

Discussion Starter

What is the most uncomfortable thing that God has ever asked you to do? Did you do it? If so, did you find that doing it affected your faith or relationship with God at all?

Worship Together

Ask everyone to sit with their eyes closed and try to picture the scene, as someone reads Revelation 4 through slowly. Take a few moments in quiet to reflect on the majesty and holiness of our God. Ask someone else to read Hebrews 10:22 and then spend a few minutes offering prayers of praise and worship.

Bible Study

"It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone."
John Calvin

Read James 2:14-26

This short passage has been the cause of much debate and controversy over the years. At first glance, James's statement that "a person is justified by what he does..." (James 2:24) is in direct contradiction to Paul's assertion that "a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law..." (Romans 3:28). However, when we look at the contexts of what the two authors are writing we find that they are answering two very different misunderstandings. Paul addresses the reader who believes that they will stand justified before God because they have obeyed the Old Testament law and tells them that they need to place their faith in God's grace, not their own actions. James confronts those who think that giving mere intellectual assent to God's word ("Oh, sure, I believe in God...") would be enough to make them Christians.

Discuss the following questions...

- In verses 14-16 James lays down a basic yardstick of faith – if we see a brother or sister in need, are we doing anything to meet those needs? How would we apply these verses in our 21st century church setting? Do you think that we are meeting this yardstick in our church, or our small group?
- In what way was Abraham's faith "made complete by what he did"? If you have not all worked through the meditations you may want to look at Genesis 15:1-6 and Genesis 22:1-18.
- Do you think that *all* of our Christian activity falls into the category of actions that make our faith complete by what we do?
- To what extent do you agree with John Calvin's statement above?
- How would you answer someone who says, "Of course I'm a Christian, I believe in God and Jesus"?
- How would you apply the teaching of this passage to, say, someone who is bedridden and unable to go out and "do good works"?

Pray Together

Read Matthew 5:14-16. In twos or threes name one person who you would like to see and recognise the difference that your faith makes to your life. This may be a family member, friend, colleague or neighbour who you are wanting to witness to. Pray for that person, and that God would use you in the situation that you are in to be a light to them. Maybe you could commit to keep praying for each other over the time until you next meet and then share any answers to your prayers.

Meditations

A few brief thoughts to ponder on before your group discussion.

Read James 2:18

If your non-Christian friends were asked whether or not you are serious about your faith, what aspects of your life might they point to which demonstrate your faith? Are there aspects of the way you behave that they might use to argue that your faith is not really very important to you? Bring your thoughts to God in prayer.

Read Genesis 15:1-6, Genesis 22:1-18 and James 2:21-23

As you read the passages above, reflect upon the kind of faith that Abraham had. What was his confidence based upon? How did his faith and his actions work together?

Read James 2:22

Where do you see your own faith and actions working together? Where do you see them pulling in opposite directions? Spend some time bringing these areas of your life to God in prayer.

Read James 2:23 and John 15:15

Reflect for a while upon what it means to be a friend of God. Do you ever think of yourself in these terms? Ask the Lord to help you to live in the light of His friendship.

Read Joshua 2:1-11 and James 2:25

Meditate on the story of Rahab. What was the nature of her faith in God? Why is she picked out as a particular example of faith in action?

Read James 2:26

This verse provides a terse summary of this week's passage. Ask the Lord to examine your faith again, and to show you where it is alive and where it needs to have some life breathed into it. Turn your thoughts to prayer.