

Icebreaker: Are you more likely to act before you think or think before you act?

From last week: Love your neighbor as yourself. Try to connect with a neighbor you don't normally connect with. Or connect with (or show mercy and love to) someone who doesn't offer you anything in return. Share with your group how you did.

Read scripture and discuss:

1. In this part of his letter, James is sarcastic and abrupt (see verse 20). Do you find this teaching style to be helpful or unhelpful?
2. Read verse 19 again. What is your reaction to that verse?
3. James asks: If a person has faith without works, can such a faith save him? Does this premise trouble you? How can James' idea of faith with works reconcile with the idea that faith alone saves?
4. Why is Abraham such a good example of faith in action (see Genesis 22)? What about Rahab (see Joshua 2)?
5. For James, what do you think constitutes a "dead" faith? What do you think constitutes a "dead" work?
6. In the first two chapters James has given us some examples of faith with works. Among them are caring for orphans and widows, loving your neighbor, showing mercy not favoritism, seeing joy in trials, giving food and clothes, being quick to listen and slow to speak. What are some other evidences of a vibrant faith that your group can list?
7. If someone wanted to see evidence of your faith, what could you show them? Who do you know who truly practices faith with works? What do they do?

This sermon series is called "Working Out Our Faith." Each week, we will recommend a practice to work out your faith.

Working out your faith: Abraham and Rahab both practiced their faith by showing hospitality in their lives. Practice hospitality this week as an evidence of your faith (e.g. show hospitality to someone at work, at home, or at church in worship or in the hallways). Discuss with your group next week.

Prayer: As your group closes in prayer, please remember the following requests from our church family.

- > Prayers of comfort for the McDaniel family in the passing of Greg's stepfather.
- > Prayers of healing for Phil Isenbarger and Daniel Qua.

Requests from ZPC's May's Prayer Calendar:

- > Pray for 2nd Half Adventurers, ZPC's 60+ ministry, as they grow in their relationship with God, one another, and our church family.
- > Pray for the Fuller Center for Housing and for the blessing of homes for families in need in Central Indiana.

James is pretty direct and blunt in the way he challenges believers. It is good to be challenged sometimes instead of being complacent. This week, we study and discuss again living out the challenges of the Bible by not only having a real faith but living out that faith in our actions.

[Question 1] James says in verse 20, "you senseless person" to those who think faith without deeds is viable. He also says even demons believe in God. Ancient near-east culture was more direct, even shame-based, in the ways they talked to each other. James challenges us to think critically about our faith. Some today respond well to challenge while others prefer more gentle encouragement.

[Question 2] Even demons shudder. This word for shudder means uncontrollable shaking, like shivering in the cold. God is all-powerful. We are called not only to believe in God but to "fear" God by holding him in awe and with the ultimate sense of respect and honor and praise. An honoring attitude to God helps us to respect his commands and to be thankful for his grace and love.

[Question 3] The New Testament says that God's grace alone saves through faith in Jesus Christ. While we have faith, God also calls us to live for him. Our faith is not to be just head knowledge, but heart and hand and feet knowledge – to act and to be his people in the world in real ways (see Ephesians 2:8-10 for a comparison to James).

[Question 4] "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness" – this quote from Genesis 15:6 is used here in James 2 and by Paul in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. Abraham and Rahab believed – they had faith. Abraham and Rahab acted on their belief – they had actions and deeds which come out of faith.

[Question 5] For James, a dead faith is faith without any resulting action. Dead work is a work not based on faith. Faith leads to works/deeds/action growing out of faith.

[Question 6] Leaders – help your group brainstorm at least 5 more creative ways to show your faith; live out your faith. Have some fun and creativity with your answers.

[Question 7] If you were put on trial for your faith, would you be convicted based on your life? Give your group an example of someone who really lives out their faith in actions.