

JAMES: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

Week 2:
Where's the Evidence?

This includes:

1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

Like a mirror that points directly to our heart, our good deeds reflect our faith from within. And the absence of deeds serves as a lack of evidence to our faith, according to James. In this lesson, participants will be challenged to move from a solely cognitive faith to a faith that is demonstrated by action.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. WHAT: The evidence that we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ is found through our deeds.
2. WHY: To merely testify that we believe is not enough; we must demonstrate our faith through the life we lead.
3. HOW: This lesson will encourage college-age people to examine the actions of their lives and see how it compares to the faith they profess.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

James 2:14-19

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Matthew 7:13-23 and 1 John 2:3-6

TEACHING PREP

The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with participants, you'll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your lesson.

Read James 2:14-19.

In this passage, we are challenged with the idea that if our faith is not accompanied by good deeds, then it is dead. Many churchgoers, and many college-age people, will boldly declare that they follow Jesus as Lord. But as James teaches, we see evidence



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of our faith through our deeds. We are challenged that to only claim to have faith is not enough, but that our faith must be demonstrated through the way we live. This week's lesson will challenge your participants to evaluate the fruits of their lives, to determine if their faith is backed up through the evidence of deeds.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

Text Message Questions

We've provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to participants prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- What is the evidence of a Christian's faith? Hope you're ready to share your thoughts at group tonight.
- As Christians, how much do our actions matter? Let's talk about it as a group tonight!

Continuing the Conversation

We've provided you with some thoughts below that you can post on your blog or a social networking site following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage you and your college-age participants to continue the conversation after the lesson ends. Feel free to edit and customize the content to fit your ministry needs.

Saying you're a Christian isn't the same as living like a Christian. How do we know when faith is genuine? James tells us that professing to know God is not enough, but that our faith is demonstrated through our deeds. Take a few minutes to read through James 2 this week, and evaluate your life. Is there substantial evidence to back up your declaration of following Christ? As others have said before, if you were in a courtroom on trial for being a Christian, would they have enough evidence to find you guilty?



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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]

As you begin, welcome your participants and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then ASK:

- *Imagine meeting someone who claimed to be a surgeon or a professional athlete or an artist. Would you willingly believe that person? How would you know he or she was telling the truth?*
- *What is the evidence that someone has come to faith in Jesus?*
- *Do you think there is a difference between belief in Jesus and following Jesus? Why or why not?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *James boldly and directly addresses those who claim to follow Jesus yet fail to demonstrate this faith through their good deeds. He doesn't call us to judge the people around us, but he does call us to examine our own lives to see if there's a disconnect between our words and our actions. He offers an opportunity for a spiritual self-exam.*



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If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you'd like to share it with other small group leaders, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING GUIDE



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The goal of the Teaching Points is to help participants capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen here are (1) Faith requires more than words, (2) Genuine faith produces good deeds, and (3) Faith without good deeds is dead.



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Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.



Read James 2:14-19 together as a group. Consider having one or more of the participants read the text.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *According to what James wrote, Jesus isn't looking for followers who simply will claim to be his followers—Jesus wants people whose faith is demonstrated through their deeds. Let's dig deeper into what this passage reveals.*

1. Faith requires more than words

ASK:

- *Does our current society make it easy to be a words-only Christian, instead of a Christian whose faith is demonstrated through actions? In other words, is it too easy to be a Christian these days? Why or why not?*
- *What thoughts and emotions come to you when you read this passage?*
- *In verse 19, James uses strong language when comparing our faith to the faith of demons. What point do you think he was making?*
- *Jesus' first disciples knew that to follow him, their lives would have to change. They weren't given the option of claiming to follow Jesus, while continuing to live the way they once did. How different is this from our modern-day situation?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Scripture clearly teaches that our good deeds do not save us from the eternal consequences of our sin; they merely give evidence to the things that we say we believe. Jesus wants followers who will put their faith into action through the practice of deeds. Being a Christian isn't about following more rules or agreeing to another code of conduct. But if we genuinely love and follow Jesus, it ought to be seen through the way we live our lives.*

2. Genuine faith produces good deeds

ASK:

- *Look at verse 16. What are some specific modern-day examples of this scenario?*
- *James talks about having both faith and good deeds, that one gives evidence to the other. Explain the imbalance of someone who only has faith or someone who only has good deeds.*
- *How is a faith that produces good deeds more powerful than a faith that doesn't?*



SAY SOMETHING LIKE: James connects our faith to things as simple as helping others with food and clothing. Again, it's important to realize that we don't earn our salvation or God's approval by doing good things. Instead, when we have been changed by the love and mercy of Jesus Christ, it overflows into our daily lives and is shown through things as simple as giving food to the hungry and clothes to the naked.

3. Faith without good deeds is dead

ASK:

- What thoughts come to mind when you see James use words like *dead* and *useless* in verse 17?
- James declares that faith without good deeds is dead—but are good deeds without faith also dead? Why or why not?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Unfortunately, there are many people who have confessed to know Jesus but have a dead faith as defined by this passage. The good news is that we don't have to be people who only claim to know Jesus with our words but not our deeds; we can lead lives that point the way back to God through our words AND our actions.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

ASK:

- Read 1 John 2:3-6. What thoughts and emotions come to mind when reading this passage? Explain.
- Verse 6 says that if we claim to live in Jesus, we must walk as he did. Give two practical examples of something Jesus did that you could follow after.
- Read Matthew 7:13-23. Jesus tells us that we know a good tree by its good fruit. What types of things do you think God would consider good fruit? Why?
- When thinking of your own life, which verses that you've read today have brought conviction from the Holy Spirit? What verses have brought comfort?
- Jesus said that the road of discipleship is narrow and few will find it. Do you find this encouraging or discouraging? Why?

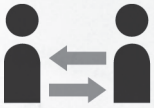


APPLICATION

Ask participants to form groups of two or three for these questions.

ASK:

- *Do any areas of your life lack the evidence of deeds or good fruit? In other words, are there areas in which you are just talking the talk but not walking the walk?*
- *Are areas of your life currently producing bad fruit? What actions would you need to take in order to prune the bad fruit from your life?*
- *When thinking of your own life, what parts of your faith are dead because they are not backed with the evidence of deeds?*
- *On a piece of paper, draw a line and write “good fruit” on one side and “bad fruit” on the other. List out the areas of your life that fall under each category. Keep this list in your Bible, and ask God to help you eliminate the bad fruit of your life and produce more good fruit.*



PAIR SHARE

SUMMARY

End your lesson here. Provide participants with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles individuals are facing, and (4) the big picture of your ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.



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SCRIPTURE TO PROCESS

Encourage and/or challenge participants to engage with the passage below. We encourage you to return to these passages throughout the series to illustrate their point of connection to God's story.



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What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 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 is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:14-17).

