

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

JAMES 1-5 (KJV) · AUGUST 26, 2026

FAITH THAT BREATHES: HOW GRACE PRODUCES LIVING OBEDIENCE

1. FOCUS PASSAGE

James 2:14–26

Key Verse:

“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” — James 2:17

2. BIG IDEA / MAIN POINT

Genuine saving faith is a divine gift of grace that never remains alone; it inevitably reveals itself through a transformed life of active, loving obedience.

3. SESSION OVERVIEW (FOR THE LEADER)

- **Suggested Time:** 60–90 minutes
- **Goal of the Study:** To help believers understand that we are saved by grace through faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone—it naturally produces good works that glorify God and serve others.
- **Leader Notes:** James can sound intense or demanding at first read. Some group members may wonder if James contradicts Paul’s teaching that we are justified by faith apart from works (e.g., Romans 3:28). Keep in mind that Paul addresses the *root* of justification before God (faith alone), while James addresses the *fruit* or proof of justification before men (a living faith vs. a dead claim). Keep bringing the group back to the gospel: Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly on our behalf, and His Spirit empowers our practical obedience.

4. OPENING (10–12 MIN)

WELCOME

“Welcome, everyone! I’m so glad we’re together today. Today we are diving into the book of James to look closely at what real, vibrant faith actually looks like in everyday life.”

ICEBREAKER QUESTION

“What is something you’ve purchased or received that looked high-quality on the outside, but turned out to be completely non-functional or fake once you tried to use it?”

OPENING PRAYER

“Father, thank You for bringing us together around Your Word today. You have birthed us by the word of truth so that we might walk in light. Open our eyes today to see Jesus clearly. Show us where our faith has been merely words, and grant us the grace and power of Your Holy Spirit to live out what we profess. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

5. CONTEXT & SETTING THE SCENE (3–5 MIN)

The author of this letter is James, the half-brother of Jesus and a primary leader in the early Jerusalem church. Writing to Jewish Christians who had been scattered across the Roman Empire due to persecution (James 1:1), James writes with the loving, direct heart of a pastor. Throughout his letter, he addresses practical issues like trials, speech, wealth, and practical care for the needy.

Crucially, James grounds all Christian living in the sovereign work of God, reminding us in James 1:18 that *“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.”* Because God has regenerated our hearts by His grace, our lives ought to reflect that inner reality. In James 2:14–26, James confronts a counterfeit version of Christianity—one that claims to have faith in Christ but shows no visible fruit or concern for others.

Let’s read the passage together.

6. READ THE PASSAGE

Read James 2:14–26 aloud once through, then invite a second person to read it again slowly.

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

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

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

7. OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (“WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?”)

1. In verses 15–16, what specific situation does James use to illustrate a faith that has no practical works?
2. According to verse 19, who else possesses an intellectual belief in the one true God? How do they react to that knowledge?
3. What two Old Testament figures does James highlight in verses 21–25 as examples of faith in action? What actions did each of them take?
4. In verse 23, what Old Testament declaration about Abraham is quoted, and what title was Abraham given?
5. What physical comparison does James make in verse 26 to describe faith without works?

8. INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (“WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?”)

1. In verse 14, James asks, “*Can faith save him?*” Based on the illustration in verses 15–17, what kind of “faith” is James referring to here? How does it differ from true saving faith?
 2. Read **Ephesians 2:8–10**. How does Paul’s statement about grace, faith, and good works help us understand James’s core message in James 2:17 and 2:24?
*(Note for Leader: Paul is arguing that good works cannot **earn** salvation [Eph 2:8–9]. James is arguing that true salvation will always **produce** good works [Eph 2:10]. They are two sides of the same gospel coin.)*
 3. Verse 23 points out that Abraham’s faith was “*imputed unto him for righteousness*” long before he offered Isaac (citing Genesis 15:6). How did Abraham’s action on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22) “fulfill” or demonstrate the reality of his faith?
 4. Why do you think James chose two very different people—Abraham (a revered patriarch) and Rahab (a Gentile prostitute)—to make his point in verses 21–25? What does this tell us about God’s grace and how faith works in anyone’s life?
 5. How does James 1:18 (“*Of his own will begat he us...*”) ensure that we don’t fall into the trap of self-righteous legalism when reading James 2?
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9. APPLICATION QUESTIONS (“HOW SHOULD THIS CHANGE US?”)

1. **Heart Reflection:** It is possible to have intellectual orthodoxy (knowing correct doctrine) without heart transformation. Where in your life are you tempted to settle for merely knowing the right answer rather than trusting and obeying God?
2. **Personal Practice:** James highlights practical care for those in physical need (v. 15–16). Who in your direct sphere of influence (family, neighborhood, workplace) currently has a tangible need that God may be calling you to address?
3. **Group / Community:** How can our small group move beyond just discussing spiritual truths together to actively living them out in our local community?

4. **Gospel Reminder:** When you look at your own imperfections and failures to produce good works, how does looking to Jesus—who fulfilled all righteousness perfectly for us—keep you from either despair or legalistic pride?
5. **Word & Speech:** Earlier in James 1:22, James urges us to be *"doers of the word, and not hearers only."* What is one area of Scripture you have recently read or heard taught that you need to put into active practice?

PERSONAL COMMITMENT PROMPT

Complete this sentence in your heart or journal this week:

"Because Christ has given me new life by His grace, this week I will step out in faith to..."

10. RESPONSE & CLOSING (10–15 MIN)

REFLECTION & PRAYER PROMPT

Take two minutes of silence together. Ask the Lord to search your heart and show you any area where your faith has become silent, passive, or disconnected from practical love.

GROUP PRAYER RESPONSE

(Leader can open, then invite short, sentence-style prayers from the group, concluding with the prayer below.)

Together or Leader:

"Lord God, sovereign Father, You have drawn us to Yourself not by our works, but according to Your mercy and by the power of Your gospel. We confess that too often our words outpace our actions. Forgive us for times when we have seen needs around us and offered empty words instead of Christlike love. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit so that our faith would be lively, bold, and compassionate. May our good works be a clear testimony to the world that Jesus Christ lives in us. Amen."

SHARING PRAYER REQUESTS

- Invite members to share specific requests, especially regarding opportunities to demonstrate faith through love this week.

CLOSING MEMORY VERSE

James 2:17
“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”