

How To Live a Good/Godly Life:
Faith + Feet = Integrity
James 2:14-26, Psalm 119: 33-40

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¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If 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? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸But 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. ¹⁹You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

²⁰You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless^[d]? ²¹Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that *his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.* ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,”^[e] and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

²⁵In 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? ²⁶*As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

PRAY

Here we are, nearing the end of January. I imagine that if you made New Year’s resolutions, you are disillusioned by now. Just human nature, right?
We have a hard time sticking with something and making it work for us.

Any random commercial break while watching television this time of year, will yield several ads promoting various diets, weight loss programs, exercise equipment or gym memberships, or non-memberships! Even Oprah Winfrey—whose weight loss journey has been very public over the years—has tried every diet there is: Atkins, Sonoma, Scarsdale, Cabbage-soup diet, the Zone, South Beach Diet, Nutrisystem, Jennie Craig, or Weight Watchers. Of late, she appears to have made Weight Watchers work so well that she has maintained her weight loss. Now she’s become their spokesperson, and has purchased interest in the company!

I read recently about a couple of plans that did not work: the “Vision Dieter Glasses”. If one wore some specially designed glasses, food would look less appealing therefore one would eat less. Not! Or another failed plan, called the “mini-fork plan”, the idea being one would consume less because the utensils were smaller. Apparently not! These so-called weight loss plans didn’t work!

Perhaps a most embarrassing moment of American weight loss history was in 1903, when President William Howard Taft, did a most undignified thing. He got stuck in the White House bathtub—all 355 pounds of him. He vowed to reduce after that, and the America's love-hate relationship with dieting has been going strong ever since. (Source: "Belly Laughs at Early Fad Diets: Tasty Morsels From Weight-Loss History." Buck Wolf. ABC News, Jan. 10, 2005.)

Sooner or later, if you're really going to have a diet that “works”, you'll have to give up all the “fads”. The only way to lose weight, if that's the need, is to consume fewer calories than one burns, eat smart, exercise on a regular basis, and stick with the plan. That’s the truth, plain and simple.

A diet is one thing. Having a faith in Almighty God is another thing altogether. While physical health is obviously important, being spiritually healthy has eternal consequences. Unfortunately, there are some spiritual fads promoted by television preachers that can be unhealthy, such as the “name it and claim it” or “health and wealth gospel”.

Thankfully, there's a real plan for spiritual health, for a faith that “works”. It is not, however, a “quick fix” that will instantly transform us into mature Christians. But there is a plan that will “work”, as long as we put it into action.

When it comes to our salvation, let’s be clear—James would be in agreement with the Apostle Paul, who emphasized that we are saved NOT by our works, but by grace through faith.

Ephesians 2:8-10: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

In other words, there is nothing we can do, no merit to earn, or reward points to be gained from our good deeds or “works”—we are saved purely by God’s gracious love in the person of Jesus Christ. We are underserving, but that is what grace is all about. Grace can only be received!

So what is the relationship of faith and works?

Faith and works go hand in hand. There must be integrity of belief—what we know in our minds and hearts—must be congruent with our behavior, how we live out our lives.

On the surface there appears to be a conflict or contradiction between the teaching of the Apostle Paul and James when it comes to their theology of salvation. The fact is, they agree, but **they come at faith from different starting points, and they each have a different emphasis.**

Paul says we are saved by grace alone; no human effort can earn God’s love or forgiveness. Salvation is a gift. Paul’s emphasis is that **we are NOT saved by our deeds, but God’s deed on the Cross:** the death and resurrection of Jesus’, God’s one and only son.

James starting place is with a professing Christian. Having been saved by the grace of God, James argues that all believers are to demonstrate their faith through action. His emphasis is that **we are saved for good deeds or works. Our behavior is an outward expression of an interior faith. “Works” or good deeds are an expression of gratitude for our salvation.**

Many of you have been married for decades, but long, faithful marriages do not “just happen”. Couples do not “live happily ever after” without making a daily decision to fulfill the promises they made on their wedding day. Marriage is about creating a loving, committed relationship between two people. Very soon one discovers that love is far more than a warm, fuzzy romantic feeling. Words are helpful. It is important to communicate our love with words. But even more, love is expressed in action. (John 3:16)

Similarly in our spiritual lives: Loving God means expressing that love in action. Loving God and living into our discipleship means “putting feet to our faith”.

If we say we believe something, it should be obvious in our actions:
in how we spend our time,
how we spend our money,
where we place our priorities.

Jesus expressed himself quite clearly in Matthew 25:34-40. This is a description of the final judgement, or the separating of the sheep from the goats...those who acted on their faith and those who did not.

³⁴“Then the King (Jesus) will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*’

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰“The King will reply, *‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’*

The work of faith—the loving actions that reflect Kingdom values—are to feed the hungry, satisfy the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the needy, visit the sick or imprisoned.

James teaches that if we see someone in need and we have the means and the power to do something to address that need, we’d best take action! (v. 14-17) Pious platitudes are not enough.

Growing spiritually into mature disciples is a learning process. In Greek the word “disciple” means “learner”. Now some of us have been disciples of Jesus for a long time. What new things are you learning about God? How is your faith being stretched and grown?

Sometimes we get to a place in life where we become comfortable. That is to say, even in our spiritual lives we can become too content/comfortable.

I submit to you, that if and when that happens to a church, it can be a symptom of a spiritual malaise that can lead to death! Because at that point, the focus turns inward. No reason to reach out. I like the folks who are here. Everything's good as it is. No sweat, let's just cruise. This condition does not require faith in God. We are depending on ourselves. Again, that is a symptom that should be like a yellow flashing light: warning!

Faith can never be exercised by proxy. One must "work" to actively develop one's faith. No one else can do this for us.

I often drive by a church with a reader board. Recently the caption read: "Exercise your faith. Walk with God!" I like that.

Spiritual growth begins when we put "feet to our faith". Spiritual growth begins when we move beyond our comfort zone and start stepping out, doing something new, and trusting that God will show up!

Howard Hendricks says it this way: "There is no such thing as an online course for swimming."

James would say, a faith that works . . . will get to work.

James names Abraham and Rahab as examples of such faith. Each of them engaged in action. Their beliefs and actions were integral to their faith.

Abraham demonstrated the deepest trust in God that I can imagine—not only by leaving his homeland to cast in his lot with an unknown and (as yet) unproven God—that was itself an act of great faith. The example James brings into sharp focus for us is Abraham's trust in God, when he is asked to sacrifice his one and only son. Remember...Abe and Sarah had waited decades for Isaac to be born. And then, a few short years later God tells Abraham to offer up this son as a sacrifice? (What was God thinking??)

Now, child sacrifice was not uncommon in the ancient world. I find it hard to even briefly entertain that thought, however Abraham's faith in God was so deep, that he was willing to obey because he believed that God would provide what was needed. In fact, it was at the very last moment, when Isaac is already tied upon the altar, God provides a ram to be sacrificed instead.

Abraham is a great example of one who stepped out in faith and obedience, not knowing the outcome, but knowing the God in whom he put his trust. His faith in God was expressed in obedient action. (Read this story Genesis 12-22.)

The second example James gives is Rahab. She is a prostitute who aids Joshua and his spies on their reconnaissance mission into the Promised Land. Rahab helps them escape *and* she strikes a bargain with them in order to save her own hide and that of her family members, when Jericho falls.

Her faith and actions make a difference, which God honored! (Rahab's story is found in Joshua 2-6.)

Friends, as those who call ourselves Christians, we'd best be very, very careful. The world is *listening* to our words. But even more, *the world is watching us, to see if our actions match our words. It is very easy **to say** the right thing. It is much harder **to DO** the right thing.*

Dead faith is equivalent to no faith OR "all talk, no action".

Dead faith takes no risks. Why should it?

What does a lively faith look like? A lively faith is one of integrity, one in which a person's words and actions match up.

Tony Campolo tells a story about a town where all the residents are ducks. Every Sunday the ducks waddle out of their houses and waddle down Main Street to their church. They waddle into the sanctuary and squat in their proper pews. The duck choir waddles in and takes its place, and then the duck minister comes forward and opens the duck Bible. S/He reads to them: "Ducks! God has given you wings! With wings you can fly! With wings you can mount up and soar like eagles. No walls can confine you! No fences can hold you! You have wings. God has given you wings, and you can fly like birds!" All the ducks shout, "Amen!" And then they all waddle home. (Source: Tony Campolo, Let Me Tell You a Story, Word, 2000)

There's no more time for waddling. It's time to put feet to our faith, and put our faith to work!

[Pray]