



**LEADER'S NOTES**  
 For use with the discussion guides drawing on the Sunday messages.  
 March 13, 2005  
 James 2:14-26

**OVERVIEW**

Many Christians—including teachers and pastors—have struggled with this portion of James. But it is our opinion that the struggle has less to do with what James actually says and how we tend to read the passage. So, we want to make sure we listen to what James is saying . . . about faith and works, about justification, about being saved. Keep in mind that James is writing to believers about how to live in the midst of difficulties; his primary concern is *not* with going to heaven when you die but living on earth now!

**DISCUSSION**

What comes to mind when you think of “big grey trunks”? An elephant? A bathing suit? Old trees? Perhaps a collection of large suitcases? It all depends on the context of those words. That is the point of the opening question.

As you reflect on the basic subject of the letter of James, remind your people what James is addressing: how to live in the midst of life. He is not, primarily, talking about “getting saved” the way we typically talk about it. He is talking about living as one who is saved. When you turn to 1:21, notice that it falls in the middle of a section where he is discussing the challenges of trials and relationships; the “word . . . which is able to save your souls” is the word that can bring wholeness and health and joy and vibrant life in the midst of challenges. That is his point; he is not talking about life in heaven but life right here!

Clearly this needs to influence the way we read James 2:14-26. Many *misread* James by taking this passage as if it is about “getting saved” (probably because Paul, in a couple of his epistles, uses similar language and the same example of Abraham to discuss that issue). But notice the question James repeats three times in this short section: What use is it? (That is, what use is *that kind of faith?* 2:14, 16, 20) He is talking about the value, the use, the impact of your faith in your life today . . . and without expressing your faith in some clear and concrete ways James concludes that such faith is useless. To experience life now, faith must express itself in tangible, visible action.

Perhaps the illustration he cites at the very end is the simplest. Rahab believed; apparently she had trusted the God of Israel. But had she not acted on that, she would have been caught in the rubble of the destruction of Jericho. We are told she was “justified” by her actions. Well, the word “justified” can mean *to make right or righteous* (the way Paul uses it in Romans), or *to show to be right* (which is the way James seems to be using the word). Rahab showed her faith in how she responded. Without that action, her faith would have been virtually useless in the situation she was in. Her faith would not be manifested as the right way to live.

**BIG IDEA**

If your faith doesn't express itself in appropriate responses of trust in the midst of life, it does you little or no good. In day-to-day living, unexpressed faith is useless.



**DISCUSSION GUIDE**  
 A small group resource for the church drawing on the Sunday messages.  
 March 13, 2005  
 James 2:14-26

A weekly discussion guide designed to aid you to hear the Word, understand what you hear, and take it to heart.

Let's begin with a “thinking” exercise. How many different ideas come to mind when you think of the words “big grey trunks”?

Clearly, these few words *can* convey a variety of ideas based on the context you have in mind. The same is true with all words—including the words of Scripture. To ensure we are understanding the words right, we must make sure we are clear on the context.

So, what is the basic subject of the letter of James to this point? What is he talking about?

In the middle of his discussion about living out your faith in the midst of trials and challenging relationships, he speaks of the “word . . . which is able to save your souls” (1:21). Is he talking here about “getting saved” or being rescued and preserved through challenges?

Turn now and read James 2:14-26. Did you notice the question James repeats three times in this passage? What is he asking?

In light of that, is James talking about a faith that “gets you saved” or a faith that “lives out life”? What does he have in view?

What might have happened to Rahab if she hadn't expressed her faith in actions? What is the point of using this illustration?

What does James want you to realize about your

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