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Sunday School Lesson

TOPIC:

“Faith Without Works is Dead”

James 2:14-26

VERSE DISCOVERY: James 2:14-26 (KJV, Public Domain)

Prepare

- **Opening Exercise:** Taken from the lesson, this one will have to be planned in advance. The week before, announce to your students that we are having a **Show and Tell** time during class. Each student can bring or do something special and talk about it. If you were unable to do this the week before, you can always contact parents for younger students or the students themselves if they are older (Truthfully, show and tell has no age limits. Even adults have things they like to display before others that are meaningful to them.) and notify them of what will take place. The earlier they are reached in the week the better the response will be.

During the show and tell, give each student equal time to share their special thing (even adults). And you, as the teacher, can show something special, too.

Then, tell them, “Just as we all had the chance to display something that is important to us, there is something special God wants us all to put on display before the world: our faith. And, the best way that we do that is how we act towards, serve, and treat others. What we do matters.”

Explore – Full Lesson Available on pages 5-11

Real Faith

“Yea, a man may say, Thou has faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” James 2:18

Faith. It is a great word. But what I have found out in life is that sometimes it’s very easy to talk about it, with all of its beautiful characteristics and qualities, than to actually do it or put those beautiful things that draw us into practice.

As we get into this lesson, you will see that is why I have broken it up into these two main sections, titled “No Action. No Proof.” and “Much Action. Much Proof.” These two sections offer a line of separation between the one who just talks about the faith they have and the one who

allows their faith to be lived out through the process of doing, or what our lesson defines as works.

In this lesson, we will find that real faith is always followed by real actions. Real faith has been and will always be proven through a heart of obedience. Although it does not know all that is ahead, that one who possesses real faith still chooses to follow God's will for their life. Real faith that is seen, not only by you, but by others as well can testify of your walk with Christ because as you go about your days and your life, the things you do and how you behave toward others testify that the faith that resides in you is not stagnated or stale, or worse, just lip service. Your faith is marching forth, obeying, and performing its good works to all. Your faith is true. Your faith is alive. Your faith is real.

Jesus obeyed God to the point of death (Philippians 2:8). At one point He said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work," (John 4:34). And, finish His work He did.

We are followers of Christ. Therefore, I must ask, what works are we performing and/or finishing? What are we actually doing with our faith? Is it actively walking where He wills us to go or is it sitting on a shelf as just another pretty thing to look at? Is it so alive and working that others can tell, beyond a shadow of a doubt, to Whom we belong, or do we need Jesus to do compressions over our heart and soul to revive the spiritual vigor within us?

Real faith, when it all boils down to it, seeks to please God in every aspect of our life. Who we really are on the inside and what we possess will be proven in our daily walk and our doings because real faith will always be seen.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:17-18)

Activities

- **Adult Journal Page:** In this lesson it is noted that what we do or how we live out our faith matters. Today, right where you are and working with what you have, how can you put your faith on display? Record it on the journal page. For the **Kid's Journal Page**, students can write about how they can show others their faith through what they do.
- In the **Draw the Scene** section found on-site, younger students can write in the provided space one way they can show their faith to others. Then, they can draw a picture of themselves doing what they wrote.

- Younger students can put together one of the “**Hand**” themed crafts such as “**Lace it Up Handprint**,” and the “**Handprint Necklace**,” found on wordforlifesays.com. Although these activities are used in other lessons, they work very well here in bringing out the idea of showing one’s faith. Using a simple hand craft can be used to bring out the idea of serving or doing things for others that will show your faith. These activities can be used with any verse or point you want to bring out with the lesson.
- **Card Match:** Play any card matching game (or make your own using ideas from the lesson) to highlight the idea of how our actions should “match” the faith we say we have. If you do not want to do a “Show and Tell” as a lesson opener, this activity would work well in its place as an object lesson.
- Alternate activity sheets are available for any who just want to work with printed materials such as **Word Search, Crossword, and Word Scramble**.

Review

- Commit to memory the base verse from the lesson: “***For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.***” **James 2:26**
- Fill out the review sheet provided (page 12)
- To bring home the idea of “doing”, have students play a game of **Charades**. But for this game of charades, have ideas in the bucket that people can do to help others, make them feel loved, and show your faith (ex. Sweep the floor for someone, pick flowers to show love, wash the dishes to be helpful, visit the sick, welcome everyone, etc.) Emphasize there are a lot of ways we can show our faith through our “doings”. You can even have students come up with ideas to throw in the bucket and see if others can figure out what they wrote.

Life

Our life can speak louder than our words. How can you make your life speak louder this week? Use the **Blank Journal Page** (found on-site) to record your commitment.

TOPIC:

“Faith Without Works is Dead”

James 2:14-26

VERSE DISCOVERY: James 2:14-26 (KJV, Public Domain)

Remember the days of “Show and Tell” at school? It was an opportunity for one to not just talk about what they do or have, but to display visible evidence before their classmates of a possession or skill.

Jesus was a “Show and Tell” Savior. He drew many crowds to Himself through the many miracles that He performed: feeding 5,000, healing the sick, raising the dead, and so on. People would often marvel at what He could do. He did more than just talk the talk or preach and lecture, He demonstrated the power of the Kingdom of God through Himself.

While you and I may not be multiplying a boy’s lunch to feed 5,000, we can through our actions and service toward one another, volunteer to feed some. We may not be raising the dead or healing the sick (although, miracles really do still happen), we can volunteer to comfort and help those around us in need. What this does is it shows that we are more than just talk; rather our faith is manifested in what we do.

James knew that people needed to see the church displaying tangible evidence of what they say they believe, especially when it comes down to how we treat one another. Jesus, along with many others in the Bible, let their works speak for them. And, how they worked showed what the real measure of their concern and faith was on the inside.

NO ACTIONS. NO PROOF.

James 2:14 “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?”

This section of verses picks up right where James left off his teaching against having respect of persons and dealing with how we treat people.

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Real faith serves others. In my opinion, right at the beginning of this lesson, James seems to be questioning the validity of someone's faith without works, without evidence. He said, "**What doth it profit?**" What does it profit you? What does it profit for others around you?

For a man or woman to say they have faith or are in the faith without evidence to back it up is like saying one is a doctor without a degree to prove it. When I go into a doctor's office, I am one of those people who will read the accreditations on the wall. This is proof that they can take care of me. What I see before me is speaking up on behalf of the individual to whom I am submitting myself for care. Those papers hanging on the walls are little, personal testimonies.

Faith that is worked out operates in the same manner. Faith is not silent. Faith is full of action. Faith is alive. Faith is shared through works to testify of its genuineness and sincerity. Faith does more than move mountains. If it is lived out in the lives of the men and women of God, it can help move hearts toward salvation!

When one is living a life of faith people should be able to look at their life, their actions, as signs of accreditation that we belong to God. They should be able to tell by how we operate and carry ourselves through our display of service, that we live what we talk.

Where is the profit if there is no proof? What can you and I show to a hurting world that we have their best interest in mind; that we genuinely care about them as a person?

James 2:15-16 "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

Is this one's faith real or not? Words without supplying to the physical, emotional, or spiritual comfort and support of another in distress are what these two verses speak of. But, all too often, how many times have we heard or spoken of what should be done to help others without putting in some work to help society move toward that goal?

All that talking becomes useless speech. Unless we move past the act of just talking and show that we care through the act of doing; unless we put some backbone and muscle behind our mouths, the world will never see the true love of Jesus Christ in action.

That is what it's all about, isn't it? It is going beyond pulpits and church walls to work at meeting the needs of the communities that we are in, to put the love of Christ on display through our

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actions and not just our words. Obviously, some people, churches, and communities can do more than others. That is not what James is after here. He just wants us to get up, move past complacency, and just do something.

James saw no positive effect for others in just words alone. Speaking “**peace**” without lifting a finger to physically help satisfy the present need, to him it was not true faith. True faith believes and then allows that belief to be put to work. True faith has heavenly aspirations that work out to show good on earth. So, he asked, “**What doth it profit**” without it? What is each of us doing now that is benefiting his fellow man and the kingdom of heaven?

James 2:17-18 “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.”

What you profess and what you do *together* should match up to display a well-rounded Christian. People cannot claim they are heaven bound and yet show no heavenly fruit in their lives. Such claims to faith are “**dead**,” meaning there is nothing in it to prove it is alive and real.

Don’t you know, you can start today to make a difference? You can start where you are and with what you have. You do not need a personal invitation to love and serve others. What are you waiting for? Show the world that God is alive in you! Put some action behind those words you speak!

One may say, “**Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.**” Our faith, which comes through hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17) should compel us to actively participate in the things that are written of or spoken through that Word; it should get us involved in the things that God is concerned about. The faith that shows that the Word is working in us is the faith that can do more. Therefore, faith and works do not go against each other, rather, they support one another in proving that Christ is alive and active on the inside of the believer (compare with James 2:22 notes below).

When that happens, this, in turn, shines a light to the world reflecting Him. Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your *good works*, and glorify your Father which is in heaven,” (emphasis mine). This light shines by what it is doing; by “good works.” This kind of faith can make a bigger impact in this world and draw more people to God.

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James 2:19-20 “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”

One’s claim to faith goes beyond just believing in the very real fact that there is a one and only true living God. It is living out that belief in one’s daily life. It’s working His works. James opened our perspective this way by saying that’s good; that’s a start, that’s right, “**thou doest well**” to believe. Everything in our faith walk begins with believing. But, where does it go from there?

He goes on to say, “**The devils also believe, and tremble,**” but they’re still “**devils.**” They know there is a God. They believe He exists, but they are not bowing their selves to working His works. They are not obeying Him. They are not working His will. They are not in a relationship with God; rather, they work against everything God is, loves, and stands for.

But, what of those who claim they *are* in a relationship with God through faith? Where is the fruit of their faith?

Faith without fruit is not an operational faith. It is stale. It’s stagnated. It does no good. Real faith must act out what it is experiencing on the inside. Real, genuine faith will not just be content in a life of mediocrity – never accomplishing or making a difference for His kingdom. Real faith wants to see better in and for people’s lives. Real faith shows itself and overflows to those around him or her.

Therefore, if faith is meant to be alive and active and shown to the world through works, then “**faith without works is dead.**” The one who claims they believe without any evidence to support that proclamation is “**vain,**” useless, hollow, in other words, no good.

Rather, when we come to that great and glorious day, Jesus wants to say, “Well *done*, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord,” (Matthew 25:23, emphasis mine). Those who have put their faith into action and have “*done*” something with what He has given them can make a difference. God can use people like this in the world. But He cannot do that unless you work what He has given you.

If it is not working – it’s “**dead.**” It’s lifeless with no functioning activities. It is useless!

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MUCH ACTION. MUCH PROOF.

James 2:21-24 “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

Real faith obeys God. Genesis 15:6 declares of Abram, “And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” This was after God told him to count the stars and see if he could number them. God then told him, “So shall thy seed be,” (Genesis 15:5).

At another point, Abraham was forced to send Hagar and Ishmael away, but God gave him this promise: “for in Isaac shall thy seed be called,” (Genesis 21:12).

Then there came a day when Abraham’s faith was tested to see if he still believed in the God of those promises that were spoken unto him; to see if the faith and righteousness that was attributed to him was true on the inside and not just an outward, surface claim to faith. By taking action to obey God in going forth with the procedure to offer **“Isaac his son upon the altar,”** he manifested through his works the very realness of his faith. His faith, in turn, became a testimony before the whole world. Abraham’s story does not just talk about faith, it shows how his faith was worked out (compare Hebrews 11:17-19).

His actions demonstrated his heart. **“Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect.”** Pay attention to that word **“with”** (compare this to the notes above in James 2:18), which speaks to the accompanying factor of each coming alongside one another as agents together to show what he was really made of; to show his true belief in God alone, regardless of the way things outwardly appeared. Jointly, they showed his true faith nature, and jointly, **“by works was faith made perfect,”** or complete.

“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.” Referencing the above verse quote I noted earlier from Genesis 15:6, James saw a fulfilling of that verse through the actions of Abraham, through his obedience. Abraham’s faith was real, and it was shown by what he did (compare Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6).

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“And he was called a friend of God.” Abraham’s experiences with God drew his heart closer to God in obedience and in turn, he was considered a friend of God (compare 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8), in such a way that God was even able to reveal to Abraham what His plans were for the destruction of Sodom (see Genesis 18:17-18).

Jesus once taught, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you,” (John 15:14-15). As His Father revealed to Abraham, His friend, of His plans, so too does Jesus reveal the will of God to those disciples, to those who obey Him, for they are His friends, too.

James put the two together as in a great summation: **“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”** James was calling his readers to put their faith on display. To show they had a lively faith. To show the world that you are not just all talk, but the love of Christ is in you and manifesting through you to touch a world in need. Put Him on display that when eyes see you, they might see Him.

The Apostle Paul put it like this, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ,” (1 Corinthians 11:1). In the chapter before, he left off saying he was not seeking his own profit. But in all that he did, he was seeking the “profit of many, that they might be saved,” (1 Corinthians 10:33).

While works cannot save us they show that we are saved, they are telling proof that we are **“justified”** and moving in the same direction as our Christ. And, what we do, can, in fact, profit others (compare to Paul’s statement above from 1 Corinthians 10:33 regarding what he was doing was for the “profit of many” and James asking in the above verses (James 2:14-16), about what does it profit when the works are missing from the faith).

James 2:25 “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?”

Here is another example of WHAT YOU DO MATTERS! I cannot overemphasize those words enough. Rahab could have lost her life if she had been found helping the enemy of her people. But she heard about all God had done in delivering His people against their enemies (Joshua 2:10) and it made the people of Jericho’s hearts melt (Joshua 2:11). But Rahab believed for more. She said, “I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen

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upon us,” (Joshua 2:9). Not only did she express belief in all that God has done and was still doing, but she also went as far as to take these men in her home and personally sought for their care and safety. That was a bold step for her. Her faith was put into action. To make a long story short, for those in her house, their lives were spared in the fall of Jericho because of her active, working faith which landed her in the hall of fame of faith (Hebrews 11:31).

James 2:26 “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

The body is a physical shell, so to speak, that houses the spirit. At the time of death, the spirit departs and goes back to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7) leaving behind the lifeless shell that remains. When we attend funerals and view our dearly departed all we see is what is left, the outer man, the shell. **“So faith without works is dead also.”** Faith, without the outward workings of tangible evidence, is just as dead as a body without a spirit. Life is not represented there.

Our actions testify to the faith that we say we have in us. What we do or how we live out our faith matters. Jesus taught, “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,” (Matthew 25:40; read Matthew 25:31-46 for further explanation).

Let us remember, we are not saved by works: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast,” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Rather, works give proof to the faith living on the inside of you: “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone,” (James 2:17).

No action. No proof. Much action. Much proof.

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TOPIC:

“Faith Without Works is Dead”

James 2:14-26

Please Answer the Review Questions Below

1. **T or F.** Faith never needs to be proven through actions. Saying you have faith is enough. (James 2:14-26)
2. “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath _____, and have not works...? (James 2:14)
A. Belief B. Love C. Belief D. Faith
3. Recall some examples from James 2:15-16 where faith was not properly displayed through works.

4. What does, “**I will shew thee my faith by my works**” (James 2:18) mean?

5. This man was called a “**Friend of God**,” (James 2:23) because of his faith.
A. David B. Abraham C. Israel D. Isaac
6. **T or F.** Rahab’s faith caused her to do something to save the messengers. (James 2:25)
7. “**For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also,**” (James 2:26). Describe what this verse personally means to you.

