



Care & Share

WHAT IS REAL FAITH?

By Dr Marno Retief

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 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. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

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? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:14-26, NIV)

The Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, Lincoln Memorial, the statue of Christ the Redeemer, the Taj Mahal, the Colosseum, the Great Wall of China, Notre Dame Cathedral – what do all of these structures have in common? Well, these structures are widely regarded as some of the most famous monuments in the world. Each year millions of people from all over the world travel great distances to go and see these remarkable feats of architecture. But have you heard of the following monuments? Mother's Memorial, anyone ever heard of Mother's Memorial? Democracy Uniting the World – anyone ever heard of that monument? Liberty Memorial – anyone ever heard of Liberty Memorial? Well, all these monuments will be unfamiliar to you for a very simple reason: They were never built! Yes, that's right – Mother's Memorial, Democracy Uniting the World, Liberty Memorial – all of these are examples of monuments that were planned, monuments for which building plans were drawn up, but the building plans remained on paper – they were never executed, they never became a reality. As impressive as some of these designs were, the tragedy is they were never more than a good idea. A good idea that came to nothing. We face the very same challenge in our Christian lives, don't we? We draw up elaborate plans on everything we want to accomplish for the sake of the gospel. We dream about doing great things for God. We envision reaching the whole world for Christ and spreading the good news to every corner of our society. And you know what – these great plans and dreams are good. They're commendable. There's nothing wrong with them. But here's the problem: They mean nothing – absolutely nothing – if they're not put into practice. They mean nothing if faith doesn't lead to action. If faith doesn't become works.

Good works reveal whether or not our faith is real. Our spiritual actions reveal our true identity – they reveal whether or not we are real Christians. James invites us to look at this important biblical truth from three different angles, each angle highlighting a different dimension of this important truth. Firstly, James explains why faith without works is useless. Secondly, James explains why faith without works is powerless. And thirdly, James explains why good works reveal whether or not our faith is real. Let's briefly consider each of these angles and the implications of each for our Christian life.

So, firstly, let's consider why faith without works is useless. When we look at the first verse of the passage – verse 14 – James begins his discussion of this topic by referring to people who claim to have faith, but there's no evidence of works that back up this claim. James finds this scenario totally incomprehensible – it simply doesn't make sense to him. And James asks a very pointed rhetorical question, "Can such faith save them?" And, of course, the answer to this rhetorical question is, "No, such faith cannot save him". For James, any claim to faith should be validated. If I say I believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, then there necessarily should be some evidence or proof in my life that backs up this claim.

This idea of faith needing to be validated is central to James' argument and offers us the lens through which to understand the entire passage. In verse 15 and 16, James connects this idea to a general principle all of us ought to agree with – a principle he draws from observing the plight of the poor and the destitute. Here's the principle: If we say something but there's no corresponding action, our words are useless. When we encounter someone who's in desperate need of clothing and food, nice words can do nothing to change their situation. As James remarks, "If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" And, of course, the answer is it means nothing. Words without actions mean nothing.

For James, this principle is especially relevant to the question of faith and works. That's why we should pay special attention to what James says in verse 17: "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead". Let me repeat that, since it's crucial we understand this: "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead". James begins this verse with the phrase, "in the same way", which means he is connecting it back to the general principle he highlighted in the previous two verses. Just like words without actions are useless, faith without works is useless! Faith without works is dead! It's lifeless! And contrary to what some people think, James and Paul are in complete agreement on this point. Paul taught the very same truth. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul teaches that the only thing that ultimately matters in the Christian life is "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6, ESV). So, for Paul, as for James, if we claim to have true faith, a living faith, it must be joined to works.

We can speak about faith all we want. We can claim to have the greatest faith in the world! We can decree and declare, and quote hundreds of Bible verses to people, but all of that means nothing without works, without putting our faith into action, without reaching out to the people around us. Faith without works is useless. Faith needs to manifest itself in what we do. How often do we tell people, "Don't worry – I know God will help you. I'll pray for you, brother. I'll pray for you, sister. Go in peace"? And you know what? That's great, there's nothing wrong with saying that, because we should pray for people. We should trust God to help people through difficult times. There is power in prayer. James himself acknowledges the power of prayer later in the letter. But you see, words – even words of prayer or quoting inspiring scriptures – can so easily become an excuse to do nothing. And this is the danger James is trying to highlight. James is warning us against a kind of faith that has no practical use – a useless faith. Useless – that's a strong word! Have you ever heard of useless products or useless inventions? Would you have any use for a walking sleeping bag? Or umbrellas for your shoes? Or what about a banana slicer? Or a DVD rewinder? Or an automatic ice cream cone? All of these are useless inventions. But faith without works is just as useless. It has absolutely no use in our lives. If this is our understanding of faith, we might as well live without it.

But secondly, James points out, faith without works is not only useless, it's also powerless. We can believe all the right things, we can know all the creeds of the church, we can know all the confessions of faith, but that's simply not enough. The fact that our beliefs are biblical and orthodox does not prove our faith is real. I know this might sound surprising to some people, but you can believe all the right things and still be lost, still be separated from God. But how's this possible? James explains this point by referring to the central confession of faith found in Judaism – the Shema. The Shema is traced to Deuteronomy 6:4 (ESV) where Moses declares, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one". From ancient times up to the present day, devout Jews recite the Shema as part of their daily morning and evening prayers. It's a prayer that affirms a fundamental theological truth: There is only one God. And James also believes this. He

acknowledges the importance of this doctrine but emphasises that right doctrine does not prove your faith is real. As James puts it, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (James 2:19, ESV). Yes, even demons believe this fundamental truth, but does that mean they have a living, saving faith? No, of course not!

With this example, James was confronting a false teaching that was doing the rounds in the early church. There were some false teachers who claimed that, since Christians are living under grace, they’re no longer required to submit to the biblical laws of morality. According to this view – which is known as antinomianism – Christians are free to ignore and disobey the moral laws of God, without the slightest danger to their eternal salvation. As long as you believe the basics of the Christian faith, as long as you believe you are saved, all is well. Your lifestyle may be deeply sinful, you might have no regard for biblical morality, but you believe the right things. It’s this false gospel James was confronting in his letter. I wish I could say this kind of teaching is something of the past. But unfortunately, this false gospel is still found in some churches today. Pastors who hold to this false teaching will often say they’re preaching grace, that they’re teaching people about the unconditional love of God, that they’re teaching people how to live out their freedom in Christ. But the truth is they’re misleading people – they’re teaching people to remain slaves to sin. They don’t realise the grace of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit always lead us to live holy lives, which includes joyfully submitting ourselves to the moral laws of God. Paul explains this truth so powerfully in the book of Romans. Writing to the church in Rome, Paul declares, “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:17-18, ESV). True faith in Christ makes us slaves to righteousness – it totally transforms our lives. But, as James points out, believing all the right things is simply not enough. Faith without works is powerless. It can never bring about lasting change in our lives. Without practical obedience to the will of God, we’ll never experience any spiritual growth.

So far James has highlighted just how useless and powerless faith without works is. But thirdly and lastly, James teaches us that works reveal the true nature of our faith. Works reveal whether or not our faith is real. We could even say works reveal our true identity – they help us to determine if we really are who we say we are. Are we truly Christians? In order to make his point, James turns to the example of two well-known Old Testament figures – Abraham and Rahab. Starting with Abraham, James remarks, “Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 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” (James 2:21-23, ESV). Now there are a number of important things we should take note of in this passage. Otherwise, we’ll miss what James is saying, or we might even think he is contradicting Paul’s teaching of justification by faith.

So, first of all, when James uses the word *justified* in this context, he is using it in a different sense than Paul. When Paul uses the word *justified*, he is normally using it to refer to the beginning of the Christian life, to that moment when God declares us to be in a right relationship with him. And that declaration of justification is based on our faith in the finished work of Christ alone. It’s impossible for anyone to earn this declaration of justification. God gives it freely to all people who – through the grace of God – put their faith in Jesus Christ, who commit their lives to him. James, on the other hand, is using the word *justified* in another sense, as a reference to how we are shown to be righteous. A person who’s truly been justified, will show themselves to be justified through their actions. The reason people sometimes get confused and think James is contradicting Paul is that both James and Paul refer to Genesis 15:6, which speaks of how Abraham “believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness”. But what people fail to understand is that Paul uses this scripture to refer to that first moment when Abraham put his trust in the promise of God and God brought Abraham into a right relationship with himself. James, on the other hand, reads Genesis 15:6 through the lens of Genesis 22, where Abraham’s actions reveal that he is truly justified. Abraham’s willingness to obey God’s command to sacrifice his son Isaac revealed that his faith was real. It revealed his true identity as a friend of God. In the same way, the actions of Rahab the

prostitute who helped the Israelites capture Jericho revealed the true state of her heart – it showed that she had a real, living faith, even if it that faith was only in its beginning stages.

When you and I put our faith in Jesus Christ, God declares us to be righteous – to be in a right relationship with him. But God's declaration of righteousness is not some empty declaration without any effect in our lives. No, God's declaration changes us, it transforms us. As the Lord declares in Isaiah 55:11 (NIV), "[S]o is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it". And how do we know if we're really justified by God? Our works – the way we live our lives - will reveal whether or not we're really justified. And this challenges all of us to do some serious introspection. It challenges us to evaluate whether the fruit of the Spirit is present in our lives. What is the fruit of the Spirit? Paul gives us this explanation: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23, NIV). If none of these things are present in our lives, we have real reason for concern. What does your life look like today? Do your works reveal you're a child of God? Or do they maybe tell a different story?

James ends his discussion of this important topic by summarising his main argument. And this is how he puts it: "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:26, NIV). Have you noticed that – from a distance – you can't really tell the difference between someone who's sleeping and someone who's dead? They appear to be in the same condition. But yet – when you get up close to them, there's one crucial difference between someone who's alive and someone who's dead. And what's that? The one is breathing and the other one isn't. The fact that someone's breathing is a sign of life! It's a sign that their spirit is still in them – that their body is alive. But if there's no breath, if there's no spirit, the person is dead. Our spiritual actions, our obedience to God, our good works are evidence that our faith is alive! James challenges us to check the vital signs of our faith. Is our faith living and active? Are we seeking the glory of God in everything we do? Are we seeking to live holy lives? Are we reaching out to the people around us with love and compassion? May God the Holy Spirit help us to fruitfully reflect on these questions.

OUR CHURCH FAMILY

With February approaching, we look forward to Valentine's Day on the 14th and Family Day on the 15th. These two days bring an opportunity to have a "warm" day filled by love. I believe we should always be loving and caring for 365 days a year. While I am writing this, it hit me that every day we should be loving and caring and put away hurtful words and actions. Honestly, I fail big time. We can show love to others, even through small gestures like sending a card, making a phone call—even a smile (behind our masks ☺). With the Holy Spirit in our hearts, there is no room for grudges and unloving thoughts. Success—go with the Holy Spirit!

Sietske Van Zwol has been diagnosed with stage one breast cancer and will be having surgery in Thunderbay on February 11. Keep her and Jan and the family in your prayers.

Our thoughts go out to the Wieringa family as Hilda's brother and Gerald's uncle, Lloyd Wieringa, is in the hospital battling cancer.

The Dorcas Society has cancelled their meeting for the beginning of February and hope to meet again in March.

Janine Webb and Colin Angus will be united in marriage on the 27th of February in Fort Frances. We wish them God's blessing on their special day and as they begin their married life.

Congratulations to Tianna Veldhuisen and Youbin Lee who were engaged in December. They plan to get married on August 14th in Inwood, Iowa.

Also, congratulations to Kacia Veldhuisen and Tobijah Gerber who were engaged in December. They will be getting married in Emo but have not yet set a definite date.

From Cathie Sinninghe:

Dear Church Family,

Fred and I would like to thank the Dorcas ladies and other church family who have sent us food and goodies, called me and sent cards. They have helped us and made us feel loved. I am recovering and am very thankful for all of your prayers. The pain level is now very manageable. Please continue to pray as I have about 4 to 5 more weeks of total non-weight bearing and probably another month or two recovery after that. Also please pray that the ligament/tendon of the big right toe will stretch so that the toe will lay flat.

Fred has been amazing! I am supposed to have another Telehealth in about 3 to 4 weeks, at which time they may put me in a walking boot and start partial weight bearing. Thank you again ! We appreciate your kindness.

Your brother and Sister in Christ/Yeshua

Fred and Cathie Sinninghe

We have one student away from home, celebrating his birthday in February. Isaac Dykstra will celebrate his birthday on February 17th. You can send him a card at 251 Main Street, #3016, Cedarville, Ohio 45314. We also have one senior celebrating her birthday. Donna Vos will celebrate her birthday on February 16th. And we have one couple celebrating an anniversary over 40 years. Corrie & Janice Wiersema will celebrate their 58th anniversary on the 16th of February.

We wish everyone celebrating birthdays and anniversaries in February, a very joyful day!

Some humour:

There was a very gracious lady who was mailing an old family Bible to her brother in another part of the country. "Is there anything breakable in here?" asked the postal clerk. "Only the Ten Commandments" answered the lady.

A poem, written by Helen Steiner Rice, which I came across written on a card:

*Whenever dark days come and we cannot understand,
We must trust His wisdom and be guided by His hand.
May it comfort you to know that you are in His care,
And that we're all a part of God and God is everywhere.*

Here is a Bible quiz to work on by yourself or with others. All the questions have something to do with trees and plants. The answers will be in the March Care & Share. Enjoy!

1. On which day of the creation did God create trees and plants?
2. What kind of leaves did Adam and Eve sew together to make clothes for themselves?
3. In Zechariah 1, the prophet has a vision of a man riding a red horse and standing under what kind of tree?
4. When the Israelites came to Elim, how many palm trees were there?
5. In Psalm 52, the psalmist describes himself as what kind of tree in the house of God?
6. Who says, "I am the true vine"?
7. What happened to the plant that God caused to grow over Jonah to give him shade?
8. The beauty of which plant did Jesus compare to King Solomon?
9. The psalmist says whose "days are like grass"?
10. The branched candlestick in the tabernacle had its cups carved in the likeness of which plant?
11. In Isaiah's prophecy, what flower will bloom in the desert?
12. Who is described in the psalms as "spreading himself like a green bay tree"?
13. Complete the saying of Jesus: "for the tree is known by its _____".
14. According to Job, what is the hope of a tree that is cut down?
15. In Genesis, who was buried under an oak tree below Bethel?
16. Who slept under a juniper tree after fleeing for his life?
17. Which plant is "the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs"?
18. Who climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus?
19. What is described as a "tree of life to them that lay hold upon her"?
20. What seed did manna look like?

“To everything there is a *season*, a time for every purpose under heaven” Ecclesiastes 3:1

I enjoy the ***seasons*** that we experience in Canada. Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter all bring such a different look to our surroundings accompanied by big weather changes. Each season has its own beauty and uniqueness and is all part of God's plan.

January 2021 marks the beginning of a new “***season***” in my life. As of January 1 I officially retired!!

I AM THANKFUL THAT WHATEVER THE *SEASON* GOD IS AT WORK

I thank God for the way He has led me through the years. God has always provided support, places to work and ministries that I have enjoyed. I am thankful for good health, for His presence with me each step of the way. I am grateful that He goes before as I enter this new time in my life.

God gave friends and family who have prayed for me, supported me and encouraged me. I thank all of you—I feel very humbled and blessed for all you have done.

I am thankful for Africa Inland Mission International and appreciate all they at the home office do for me.

It is exciting to hear how God is working in Africa and in the rest of the world today—I am grateful to have been able to be a small part of what He is doing in Africa and will continue to pray and have active interest in the work there. You have been a part of that ministry too.

I AM THANKFUL THAT WHATEVER THE *SEASON* WE CAN SERVE HIM AND OTHERS

Psalms 1:1-3 Tells us that those who delight in God's law and meditate in His Word “shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. That brings forth its fruit in its *season*, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”

I want to be used of God and serve Him as He opens doors and directs my steps in this new ***Season***. **Like Ezra I want to prepare my heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach it to others as God opens doors. Ezra 7:10**

COMMUNICATION

I will be happy to be in touch with those who would like to continue to connect. Please keep sending your newsletters and notes via email or phone so we can keep up with news and pray for each other. See address below.

Happy New Year! May 2021 be a year of blessing to each of you as you go through your own ***seasons***. Keep safe and well in His care.

Loving greetings and best wishes to you, my dear and faithful friends!

Laura Hickey

Mailing address: Laura Hickey P.O. Box 2788 Melfort SK S0E 1A0; Phone 1 (306) 921-3573; email: Laura.hickey@aimint.org

MISSION ADDRESSES:

Africa Inland Mission International Canada: 25 Faulkland Road Scarborough ON M1L 3S4 CANADA
TEL: (416) 751-6077

AIM US: P.O. Box 3611 Peachtree City, GA 30269-7611 USA

The following was written by a father after the US Capital was overrun by protestors on January 6, 2021:

Don't feel sorry for or fear for your kids because the world they are going to grow up in is not what it used to be. God created them and called them for the exact moment in time that they're in. Their life wasn't a coincidence or an accident. Raise them up to know the power they walk in as children of God. Train them up in the authority of His Word. Teach them to walk in faith knowing that God is in control. Empower them to know they can change the world. Don't teach them to be fearful and disheartened by the state of the world but hopeful that they can do something about it. Every person in all of history has been placed in the time that they were in because of God's sovereign plan. He knew Daniel could handle the lions' den. He knew David could handle Goliath. He knew Esther could handle Haman. He knew Peter could handle persecution. He knows that you child can handle whatever challenge they face in their life. He created them specifically for it! Don't be scared for your children, but be honoured that God chose you to parent the generation that is facing the biggest challenges of our lifetime. Rise up to the challenge. Raise Daniels, Davids, Esthers and Peters! God isn't scratching His head wondering what He's going to do with the mess of a world. He has an army He's raising up to drive back the darkness and make him known all over the earth Don't let your fear steal the greatness God placed on them. I know its hard to imagine them as anything besides our sweet little babies, and we just want to protect them from anything that could ever be hard on them, but they were born for such time as this.


Just some thoughts from a dad who is rocking his sleeping baby and thinking about what a crazy day it has been in our country.

- submitted by Ann Fluit



February

2021

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 Paisley Esselink	2	3 Lucas Koomans Wilma Wielinga	4	5	6 Aidan Osadchuk
7 Benita Retief	8	9 Alida Esselink	10	11 Zachary Koomans Corinne Webb	12 Katrina Koomans	13 Hayden Morgan
14 <i>Valentine's Day</i>	15  <i>Family Day</i>	16 Kylie Veldhuisen Donna Vos *Corrie & Janice Wiersema (58th)	17 Isaac Dykstra Alyssa Koomans	18	19 Cora Vansmeerdyk Matt Veldhuisen	20
21 Rebekah Crans *Theo & Deb deGroot (12th)	22	23	24 Karen Koomans Kay Redford	25 Courtney Bethune	26	27
28 *Brad & Corinne Webb (29th on the 29th)						