

BIBLE DISCUSSION GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS

In preparation for Sunday, Sept. 4, 2011

Passage: James 2:14-26

Memory Passage: James 2:17

DAY 1 – ASK FOR INSIGHT

READ THE PASSAGE

- (a) **Read James 2:14-26.** This is the central passage of James' book. Take a moment to create an outline for this passage. What is the main point James is making in these verses?
- (b) What 2 important questions does James ask in v. 14? How are these questions related to 2:1-13? How are they related to what we have learned so far in James? How would you answer each of these questions right now?
- (c) What does James mean by "works"? What is your initial reaction to hearing the words "faith" and "works" so closely tied together? What verses come to mind that might seem, at first glance, to say the opposite of what James is suggesting in v. 14 (see Rom. 3:21-4:21 & Eph. 2:8-9 if none come to your mind)?
- (d) If you are "someone (who) says he (or she) has faith" (v. 14), write down the works that your faith "has" (v. 17). Would James (and therefore God) consider your faith to be authentic? Upon what basis do you make your judgment?
- (e) *Family:* Explain to your family that this week we will be looking at what authentic faith looks like. **Read James 2:14** and explain that "works" are actions that give evidence that one has authentic faith. Then guide your family through **James 1:1-2:13** and identify all of the "works" that we have already observed, both positive & negative (i.e. Positively: authentic faith both hears & does the word [1:22] & negatively: authentic faith does not show partiality [2:1].) Write these works that mark authentic faith on your white board and remind your family that doing these things does not make one's faith authentic, but if one's faith is authentic their lives will be marked by these things as a result of that faith.

DAY 2 – ASK FOR INSIGHT

READ THE PASSAGE

- (a) **Read James 2:14-26.** James gives us 4 examples/illustrations of faith in these verses, 2 that illustrate a dead, non-saving, inauthentic faith, and 2 that illustrate a living, saving, authentic faith. Find these 4 examples, write down the verses in which they are contained, and summarize their content in your own words.
- (b) The first two examples are summarized as being no good ("what good is that?" in v. 16) and useless (v. 20). Why does James evaluate these examples of "works" in this way (cf. vs. 17 & 20)?
- (c) James enters an objection with which he wants to interact by way of an imaginary questioner in v. 18a when he writes: "But someone will say, 'You have faith & I have works.'" Explain this objection and then explain James' answer (vs. 18b-19).
- (d) The statement of monotheism (The belief that we worship one God: mono=one; theos=God; ism=a system of belief or a philosophy) is foundational to the Christian faith and is found in both the OT & NT (Deut. 6:4-6; Ex. 15:11; Is. 45:5-6, 21-22; Mark 12:29-20; Rom. 3:30; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19). Why does James say that this profession is not enough to evidence saving faith? How is the demons' profession an example of the objection found in v. 18a?
- (e) *Family:* Gather a serving of a food that your family will recognize as one of your personal favorites. Start talking about how much you dislike this particular food. Then, as you devour it, showing by your actions that you absolutely love the food, talk about how much you dislike the taste, the texture, the smell, everything you can think of to dislike. Then begin a discussion with your family about how your words and actions did not match up. Ask them what they would have thought you were eating if they could only hear your words, and what they would have thought you were eating if they could only see your expressions and actions. Then **Read James 2:14-17** and explain how the action (work) of true saving faith would never think that speaking to a cold & hungry person about being warmed and filled would be the right thing to do. Authentic faith will act to warm and feed them. Just like your words did not match your actions, neither would these words match true faith.

DAY 3 – ASK FOR INSIGHT

READ THE PASSAGE

- (a) **Read James 2:21-24, Romans 4:1-12, Gen. 15:1-6 Gen. 17:1-14, & Gen. 22:1-12.** Read these passages and explain why James' statement in 1:21 about Abraham's justification does not contradict Paul's statement in Romans 4:2-3 about Abraham's justification. You should interact with the verses in Genesis that each person quotes, the timing of the events in each of the passages, and each one's use of the word "justify" (i.e. how do Paul & James differ in their use of "justify"?)
- (b) *Family:* **Read James 2:21-24.** Explain that James is turning toward examples of authentic faith and begins with the example of Abraham and willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac (you can either tell this story to them or read it from Gen. 22). Explain that James uses the word "justify" to mean "a demonstration of the truth that Abraham has been justified" (justified means that one is declared righteous by faith in Christ's work on the cross). Ask: "Why did Abraham's actions show that his faith was authentic? How do we know that 'faith was active along with his works' of willing obedience?" Then **Read Gen.**

15:6 and explain that many years before Gen. 22 God had already declared Abraham righteous based on his faith in God, so his actions in Gen. 22 reveal that he was a man acting in accordance with authentic faith, just as James says in James 2:22-24.

DAY 4 – ASK FOR INSIGHT

READ THE PASSAGE

(a) **Read James 2:14-26 & Josh.2:1-22.** James' second example of authentic faith is Rahab. Why are her actions an example of faith that saves? How did she experience salvation?

(b) James has shown us 2 examples of a faith that is dead, or not authentic. What other examples of dead faith (a faith that is without works, a faith that cannot save) can you think of? In what ways are you guilty of professing a faith that is not authenticated by works? In what ways are you guilty of seeing the needs of others, maybe even talking about them, but not acting to meet them? Spend some time repenting of this kind of dead faith and ask God to grant you a new desire to exercise the love, service, and compassion of Christ towards others, works that are produced by the faith you profess. Remember, Jesus said that we who are His will be known by the world around us, and it is by our love that we will be known (John 13:35).

(c) James has also given us 2 examples of authentic faith. What are other examples of works that authentic faith will produce? Describe a local body of Christ in which everyone's faith is authentic and works abound to prove it? In (b) you prayed for God to grant you a new desire to exercise an authentic faith. Write down what God revealed to you and make a commitment to Him to move past thinking/speaking about good works and on to acting and doing the word of God.

(d) *Family:* **Read Josh. 2:1-22 & 6:15-25 (or tell the story without reading all of the verses)** and discuss this wonderful story with your family, drawing attention to the courageous faith shown by Rahab, the works that her faith exhibited, and the faithful God who provided for her and her family's salvation. **Then read Hebrews 11:31** to show the other (besides James 2:25) NT affirmation of her faith being an authentic faith.

DAY 5 – ASK FOR INSIGHT

READ THE PASSAGE

(a) **Read James 2:24 & Eph. 2:8-10.** Now that you have studied James 2:14-26, what does James mean when he writes that "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone"? How would you respond to someone who said, "James is adding something to faith in order to produce salvation"?

(b) How does Paul in Eph. 2 describe the process of salvation? What is his stance on works with regards to salvation? To what kind of "works" does he refer, and are they different from the "works" about which James writes? If so, how are they different and how can one tell the difference between these 2 types of works?

(c) How does Eph. 2:10 inform our understanding of the agreement between Paul & James in these passages? How does this verse help us understand how we must "work" as a result of our faith? What is our role in these "works"?

(d) Write down at least 3 concrete applications that you have learned this week and place this list somewhere prominent so that you will see it daily and be reminded of the application of this text.

(e) *Family:* Lead your family through the discussion & application found in (a) through (d) above.

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Authentic Faith Works!