

Message Discussion Guide

FAITH SACRIFICES

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

September 20, 2009

James 2:20-24

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Invite learners to share about a time when they began a relationship with another person, whether a friendship or a romantic relationship. Ask the following questions:

- How did your knowledge of that person change as you began to know him/her better?
- How did you change from knowing **about** that person to **knowing** that person?

Explain that today we will discuss true faith in Christ that is not an empty knowledge or belief.

Option 2

Invite learners to explain the difference between a wedding and a marriage. Encourage learners to discuss the major differences between legalizing a marriage and living out that marriage day-in and day-out.

Explain that today we will discuss how beginning a relationship with Christ and living out that faith differ in their foundation and expression.

Review the Message . . .

Two Pictures of Faith...

- Dead faith...
 - Which does not save.
- Living faith...
 - Which does save.

Discussion

- Enlist two learners to read James 2:20-24 and Romans 3:28. What is the apparent contradiction between Paul's writing in Romans and James in his letter?
- Explain that Paul wrote Romans to combat the idea that a person's works or obedience to the Law was the source of salvation, whereas James was combating the idea that easy, intellectual faith, like that of the demons, was true faith.
- Enlist another learner to read James 2:19. Describe the faith of these demons. Is their faith a saving faith?

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- What is the difference between the non-saving faith of the demons and the saving faith that Paul describes in Romans 3?
- To what kind of faith was James referring to in James 2:24?

Application . . .

- How do we often demonstrate dead faith in our lives?
- How do we defraud others into believing that empty faith in Christ is enough for salvation?
- What do our actions demonstrate about where we place the foundation of our faith?

Two Pictures of Righteousness...

- Positional Righteousness...
 - How we stand before God.
- Practical Righteousness...
 - How we live before God.

Discussion

- Enlist two learners to read James 2:23, and Genesis 15:6. Explain that this instance of Abraham believing God's promises was the instance that James refers to in Verse 23 where he describes Abraham's righteousness.
- What works did Abraham do to earn this righteousness? What was the basis of Abraham's righteousness?
- Explain that the righteousness in this instance provided Abraham a permanent right standing before God—he was justified once and for all before God.
- Enlist two learners to read James 2:21 and Genesis 22:1,12. What is the significance of God's declaration that He was "testing" Abraham's faith?
- How is Abraham's demonstration of faith different from his exercising of faith in God for righteousness?

Application . . .

- Why do we often still try to earn righteousness outside of our faith in Christ?
- How do we take advantage of our right standing before God by neglecting practical righteousness in our everyday lives?
- How should our standing before God spur us on to live righteously?
- How do our lives serve as "tests" of our faith?

Two Pictures of Works...

- Works fueled by the flesh...
 - Which do not honor God.
- Works that are the fruit of faith...
 - Which bring great glory to God.

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- How do they work?
 - Faith _____ creates _____ works.
 - Works _____ complete _____ faith.

Discussion

- When we think of the idea of “works” in the Bible, do we tend to think of works as negative or positive?
- Enlist two learners to read 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and Galatians 5:6. In these verses, how is the idea of “works” presented?
- Read James 2:22. James referred to works of faith in this verse. How does his designation of works of faith indicate that he is referring to positive works?
- What does James indicate is a result of these kinds of fruits of faith?

Application . . .

- How do we neglect the importance of demonstrating fruits of our faith?
- How do we downplay the part that fruits of faith play in recognizing the authenticity of a person’s faith?
- When we give our testimony, do we place more importance on what God saved us from or what God’s grace has done in our lives through faith? What might this focus indicate about our desire to demonstrate God’s work in our lives?

Two Pictures of Justification...

- Initial Justification...
 - The inception of the Christian’s life.
 - The danger Paul wants us to avoid:
Thinking that works are a necessary basis or means of our salvation.
- Final Justification...
 - The confirmation of the Christian’s life.
 - The danger James wants us to avoid:
Thinking that works are not necessary as evidence of our salvation.

Discussion

- Enlist two learners to read James 2:24 and Romans 5:1. What is the difference in the verb tense of these two verses concerning justification? Point out that Romans 5:1 indicates justification happened in the past, and James 2:24 indicates that justification is happening in the present.
- How do the verb tenses give clues to the meanings of these terms? What is the difference in the meaning of justification in these verses?
- Note that similar to the differences in righteousness, James refers to justification that is a continual confirmation of faith in Christ, as opposed to justification that occurred one time in the past to give a right standing before God.

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Application . . .

- How do our lives give witness to our initial justification by God?
- How do we know if our faith is genuine or one that mimics that of the believing demons?
- Why might we get defensive about needing to show the genuineness of our faith to others?

Two Truths to Remember...

- Salvation is by faith.
 - By initial faith in Christ, we are made right before God the Father.
 - Christ is the basis of our salvation.
 - Faith is the means of our salvation.
 - This gives us radical confidence.
- Faith works.
 - By continual faith in Christ, we walk with God as friend.
 - This results in radical obedience.
 - We trust God wholeheartedly.
 - We follow God sacrificially.

Application . . .

- How can we sum up the basis of our faith in Christ?
- What role does faith have in our salvation?
- How can we sum up the role that works play in our lives?
- What is the relationship between our faith and our works?