

# The Life of Faith

Advance in Faith 1 – Unit 5

## Week 5 Faith's Expression (2)



## Introduction

The purpose of this session is:

- *To identify the ways in which faith finds expression in our daily lives and encourage believers toward intentional expressions of faith in both word and deed.*

## 1. Faith and Works

James 2:14-26 (NLT)

*“What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.” You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless? Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” He was even called the friend of God. So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone. Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works”.*

This can be a confusing passage of scripture because it appears as though James is saying that we cannot be justified by faith alone and that works are essential to our salvation. Of course Paul the apostle taught throughout the New Testament that salvation and justification are indeed by faith alone and that no man can be justified by works (Ephesians 2:8-10) so how do we reconcile what James is saying with what Paul has said in the rest of the New Testament?

While it appears at face value that James is speaking here about “faith and works” he is really speaking about “faith and faith” or more particularly, two kinds of faith – one that produces works and one that doesn't.

What James is essentially saying is that when faith is authentic it will naturally manifest itself in the form of works. If somebody claims to have faith in God but there is no behavioural evidence for that claim then chances are good that the person's faith is not genuine. Works are the fruit of authentic faith.

In fact all authentic belief is evidenced by behaviour. That means that people can best tell what we truly believe by the way we behave, i.e. by the things we do rather than the things we say.

Paul explains the relationship between faith and works this way:

### **Ephesians 2:8-10**

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*

Here Paul is saying that although we are not saved by works we are saved for works – “good” works that God has prepared for us to engage in.

The Bible speaks about two kinds of works: “dead” works (**Heb. 6:1**) and “good” works (**Eph. 2:10**). “Dead” works are the works we engage in to try and earn the favour of God, to merit His mercy, to show Him that we deserve His love and His grace and of course they are of no significance to God whatsoever. God is not the least bit impressed with our weak and futile attempts to prove our own worthiness. In the same way that “faith without works is dead”, “works without faith” are also dead.

### **Dead works = works without faith.**

“Good” works on the other hand are the works we engage in as a result of the new spiritual reality that has been manifest inside of us through the new birth and faith in Christ.

**Works as a Witness:****Matthew 5:13-16**

*“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Through this statement Jesus is pointing out that as His disciples we are called by God to engage in good works as a visible outward demonstration of the invisible inward reality that we have experienced through the new birth. We are to “let our light shine before men” he says and how do we do that? Through engaging in good works.

**1 Peter 2:11-13**

*“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

**John 5:36**

*“But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.”*

That statement was true of Jesus and it is certainly true of us. The works that we do bear witness of us and our works either testify for us or against us. They either affirm the authenticity of our faith or undermine the authenticity of our faith.

**Hebrews 10:25**

*“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

In the context of the assembling of ourselves together we are mandated to stir one another up towards love and good works. We have a mutual responsibility towards one another to ensure that we are actively demonstrating the genuineness of our faith through engaging in good works both towards the family of God and towards the outside world. We have to provoke one another towards that end.

## 2. Faith and Obedience to the Will of God

### 1 John 5:13-14

*“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him”.*

Acting on faith requires knowledge of God's will. You can only believe God for what you know to be His will. If you attempt something that God has not told you to you will be taking a step of presumption not a step of faith. A step of faith in action is a step of obedience to the known will of God. (E.g. Getting out of the boat and walking on the water was Peter's idea / initiative but Peter could only get out of the boat and walk on the water because Jesus told him to come to Him).

**Faith begins where the will of God is known**

### Conclusion:

In summary: faith finds its expression in multiple ways not least of which is “good works”. These works are evidence of a changed heart and bear witness to the new reality of faith within. Faith is also expressed as confident obedience to the revealed will of God.

### Group Discussion:

1. Has God ever required you to take a bold step of faith and do something you felt afraid or inadequate to do? If so share your experience with the group. What fears and doubts did you have and what was the outcome of that step?
2. Faith in action requires knowledge of the will of God. How do you discern the will of God in your life?
3. How has faith in God (trust in the integrity and consistency of His character) changed the way you behave / live from day-to-day?

### Memory verse:

#### Ephesians 2:8-10 (NKJV)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”.