

# Harvest

Evangelical Free Church

November 1, 2009

Join us in being on mission with God!

### OUR VISION

To continually mature and grow as a united body of Jesus-imitators who live out God's greatest commandment to "Love" by exalting God and serving one another, and His greatest commission to "Go" by reaching into and shaping our local, regional, and global communities.

## "The Poverty of Good Intentions"

*James 2:14-26*

### Getting Started

*After an introductory time, discuss the following questions in your group or class.*

Q: Share about something kind you have done for someone else the past two weeks? What was their response? How did it make you feel?

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### Thinking about Friendship

1. Pollsters ask Americans lots of questions about themselves. For example, this time of year they ask people what they intend to spend on Christmas gifts. What is the problem with building plans on what people claim to be true about themselves?

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2. Look at some of the claims below. Identify the issues that must be explored in order to evaluate the claims.

- I am an independent, neither a Republican or Democrat.
- I believe in living a healthy lifestyle.
- I try to keep informed about national events.
- I'm a good parent.
- I support global missions.
- I am a good spouse.

3. What questions come to your mind when you get to know someone who claims to have "trusted Christ" years ago, but whose lifestyle is no different from other people who have nothing to do with Christ?

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**James 2:14-26**

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. <sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder. <sup>20</sup> You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

4. Write the question James raises in verse 14 in your own words. What is he asking? What is he *not* asking?

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5. Describe the situation of the person pictured in verse 15. What do you think might have brought a first century Christian into this kind of desperate circumstance?

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6. What is good about the response of the person in verse 16?

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7. Are there any circumstances where this kind of response to a need is all that God expects of us?

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8. What is deficient about the response in verse 16? What part of the statement of the person who speaks in verse 15 does James suggest is not really true?

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9. James' major argument is in verse 17. What is his point? (See verse 26 as well.)

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10. Why do you think he uses the word "dead"? Is it something that was alive and died, or something that never had life?

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## The Poverty of Good Intentions

<sup>22</sup>You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup>And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup>You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup>In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? <sup>26</sup>As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

11. Verse 18 states a possible counter-argument. What is the position of the person who doesn't agree with James' assertion in verse 17?

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12. What is the problem with accepting the idea that some people demonstrate their faith through their deeds, but others don't need to do that?

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13. **Verse 19 relates to an affirmation of the *shema*, the statement that Jews recited daily. It comes from Deuteronomy 6:4, which says, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!"**

How does James' observation in verse 19 refute the idea that subscribing to a certain ancient truth is sufficient for life-giving faith?

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14. Who does James use as a model of someone whose faith involved works? (See verse 21.) Why is it important to remember that the test of Abraham in Genesis 22 followed the covenant in chapter 12?

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15. How does James picture the interaction between faith and works in verse 22?

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Reaching Up and Reaching Out

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16. What did God do in Abraham's case that demonstrated that Abraham's faith was sufficient to reconcile him to God?

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17. How do you think Jews might have reacted to James' illustration of Rahab? Why do you think he picks an unconventional person as an example of faith?

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18. **Evangelicals maintain that we are saved by faith and not from works. But they also assert that faith, if it is authentic, produces behavioral changes (works) that can be seen and measured. Jesus himself said, "By their fruit you will recognize them." (See Matthew 7:16).**

What are some of the measurable ways in which Christians can reflect authentic faith in our day and age? What would you expect to see as evidence of authentic faith in the life of a modern believer?

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19. How would you disciple a young Christian to see the importance of works without shifting their faith to them as a substitute for trust in Christ?

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20. What are some ways you can apply this passage to your life?

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