

Faith Without Works Is Dead

James 2:14-26

MEMORY VERSE

JAMES 2:26

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

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A sheet and four chairs.

As many balloons as the number of children in your class and a marker.

ATTENTION GETTER!

It's All in Your Head

You will need a sheet and four chairs for this activity. Set the four chairs in a circle in the middle of the room with the backs facing in. Seat a volunteer inside the circle as the “head” of the class. Put the sheet around him/her and over the chairs to create a head without a body.

Tell the rest of the class that they are the body. You can divide them into groups that represent hands and feet and have them stand in the appropriate spots. They will have to perform the tasks that the “head” tells them to do. Have the “head” give tasks to the hands and feet for them to perform such as erase the board, get a drink of water, pick up a book or throw something in the trash.

This will demonstrate how just thinking something is very different from actually doing it. God wants us to not only “think” our faith, but to “do” our faith.

LESSON TIME!

Why do we want to do good things? As Christians we want to do the right things and please the Lord. We want to love others and help them when we can. We want to obey Jesus and our parents. But why do we do these things? Is it because we want to make God like us and accept us? Or is it because we know how much God loves us and accepts us that we want to do nothing else except to please Him?

Today we are going to learn about faith and works. For children this can be a difficult concept to understand. It can be difficult for adults to understand! The main thing to know is that our works, the good things that we do, will happen in our lives because of our faith, trusting in Jesus. And if we say that we love Jesus then we will want to do good things. If He lives inside of our hearts we should desire to do what is right. **God wants us to live out our faith.**

JAMES 2:14-17

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,

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?

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

James begins by asking a question. Basically He is saying what good is it to say that you believe in Jesus but you do not do what He asks you to do. That kind of faith is not real. The real kind of faith will make us different and cause us to want to do what Jesus says.

James uses a simple picture to help us to understand what He is saying. He tells us about a brother or sister (fellow Christian) who is poor. They do not have anything to eat or clothes to wear. Then they come to church and we see them. So we say, "God bless you, we wish you the best. We hope everything works out" and then send them on their way without helping them in any way. This kind of faith is not real.

The real kind of faith is the kind of faith that will help that person to get food or clothing. We should be willing to make a difference in a person's life whenever we have the ability. If we love Jesus, then we will love like Jesus.

So, when verse 17 talks about “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead,” it means that if all we do is talk about believing in Jesus without doing what God would have us to do, then our faith is not real, it is dead. God wants us to have living faith, which is the type of faith that will produce good things in us. **God wants us to live out our faith.**

JAMES 2:18

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.

Some people might try to separate believing in Jesus (faith) and doing good things (works). James challenges us to show our faith without any works. The truth is that it cannot be done. If we are not doing good things in our lives then our faith will never show.

What is even worse is if we are doing bad things. Then our faith is definitely not showing. In fact we could even be doing harm to the name of Jesus among other people who do not believe in Him. Sometimes we will make mistakes and God will forgive us, but if doing bad things is what we are always doing, then it could be that our faith is not real. Our lifestyle should be of faith and works.

James said, “I will show you my faith by my works.” The good that we do will only declare to the world that our trust in Jesus is real. He will receive the glory for what is going on in our lives. We don’t do good to try to please Him, but because of what He has done for us, **God wants us to live out our faith.**

Faith Test

Ask your class if they really believe that they can do a simple task like stomping their feet or touching their nose (you can think of others). But tell them not to start doing it yet. While everyone is thinking about it explain that this is faith. The problem is that no one can see inside your head to know that you believe that you can do this. God wants us to demonstrate our faith.

Next tell everyone that they can do their “simple task.” Explain that this shows everyone else what you already know inside of your head and heart.

JAMES 2:19,20

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Did you know that even the devil and his angels believe in God? They know that there is a God and they are afraid because they know that one day they will be judged. But of course they do not have any good works. So just because they believe that there is a God does not mean that they are saved.

This is very important because we can say we believe in Jesus, but not really have a relationship with Him. How can you know that you are really a Christian? He gives us His Holy Spirit who helps us to know we belong to Him and because He will be changing our life. Even though we will not be perfect, we will want to do what is right, **God wants us to live out our faith.**

JAMES 2:21-24

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

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.

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

Here is the story of Abraham and Isaac. This shows us that we will do what God asks us to do whenever we trust in Him. Abraham had something very difficult that God asked Him to do. He was supposed to sacrifice his son. But Abraham trusted the Lord and did what he was asked to do. God did not have him sacrifice Isaac, but he did learn a valuable lesson in faith and works.

James said that for Abraham, his faith worked together with his works. Really, you cannot have one without the other. Doing good things will never get us to heaven without faith (trust) in Jesus. Saying we trust in Jesus without doing what He asks will never save us either.

JAMES 2:25,26

Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

We now have the example of Rahab who helped the spies in Jericho. God was going to judge Jericho and destroy the city. Joshua sent in a couple of spies to see what was going on. They met up with Rahab and she protected them from harm. This was an example of trusting (she trusted in God to save her) and doing (she protected the spies from being captured). She was then saved from the judgment that came upon the city.

So, faith and works go hand in hand. Remember that doing good things will never save us or get us to heaven. But doing good will naturally come from our believing in Jesus.

If you have never asked Jesus into your heart then do not try to make yourself better by doing good things. That will never work. Just start off by trusting in Him and asking Him to come into your heart. Then He will change you from the inside and help you to do everything that He asks you to do. **God wants us to live out our faith.**

Balloon Faith

Pass out balloons to your class. Write the memory verse on the chalkboard. The memory verse says that just like the body without the spirit is dead so is our faith without works. The balloons are kind of like our faith apart from works, sort of lifeless.

Next have the children blow up the balloons. Explain that without air the balloon would remain lifeless, just like our faith is lifeless unless we show or demonstrate our faith by doing good things. It's hard to see faith unless it is lived out in our lives.

As an option you can allow the children to use a marker and write the memory verse on their balloons.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to do all that the Lord asks them to do. Pray for them to believe in Jesus and to obey Him. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.