing. Peter saw through his false faith, a faith that was really dead. Jesus put it this way in **Matthew 7:16-23**.

James is saying what Jesus said, that obedience to God, which is an external evidence of internal faith, is the proof of saving faith. Without evidence, faith is an illusion. But if you want some hard proof that faith without works is dead, James provides an illustration about dead faith.

B. The Illustration About Dead Faith – vs. 15-16

He relates a hypothetical but realistic illustration. He tells about someone who is destitute of life's daily necessities – food and clothing. For all we know, this person was homeless. Calling the person a brother or sister refers to this person as a fellow believer. Something has occurred in his life that has left him destitute of basic needs. Whether it was a common site or not, this person was left wanting.

We see them scattered around us as well throughout our cities and towns – people who stand at busy intersections with a piece of worn and crumpled cardboard in hand asking for some help. I suppose most are genuinely in need. To my shame I must admit that I often look away or like the religious guys in the story of the good Samaritan walk to the other side of the street to avoid them. We have seen the commercials asking for support of impoverished children or helping God's people in the Holy Land. Of course such commercials are meant to tug on the heart strings by showing scenes of children rummaging through garbage dumps or children standing in the doorways of shacks that are about to fall down. I have to admit that I've grown a bit calloused. I'll admit that it's a challenge when some of it is for show or under false pretenses. But none the less, the need exists and in his illustration, James tells us there is someone with a genuine need, but the response of the person who sees the need is one of indifference. They brush the person aside

saying something like “be warmed and filled. I sure hope you can get what you need somewhere, I wish I could help, but...” James says such words have no meaning and offer no help. Such words are as empty as their stomachs. Sure, I’ve given someone my bag lunch or a few dollars here or there. Was it out of appeasing an otherwise guilty conscience or was it out of a genuine desire to demonstrate my faith? If I choose to do nothing or if I give to ease my conscience, it is an empty gesture and an evidence of a faith that is dead. Now I’m not suggesting that we jump in our car and drive the highways and byways looking for every homeless person to offer them a meal and a change of clothes. But I am suggesting that we shouldn’t be indifferent to the needs and walk on by or give them a nice sounding speech or even suggest they go find a job with so many help wanted signs hanging on local businesses. What I am suggesting is that faith helps.

A person may have an illusion they have faith when in fact it is dead illustrated by an indifference that only pays lip service to meeting a specific and tangible need. In **verse 17** James notes that there is an incompatibility within dead faith.

C. An Incompatibility Within Dead Faith – v. 17

One author said it was Martin Luther. Another author said it was John Calvin. Whoever made this statement is correct – “**It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone.**”

If faith is not accompanied with deeds, actions, works, it is a dead faith, a lifeless faith.

Each of us has an irrefutable identification. It can’t be altered or hacked. It’s our fingerprint. James is saying that there is an irrefutable identification that makes your faith evident. Saving faith can be recognized by certain spiritual fingerprints. It’s in your actions. **Are your walk and talk the same? Do your works measure up to your words?**

James says that faith without works is a dead faith because the lack of works reveals an unchanged life or a spiritually dead heart. Saving faith results in a transformed life and that faith is demonstrated by

the works we do. As one author noted “**How we live reveals what we believe and whether the faith we profess to have is a living faith.**”

Warren Wiersbe stated that “**no man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same, anymore than he can come into contact with a live 220-volt wire and remain the same.**”

Works are an outward expression of an inward experience of faith. Works are not the cause of salvation, but rather they are the evidence of salvation. Without such evidence, it’s dead faith.

Do you have a dead faith?

James then speaks about a second kind of faith, demonic faith.

II. FAITH THAT IS DEMONIC – vs. 18-19

Now you might be scratching your head and saying, wait a minute right there, Pastor. We can understand where James is coming from when he talks about dead faith. Even Jesus talked about those who thought they had faith, but didn’t and won’t get into heaven because they were basing their entry ticket on good works alone. We know salvation is by grace through faith and not works so no one can brag about it. We understand that when by faith we believe in the finished work of Christ on the cross who bore the penalty for our sin at which moment of belief the Holy Spirit regenerates us without any works on our part for salvation. We get all that, so how can you say that the demons have faith when we know demons can’t be saved? You would be right in believing that, so how can they have faith? That just doesn’t make any sense. Let’s follow the logic of James.

Notice first the claims about faith in **verse 18**.

A. The Claims About Faith – v. 18

Faith produces something by which you can identify it. James says a person comes along and claims that you can have faith without deeds. But James denies that is possible. Faith and deeds are not independent of each other. They are not mutually exclusive. If a person has genuine faith, he

will demonstrate that faith in some kind of action. As Warren Wiersbe said, “no man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same.” It is not possible for faith and works to be independent. Faith will produce fruit because genuine faith is not invisible. So it’s preposterous to claim that faith without works amounts to anything. To illustrate this James then notes the challenge about faith.

B. The Challenge About Faith – v. 19

The Jewish audience to whom James is writing, would be familiar with the Shema. It was the Jewish statement of faith and comes from **Deuteronomy 6:4** “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One.” It was their declaration of monotheism, the belief there was only one true God. But James is talking about the inadequacy of such a belief. He is not disputing that there is only one true God. He is challenging the notion that you only need believe intellectually in God which he says is insufficient faith. He challenges this fallacy by stating that even the demons believe in one true God.

Someone has rightly said that there are no atheists or agnostics among the demons. They know all too well that there is only one God. They also have a monotheistic belief. But their faith is not saving faith. As a matter of fact, their faith is so strong in this God, that James says they believe and tremble, a word that also means to shudder.

Scripture tells us they believe in the deity of Jesus.

Mark 3:7-12

Mark 5:1-7

They not only believe in God and that Jesus is God, but Mark’s account indicates that they believe in a place of torment. Matthew says that they know Jesus will judge and condemn them to the Abyss. Their faith is not only intellectual, but also emotional because they tremble before God, they fear God, knowing the wrath He has in store for them. So when it comes to faith, there are those who have a common faith with demons who also believe in God. By demonic faith, I am not referring to a saving faith, but rather a theological soundness that believes God is real and that He is powerful. But

one thing stands in stark contrast between demons and mankind, demons can never become right with God even though they believe in one God. Their type of faith causes them to fear God because they know their destiny, their doom. Mankind on the other hand, can have a faith that also fears God, but which has awe for Him, that also gives assurance of salvation.

GotQuestions provides us with some insight. “The demons know more than we do about the awesome power of God. They watched Jesus Christ come to earth, live as a man, and then be crucified. They trembled in horror as the God-Man rose from the dead and walked out of the tomb. They saw Him ascend back into heaven, and they know that Jesus is the Son of God. The demons believe all this to be true, yet their condemnation is sure. James’ point is that mere assent to the historical and theological facts about Jesus will not save a person. Saving faith results in a new creation, which produces good works.

It’s not enough to believe in God or even to believe that the God of the Bible is the One True God. That belief, devoid of a change of heart, makes one’s theology comparable to that of the demons.

Unfortunately, many people may not realize that what they call ‘faith’ is nothing more than the same mental assent that the demons possess. Perhaps they prayed a prayer, got baptized, or went to church, but the direction of their lives never changed. They were never born again.”

Is your faith no different than the demons who also believe in God?

It is quite sobering to think that the faith we have been clinging to is nothing more than dead faith or demonic faith. But that can change. You can have a faith that is dynamic.

III. FAITH THAT IS DYNAMIC – vs. 20-26

There’s an old saying “the proof is in the pudding.” If it’s proof you want that works demonstrates faith James provides us with two good examples.

A. The Examples Of Dynamic Faith – vs. 20-25

James couldn't have given us two more different examples of dynamic faith than he does in these verses. They show us that true, saving faith leads to actions.

1. The dynamic faith of Abraham – vs. 20-24

I like that Scripture gives us an accurate picture of Abraham that includes not only his faith, but also his failures. It shows us the progress of faith in his life. One day he trusts God and leaves everything behind to venture to a land God would give to him that would be an inheritance for his descendants. The next day, he's floundering in his faith and walks by sight taking matters into his own hands because God seems to be a little slow in making things happen.

Here is Abraham, the father of the Hebrews, a man of power and respect, the person to whom God bestowed promises. If we didn't have the context of the passage, we might conclude that this contradicts what the Bible says elsewhere that salvation is by faith apart from works. James, though, is indicating that our right actions are an evidence of genuine faith. Good works are the proof in the pudding we are saved. To clarify that salvation is by faith without works James quotes **Genesis 15:6** "**Abram believed the Lord, and He (God) credited that faith to Abram as righteousness.**" In other words, it was his faith not his works that saved him. But to demonstrate his faith, he acted in faith in willfully offering Isaac as a sacrifice to God.

Romans 4:20-21

When it says in **verse 23** that Scripture was fulfilled doesn't mean in a prophetic sense but rather the fulfillment of the principle that justification by faith results in works, not that works save us but are an evidence we are saved. Faith that saves produces deeds. Again, "**It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone.**" James then offers another example in Rahab.

2. The dynamic faith of Rahab – v. 25

She couldn't stand in greater contrast to Abraham. While he was called the friend of God, we read that

Rahab was a prostitute, a woman with a reputation, someone who had broken God's moral laws. Yet here she is an example of faith, one who is etched for all time in **Hebrews 11** among those with great faith. You can read about her confession of faith in **Joshua 2**. That passage talks about her confession of faith in God. It also describes the actions she took to demonstrate her faith. She hid the spies from the police who were looking for them.

Let me give you one more example of dynamic faith not found in the text. It's yet another proof that where there is genuine faith, actions of some kind will follow.

3. The dynamic faith of Zacchaeus – Luke 19:1-10

Salvation came, not because of what he did, but because of what he believed. Jesus declared him to be a son of Abraham, not because he was a Jew, but because, like Abraham, he was justified by faith. That means he was declared right with God through faith. His faith was then observable in what he did.

James concludes this section with the evidence of dynamic faith.

B. The Evidence Of Dynamic Faith – v. 26

Faith and works are as essential as the body and the spirit. Without the spirit, the body is dead, so too, faith without works is dead. If you want dynamic faith, make it evident in your actions. You have no real faith if it's not evident in some visible way. Paul challenges us in **II Corinthians 13:5** to test ourselves to see if we are in the faith. The test of being in the faith is if we are doing deeds that demonstrate the faith we say we have.

We won't all be like George Verwer, but maybe God is waiting for someone to act out their faith in such a way that shows the world what dynamic faith looks like.

If there is a time you realized you were a sinner in need of a Savior and trusted Christ for salvation, what is the evidence of your faith?

Without works, your faith may be dead or like that of the demons. With works, your faith is dynamic.