

5. HOW FAITH WORKS

REFLECTION

Begin your study by sharing thoughts on this question.

1. Think of a time when you saw a group of people rally around someone in need. What motivated the group to help that person?

BIBLE READING

Read James 2:14–26 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

¹⁴My brothers and sisters, if people say they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save them? ¹⁵A brother or sister in Christ might need clothes or food. ¹⁶If you say to that person, "God be with you! I hope you stay warm and get plenty to eat," but you do not give what that person needs, your words are worth nothing. ¹⁷In the same way, faith that is alone—that does nothing—is dead.

¹⁸Someone might say, "You have faith, but I have deeds." Show me your faith without doing anything, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹You believe there is one God. Good! But the demons believe that, too, and they tremble with fear.

²⁰You foolish person! Must you be shown that faith that does nothing is worth nothing? ²¹Abraham, our ancestor, was made right with God by what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. ²²So you see that Abraham's faith and the things he did worked together. His faith was made perfect by what he did. ²³This shows the full meaning of the Scripture that says:

NKJV

¹⁴What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? ¹⁷Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! ²⁰But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? ²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ²²Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? ²³And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. ²⁴You see

Abraham's faith, and that faith made him right with God." And Abraham was called God's friend. ²⁴So you see that people are made right with God by what they do, not by faith only.

²⁵Another example is Rahab, a prostitute, who was made right with God by something she did. She welcomed the spies into her home and helped them escape by a different road. ²⁶Just as a person's body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead!

then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

²⁵Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

²⁶For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

DISCOVERY

Explore the Bible reading by discussing these questions.

2. Why is faith without works dead?
3. How is living faith demonstrated?
4. How do some people rationalize inactive faith?
5. Explain why mere belief in God is not enough.
6. How did Abraham and Rahab demonstrate their faith?
7. What steps can you take to practice true Christianity?
8. Why is it important to help others?
9. How is helping others part of a disciplined spiritual life?

PRAYER

Father, thank you for your perfect plan of salvation. Thank you for providing a way for us to spend eternity with you. Until then, show us the good work you want us to do, then give us the strength to do it.

JOURNALING

Take a few moments to record your personal insights from this lesson.

How do faith and works go together in my life?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

10. List ways you can reach out to someone in need.

11. How does spiritual discipline help us to practice true Christianity?

12. How can you develop spiritual discipline in your life?

For more Bible passages on faith and works, see John 14:12; Philippians 2:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; Hebrews 6:9–12; 2 Peter 1:5–7.