

## FAITH THAT WORKS

(James 2:14-26)

1. **REMEMBERING** Review the three misunderstandings of how one is saved from Sunday's message listed below. Where and when have you encountered these misunderstandings in others?
  - WORKS → SALVATION
  - FAITH + WORKS → SALVATION
  - FAITH → SALVATION – WORKS
2. **REFLECTING** What might be some reasons people hold to these beliefs and remain entrenched in misunderstanding?
3. **DISCOVERING** Read James 2:14-26 aloud and answer the questions that follow. Remember that James tackles the third equation above and teaches the fourth equation below.
  - FAITH → SALVATION + WORKS

*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no works? Can such faith save him? <sup>15</sup>Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup>If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup>In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. <sup>18</sup>But someone will say, "You have faith; I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*

*<sup>19</sup>You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. <sup>20</sup>You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without works is useless? <sup>21</sup>Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup>You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup>And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup>You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.*

*<sup>25</sup>In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? <sup>26</sup>As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.*

Review your understanding of how this equation differs from the others.

- What several issues does James address?
  - What conclusions about these issues does James propose?
  - James uses the word "justify" differently than other biblical others. What does it mean the way he uses it?
  - Read the Willard quote aloud on what he calls false, "bar code faith." How does this modern technology illustrate what James is teaching?
4. **CONNECTING** What changes has Christ produced in your own life to assure you that you possess the living faith James describes?
  5. **RESPONDING** What will you do this week to thank God that your faith is alive and well and/or support your church which encourages your ongoing understanding and faith development?

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Think of the bar codes now used on goods in most stores. The scanner responds only to the bar code. It makes no difference what is in the bottle or the package that bears it, or whether the sticker is on the "right" one or not. The calculator responds through its electronic eye to the bar code and totally disregards everything else. If the ice cream sticker is on the dog food, the dog food is ice cream, so far as the scanner knows or cares.... There is something about the Christian that works like the bar code. Some ritual, some belief, or some association with a group affects God the way the bar code affects the scanner. Perhaps there has occurred a moment of mental assent to a creed, or an association entered into with a church. God "scans" it, and forgiveness floods forth. An appropriate amount of righteousness is shifted from Christ's account to our account in the bank of heaven, and all our debts are paid. We are, accordingly, "saved." Our guilt is erased. How could we not be Christians...? Life now being lived has no necessary connection with being a Christian as long as the "bar code" does its job. We do hear a lot of discussion concerning what good Christians do and do not do. But of course, it is not necessary to be a good Christian in order to be forgiven. That's the main point of the bar code, and it is incorrect.

(Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*)