

**OPEN THE CONVERSATION**

Welcome everyone to the conversation. Begin by asking group members to share, what are some examples of foods that wouldn’t seem to go together but are actually delicious together and complement each other well?

Some things we read in Scripture may appear on the surface to be opposites, but God and His truths are perfectly consistent and aligned.

**INTRODUCTION**

**When we dig into Scripture, we see alignment and continuity in the revelation of truth. The book of James is full of practical wisdom and convicting truths about how faith shows up in real life for the Christ follower. The beauty of James' perspective further unpacks what faith looks like. James was the half-brother of Jesus and wrote in Jerusalem in the early 60's AD, about 30 years after Jesus' resurrection. He was killed for following Jesus not long after he wrote. led the church in Jerusalem for about 20 years before being killed for following Jesus, not long after he wrote the book of James, a letter full of practical teaching.**

***READ James 2:14-26***

1. What’s the answer to James’s question in verse 14: “Can that faith save him?” Put the WHY into your own words.
2. What’s the answer to James’s question in verse 16: “. . . what good is that?” Put the WHY in your own words.
3. What’s the difference between loving people and attempting to earn salvation by doing good works? How can you know when you’re doing one over the other?
4. How have you experienced faith in God naturally transitioning into loving God and loving others? How has your faith informed the way you perceive others?
5. Look at verse 21. Was Abraham right with God before or after he offered up Isaac as a sacrifice? Explain your answer.
6. How did Abraham’s actions give evidence of his faith?
7. As a group, come up with a one-sentence description of the biblical relationship between faith and works.
8. If time allows, work through a few more of the related Scriptures in the Extended Cut together before wrapping up.

**WRAP UP**

**What does saving faith look like?**

**Ask the group to share some biblical truths discussed today that they are grateful for, and some that challenge them.**

Allow a time for group members to express their faith in God with words. This expression can be verbal or silent, but encourage participants to speak intentionally to God about all of the things they believe in faith to be true—things like salvation, the forgiveness of sins, the hope of eternal life, and so on. Take a few minutes to express your gratitude to God for His salvation together.
*Ask for any prayer requests, and pray for one another.*

*\*Encourage anyone with questions to stay after and talk with you. We don’t want to create doubt about students’ salvation, but we must not shy away from asking each other as believers to examine our faith regularly and ask God for more of it. Students may have deep realizations that their faith needs to grow-this is good conviction and normal for the journey of a Christ follower! Some may realize they have never surrendered their lives to Christ. Listen prayerfully and guide students to next steps that lead them toward Christ. It’s best to take the opportunity to guide them toward a point of honesty with God.*

**EXTENDED CUT**

Let’s look at a few more passages to see the theme of genuine saving faith and how works are a vital part throughout the Old Testament and

We can also consider 1 Samuel 16:7. “…For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

And 1 Samuel 15:22 Speaking to the people of God, “Samuel said, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”

Speaking to his people about the future, as God looks forward to gathering His people through Christ, God said, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Ezekiel 36:26

After studying the words of James on faith and works, let’s consider also what Paul had to say. Ask three volunteers to read Romans 3:27-28, 4:5-8, and 5:1-2.

* How would you summarize Paul’s teaching on salvation and faith?
* What does Paul have to say about the connection between faith and works?
* How do we reconcile what Paul wrote with James’s words in verses James 2:14-18?

We can see throughout the Bible that God values the intention, posture, and inclination of the heart of a person even more than He values the good works we do. This has always been God’s priority, and fits with the gospel truth that we can’t earn our salvation by works. But rather, our faith gives evidence of its existence and vitality through works.

There’s a blinking warning light here! The warning is, if we say we have a heart of faith, but there’s no evidence in our life of the increasing fruit of the Spirit or actions that build God’s Kingdom, we need to examine with God using these Scriptures whether our faith is genuine. James states faith without works is dead. This doesn’t just mean faith without works is tired or needs a little more energy. It means faith without works can’t save. A person claiming to have faith but lacking works is spiritually as lifeless as a corpse. An inactive faith, entombed in a creed affirmed by the intellect, has no more usefulness than a body with no heartbeat or breath. James did not intend to belittle correct doctrinal views, but he demanded practical holiness as an evidence of real faith. James presses us to examine ourselves, (asking God to examine us) and evaluate the state of our faith according to these truths.

I sometimes need help discerning the intent of my own heart. I need God’s help in knowing what my true motives are—so I’m continuing to learn this is something we need to sit with Him about in prayer. We can ask God to reveal truths about ourselves that we need to confess and surrender to Him. He knows us better than we can know ourselves and wants to make us more healthy and whole spiritually, emotionally, and mentally as we surrender even the motives of our hearts to Him. Part of our salvation journey is the continual surrender He leads us to daily. It’s such good news that God waits compassionately to journey with us and welcome us into His arms all along the way.