



# A Faith That Works

James 2  
Verse by Verse

Introduction

Partiality  
2:1-13

Faith  
and Works  
2:14-26

Conclusions



# Introduction

## Previously in James

- **Chapter 1**, like the whole letter, was full of practical instruction for the Christian life.
- James wants us to have **a faith that works**.
- James looked at **tests and trials** in the Christian life - that we should see them as coming from God.
- His point was that God uses these to mature us in our faith.
- Next, James encouraged us to **live out our faith** in visible, practical actions.
- Our faith is **a way of life** - both believing and doing according to God's revealed will.

What's in  
James 2?

Our  
Key Verse

From Chuck  
Smith

# What's in James 2?

- James begins by explaining how **real faith** in Christ is **never to show partiality** - such as favoring the rich.
- We are **never to judge by appearances** in the church.
- From there he reminds us of the difference between a **dead** and a **living faith**. Living faith is shown by its actions.
- James then gives us two Old Testament examples: **Abraham and Rahab**.
- They were two of the many people who took action on the basis of their faith, proving that they really trusted God.

# Our Key Verse

**James 2:26**

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.



Chuck Smith (1927-2013),  
founding pastor of the  
Calvary Chapel Movement

The message that James communicates is that the Christian life should not just be a belief system and philosophy to which we give mental assent. Rather it is a way of life. It is something to be believed, but also acted upon. If our faith doesn't result in works, and a changed life, then that faith is dead. Fruit follows faith; obedience follows belief.



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# Partiality

2:1-13



# Partiality 2:1-13

- 2:1 Partiality is from a word that means to accept or judge “according to face.”
- It is making judgments about people based on their appearance.
- Partiality here is plural: “partialities,” implying that discrimination of any kind is in view.
- James will focus on wealth and poverty.

The Lord of Glory

One Clear Example

God's Perspective

Applying the Law



# The Lord of Glory 2:1

- Don't make the mistake of thinking James is highlighting **works over faith**.
- His view of Jesus Christ is as high as it can be.
- In fact it is similar to Paul's.
- Giving Jesus the title "**the Lord of glory**" is really a very strong statement of his deity.

1 Corinthians  
2:7-8

# 1 Corinthians 2:7-8

7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the **Lord of glory**.



# One Clear Example 2:2-4

- **2:2-4** The situation is hypothetical.
- “Let’s suppose this should happen.”
- Two men enter your **assembly**, literally, **“synagogue”** – the gathering of the church.
- One looks poor and the other looks well to do.
- So how will we treat the two of them?
- All other things being equal, we should treat them both the same.

Proverbs  
22:2

Why Honor  
Anyone?

Our Evil  
Thoughts

# Proverbs 22:2

The rich and the poor meet together;  
the Lord is the Maker of them all.

# Why Honor Anyone?

The Bible tells us to honor certain people, so we should be sure to do so. For example,

- Our parents (Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16)
- The elderly (Leviticus 19:32)
- Those in public office (Romans 13:7, 1 Peter 2:17)
- Widows (1 Timothy 5:3)
- Elders or pastors (1 Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:17)
- Our boss at work (1 Timothy 6:1)

There is nothing evil in showing such respect; it is actually a very classy thing to do.

# Our Evil Thoughts

- Making such **distinctions**, James says, indicates that we have become “**judges with evil thoughts**.”
- **Why** might we make judgments based on appearances? Deep down, maybe it's like this:
  - We want friends that **make us look good**.
  - We want the **people we idolize** to think well of us.
  - We **dislike some people** who are either unlike ourselves or unlike those we idolize.



# God's Perspective 2:5-7

- This is clearly not an **absolute truth**.
- **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** were all well off.
- So was **Job**, though not in the middle of his story.
- Yet it is a **general truth** that we see time and time again in the Bible.
- Jesus contrasted **the rich**, who gave much, with the **poor widow** that gave little, though it was all she had.
- **Jesus** himself seems to have come from a family that was not rich - based on the sacrifice they gave.

1 Corinthians  
1:26-29

# 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.



# Applying the Law 2:8-13

- **2:8** Here is the **royal law**, the law of the King.
- **James** is quoting **Leviticus 19:18**.
- **Jesus** quotes it in **Matthew 22:39**.
- **Paul** quotes it in **Romans 13:9**.
- Showing partiality based on appearance goes directly against this.
- Notice that **love**, as James sees it, involves right action and not just an inward feeling or disposition.

Greater and  
Lesser Sins

Breaking  
the Law

From J Alec  
Motyer

# Greater and Lesser Sins

- 2:10-11 First, a mistake Christians often make.
- Let's be accurate when we express what the Bible says.
- It is **not exactly correct** to say that there is **no such thing** as a **greater or lesser sin**.

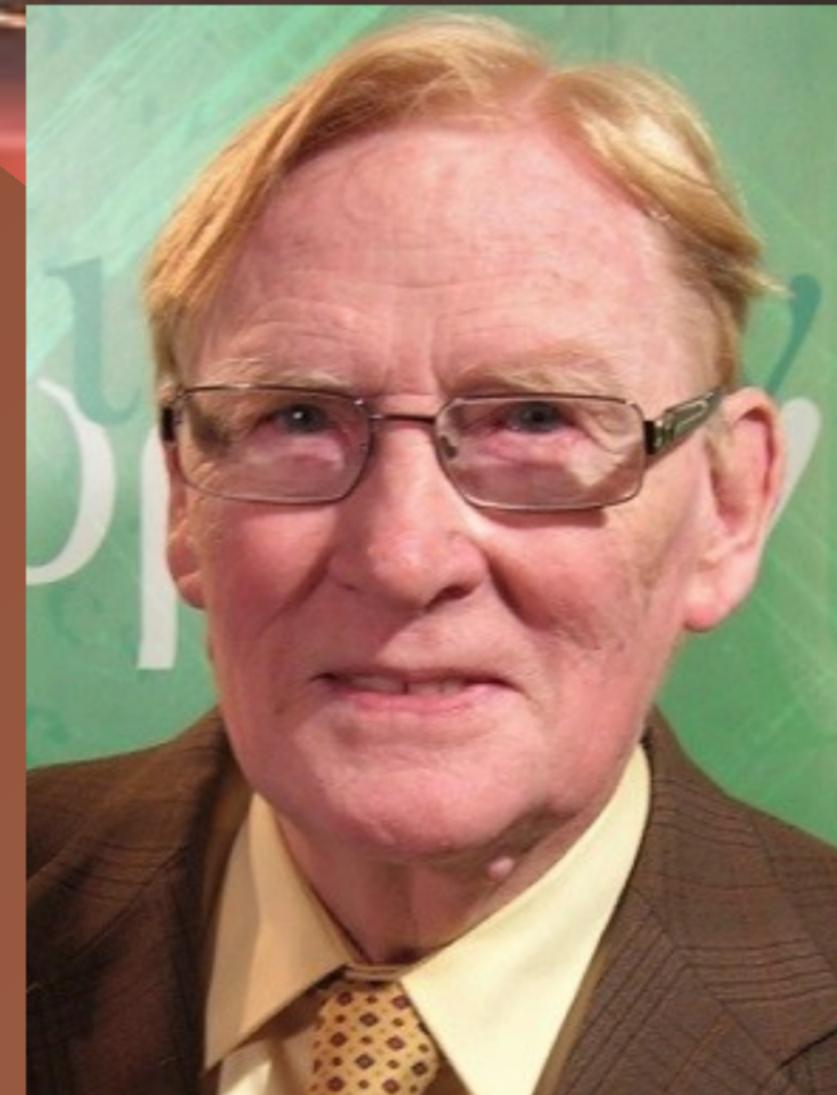
  

- **Jesus** speaks of a “**greater sin**” in **John 19:11**.
- He speaks of two servants who had **varying degrees of debt**. (**Luke 7:41-47**)
- He also tells several **parables** speaking of **greater rewards and punishments**. (e.g., **Luke 12:42-48**)
- Even here on earth, some sins obviously have greater consequences.

# Breaking the Law

- 2:10-11 Any violation of the law of God makes me a **lawbreaker**.
- And if I'm a **lawbreaker**, then I stand guilty before God and need His **forgiveness**.
- **Total obedience** requires me to unfailingly love my neighbor.
- Since I have not done so, **the law convicts me as a transgressor** (v.9).
- I have sinned against the infinitely holy God.
- I now stand in need of God's grace.

*This is our position before God.  
Judgment looks at our deserts;  
mercy at our needs. And God  
himself looks at the cross of  
his Son.*



J Alec Motyer (1924 - 2016)  
Irish Bible Scholar



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# Faith and Works 2:14-26



# Faith and Works 2:14-26

- Saving faith puts our words into actions.
- James is not content with mere slogans.
- Saying things like, "I have a personal relationship with Christ" would probably not have impressed him.
- James never denies correct doctrine.
- He does, however, want to see that doctrine come to life with good works.

More Than Words

More Than Words Plus Feelings

Two Examples of Faith

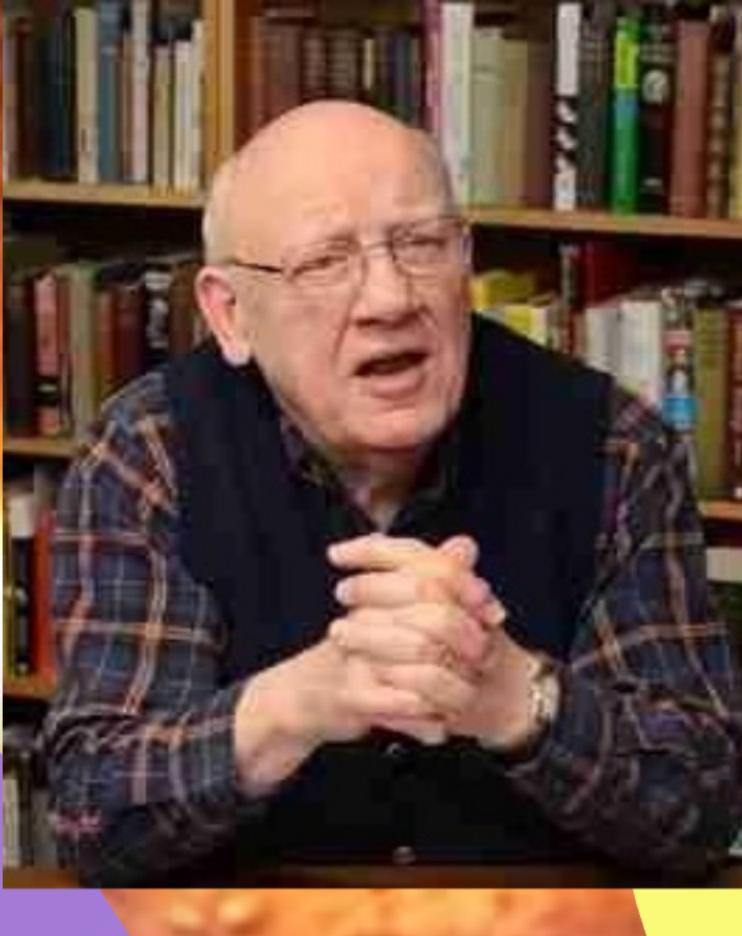
Reconciling James and Paul

## More Than Words 2:14-17

- James is still working off of his example of the rich and the poor in the first section.
- 2:17 The word translated as **dead** is *nekros*.
- There is really no other good way to translate this.
- Dead faith can produce what we might call **Dead Orthodoxy**.
- A living faith will **never be less** than right beliefs, but it will **always be more** than those beliefs alone.

From Warren  
Wiersbe

Key Verse



Warren Wiersbe  
(1929 - 2019),  
pastor and Bible  
teacher.

Beware of a mere intellectual faith. No man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same ... Dead faith is not saving faith. Dead faith is counterfeit faith and lulls the person into a false confidence of eternal life.

# Our Key Verse

- *We are repeating this here because it connects with 2:17.*

## James 2:26

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

## More Than Words Plus Feelings 2:18-19

- **2:18a** Some might like to separate faith and good deeds, as if the two can live separately and each be real – in isolation from one another.
- **2:18b** The answer from James is clear.
- Our works are the only way that anyone can tell whether our faith is genuine.
- Our works, good or bad, are the natural result of the life that we possess.

The "Faith" of Demons

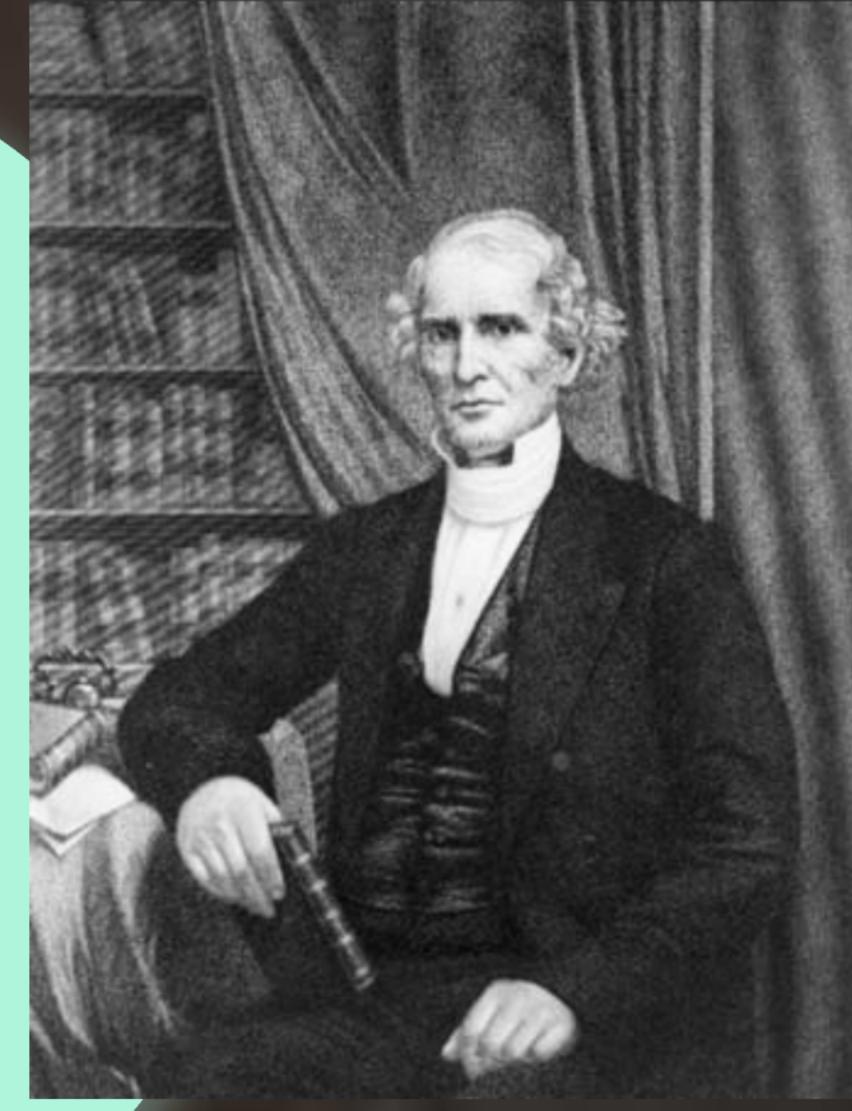
# The "Faith" of Demons

- 2:19 Demons can honestly agree with the most perfectly formed doctrinal statement of the most authentically biblical church.
- And when they think of God they “tremble” or “shudder with fear.”
- This word *shudder* appears nowhere else in the NT, but when used outside the NT, it refers to “uncontainable, uncontrollable, violent shaking from extreme fear.” (Blomberg & Kamell)

From Albert Barnes

If [demons] might hold such faith, and still remain in perdition, men might hold it, and go to perdition.

A man should not infer, therefore, because he has faith, even that faith in God which will fill him with alarm, that therefore he is safe. He must have a faith which will produce another effect altogether—that which will lead to a holy life.



Albert Barnes (1798 - 1870)  
American theologian, pastor  
and abolitionist

# Two Examples of Faith 2:20-26

## Two Very Different People with a Very Similar Faith

- The first is **Abraham**, the venerable father of the faithful, the great patriarch of the people of God.
- The second is **Rahab**, a young prostitute that was willing to risk her life to help two Israelite spies.
- By illustrating his point with two people who are so very different, James doesn't allow any of us to claim to be an exception.

Abraham's  
Faith

Rahab's  
Faith

# Abraham's Faith

- When Abraham was still childless, he received a promise from God that he would have a great many descendants.
- He trusted that God would bring this to pass.
- James quotes **Genesis 15:6**, where Abraham is counted as righteous because of his faith.
- He waited for Isaac for 25 years.
- Much later, God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on an altar.
- This brought his faith to full maturity.
- He had to believe God while acting contrary to what he could understand.

# Rahab's Faith

- Rahab was a Canaanite **prostitute**.
- Prostitutes were the **priestesses** in the traditional Canaanite fertility cult.
- This form of idolatry was normal in Jericho.
- She rejected her gods and defied the king of Jericho in order to join herself to the **God and the people of Israel**.
- She later married a Jewish man named **Salmon**, who was the father of Boaz, etc.,
- **Jesus** is her great (x 28) grandson. (**Matthew 1**).

# Reconciling James and Paul

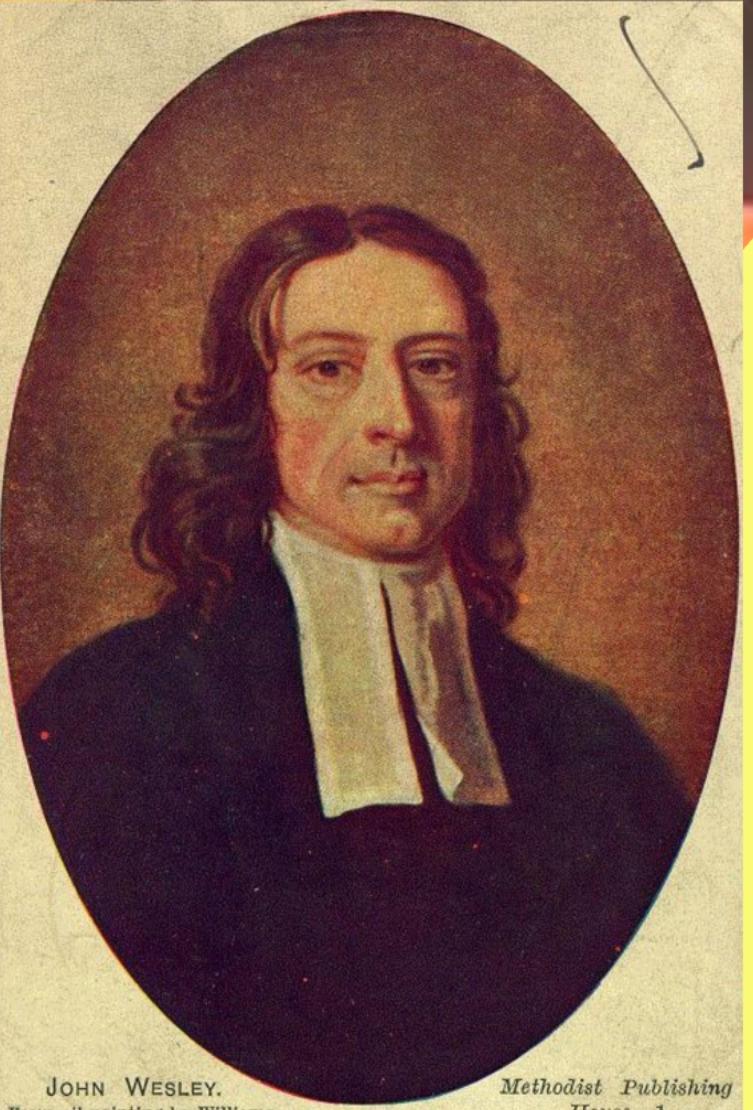
- **Galatians 2:15-16**

*15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*

- Many people wonder - do James and Paul disagree?

From John Wesley

From Augustine of Hippo



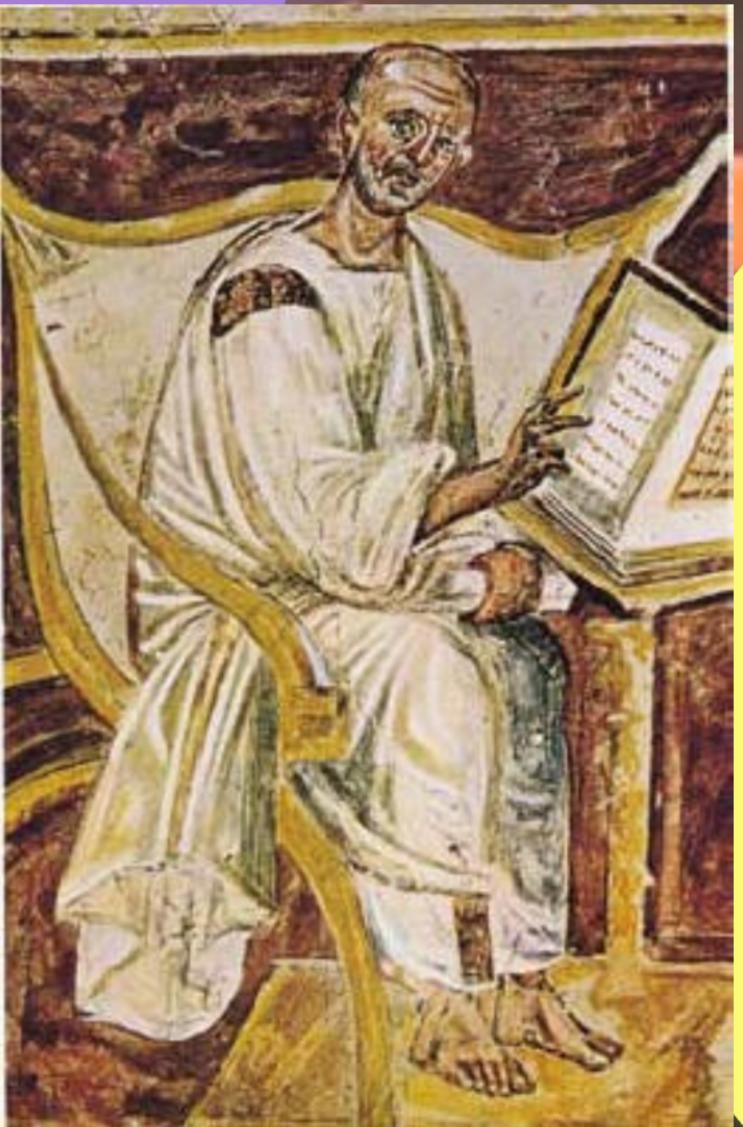
JOHN WESLEY.  
Methodist Publishing House, 1

John Wesley (1703 - 1791)  
Evangelist, Founder of  
Methodism

- *Comparing James and Paul, he says,*

And yet there is no contradiction ...  
because,

1. They do not speak of the same faith: St. Paul speaking of living faith; St. James here, of dead faith.
2. They do not speak of the same works: St. Paul speaking of works antecedent [prior] to faith; St. James, of works subsequent to it [that is, after faith].



St. Augustine (354 - 430)  
Bishop and Theologian in  
the Ancient Church

Paul said that a man is justified through faith without the works of the law, but not without those works of which James speaks.

**Ephesians 2:8-10**

8 For **by grace you have been saved through faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are **his workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that **we should walk in them**.

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# Conclusions

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- From there he reminded us of the difference between a **dead** and a **living faith**. Living faith is shown by its actions.
- James then gives us two Old Testament examples: **Abraham and Rahab**.
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From Tony  
Evans

Key Verse

A Final  
Prayer

It's possible to have a useless faith that's not accomplishing anything in life. If you say you trust God, it should affect your feet. Once you become a Christian by faith alone, your faith has to get married to works. Then, what you believe about eternity will become real in your history.



Tony Evans, Bible Teacher  
and Commentator

# Our Key Verse

## James 2:26

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

# A Final Prayer

Dear Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

- Thank you for this very clear teaching from James, the true brother of our truly human Savior.
- We ask you to please empower us to do those works that you have planned for us to do.
- Please let our lives not be useless, but rather let us be rich in good works, showing by our actions that we have been born again by your Holy Spirit through faith in your Son.
- Help us to show the world day after day what a living faith looks like - a faith that truly saves - and a faith that works.
- In Christ our Lord,
- Amen



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