

SCRIPTURE

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good[a] is that? **17** So 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 apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. **19** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! **20** Do you want to be shown, you foolish

person, that faith apart from works is useless? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; **23** and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. **24** You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. **25** And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? **26** For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. *ESV*

DISCUSS

1. In verses 15-16, James gives us a YouTube video, sort of. It would be a clever comedy sketch if it weren't so sad. How does it go? What's the answer to the question in verse 16? What good is it to offer good wishes but no practical help?
2. In verse 18, we see two kinds of faith. How are they described?
3. So then, verse 19 is referring to the "without works" kind of faith. What does it say about that kind of faith?
4. Why do you think James chooses the oneness of God as the example of basic faith, and not, say, the atoning death of Jesus?
5. In James 2:20-24, there's reference to Abraham as proof of the point. What's the argument here? How does Abraham prove that "faith without works is useless"?
6. How did these actions demonstrate Abraham's faith?

7. James quotes a verse from Genesis (15:6). What does that say about Abraham's faith? What does it say about his works?
8. How did Abraham's actions in Genesis 22 "fulfill" the statement of Genesis 15:6?
9. Do you think it's significant that the faith of Genesis 15 came several chapters before the works of Genesis 22? Does faith generally come first?
10. Take a look at verse 25. Why would James go on to talk about Rahab?
11. What do you know about Rahab? What was her occupation?
12. How did she get herself mentioned in the Bible?
13. Isn't it a mistake for James to mention a prostitute as an example of good works? Why would he do this?

■ LIVE IT OUT

The book of James emphasizes the active side of our faith, so let's consider several ways we might put its teaching into practice.

Evaluation: Talk with God about your own faith. Do you have "faith with works" or "faith without works"? Ask him to give you the power you need to put your faith into action.

Conversation: Talk with at least one other close Christian friend about this question: Is my faith more on the inside or the outside? Both are good. Both are important. But if you just feel your faith and don't show it, you're out of balance. (It's also possible to tilt the other way, doing stuff for God, but not taking time for personal growth.)

Research: James is very specific about the needs we should be responding to—the needs of widows and orphans, as well as those who need food or clothing. Where do these needs exist in your region? And what are the best ways to help such people? Join with some others in a research projects, and share your findings with this group, or your whole church.

Serving: Can you put yourself on a regular schedule of volunteering with some ministry or charity? Tutoring each week? Staffing a soup kitchen each month? Doing a work day once a quarter? Don't just think about doing these things. Plan something and do it.

Donation: Some ministries are desperate for funds. Challenge your church leaders to support worthy helping ministries, and lead by example by giving your money to support them as well.