

Testing One's Faith (14)

Characteristics of True Faith (15-18)

True faith is not indifferent but _____. (15-16)

True faith _____ with good works. (17-18)

True faith is not just head knowledge but _____. (19-20)

Two Examples of True Faith (20-26)

A _____

A _____

Homework

- **Read James 3:1-12.**
- **Read Max Lucado's "Lesson 6: Taming the Tongue" (pp 59-68).**
- **Reflect on these questions posed by Lucado.**
 1. Why does James give such a stern warning in this passage to those who want to be teachers?
 2. How does a person's tongue (or speech) compare to a horse's bit and a ship's rudder?
 3. In what ways is the tongue like fire?
 4. Why is the tongue so difficult to "tame" or control?
 5. How can the tongue be used for both good and evil?
 6. How has this passage helped you to see the power of your words?
 7. What are some situations in your life when a person's words have caused you harm?
 8. How did you respond in those situations? Looking back, do you have any regrets?
 9. How can understanding the cause of a person's behavior—and words toward you—help you to deal with the conflict in a healthy way?
 10. When are some times in your life when a person's words brought you encouragement?
 11. How are you actively seeking to encourage others through your words?
 12. Why is it important to submit your tongue to the control of God's Spirit every day?
- **Bonus Journaling Question:** What can you do to better let God control the words you say?

Faith and Action

James 2:14-26

Introduction

1. How many of you made New Year's resolutions this past January?
 - a. What did you resolve to do? Do you even remember?
 - b. According to the *Journal of Clinical Psychology* about 45% of Americans usually make New Year's resolutions; Only 8% are successful in achieving their resolution; Only 46% of those making resolutions maintain them after six months.
 - c. In an article in *The Atlantic* magazine two Harvard School of Education professors analyzed why we have such a hard time making and achieving our resolutions (*The Atlantic*, "A Harvard professor reveals how to make New Year's resolutions that you can actually keep" by Julia Ryan, 12/31/13).
 - 1) There are two fundamentally different kinds of goals that people can make.
 - a) **Technical goals** are something that you develop, a skill (e.g., playing a game, learning a language). Technical goals make for really good New Year's resolutions for people because that you can go at in a much more behavioral, sequential, logical level.
 - b) **Adaptive goals** require that something inside of you has to be altered. A belief system and the feelings that go with it. These types of goals may not be right for New Year's resolutions.
 - 2) For example, for some people, losing weight is a technical goal (e.g., follow a diet and exercise).
 - 3) But for the vast majority of people, losing weight is an adaptive goal. They have to examine what going on inside of them—what they feel/believe.
 - a) I feel hungry but believe this diet is working and good for me. So, I am sticking with it!
 - b) I feel hungry and don't believe this diet is working or doing me good. So, I am quitting!
 - d. I believe living out our Christian faith is an adaptive goal not a technical one.
 - 1) There is no program or regimen we can follow (e.g., read Bible, go to church, give tithe) that will ensure that we are Christians.
 - 2) Being Christians requires that something inside us is altered. We are "saved," "converted," "make a profession of faith." We take on a new belief system that ultimately changes the way we act.
 - 3) If we say we believe but our actions do not change, then we fail to reach our goal.
 2. Long before these two Harvard professors, James knew this truth about human nature.
 - a. Real faith/belief in Jesus will result in Christlike actions.
 - b. Faith without action is dead, a failure.
 - c. **Read James 2:14-26.**

A. Testing One's Faith (14)

1. James asks, "What good (Gk., *ophelos* – "gain, benefit") is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith (Gk., *pistin*) but has no deeds (Gk., *erga*)?" (14a)
 - a. The way he asks this question suggests that a negative answer is expected.
 - b. Such "faith" is of no benefit to the one professing it or to anyone else.
2. "Can such faith (Gk., *pistis*) save (Gk., *sosai*) him?" (14b)
 - a. Again the form of the question expects a negative response.
 - b. Faith without works is not true faith.
 - c. Works do not produce faith, but true faith produces works.
3. You can't see the calories in the cake, but you can see the evidence of them in the weight you gain.
4. Likewise, you can't see faith professed on the inside, but you can see evidence of that faith in actions.

B. Characteristics of True Faith (15-18) – James outlines three characteristics of true, saving faith.

1. **True faith is not indifferent but involved.** (15-16)
 - a. When a person of faith sees a need, s/he acts in faith to meet that need.
 - b. Jesus could not turn away from the needs he saw (e.g., sickness, spiritual oppression, hunger, sin).
 - c. Jesus acted according to the will of His Father while trusting His Father to bring Him through.
 - d. Jesus was involved to the point of sacrificing His life for each one of us.
 - e. We must have Jesus' eyes, ears, and heart as we walk in this world each day.

2. **True faith partners with good works.** (17-18)

- a. “. . . faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (17)
- b. Faith and works are like two sides of the same coin—heads/tails. It’s not a coin without both.
- c. Knowledge/understanding of what God has done in Christ Jesus leads us to profess faith in Him.
- d. Our true profession of faith in Christ Jesus then leads us to act like Christ in the world.

3. **True faith is not just head knowledge but heart action.** (19-20)

- a. Even the demons believe in God, but their belief doesn’t change them. They’re still demons.
- b. Their minds accept the truth, but their hearts remains hard.
- c. Their minds believe, but their actions are still demonic.
- d. Oh that our faith is not that of the demons.

C. Examples of True Faith (20-26)

James pointed out two examples of true faith from Israel’s history—one expected and one unexpected.

1. **A Patriarch**

- a. Abraham’s call to faith required action on at least four occasions: Leaving Ur (Ge 12); Letting Lot go (Ge 13); Abandoning his plans for Ishmael (Ge 17); Offering to sacrifice Isaac (Ge 22).
- b. On each occasion Abraham responded in faith by acting as God commanded.
- c. “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Jm 2:23 quotes Ge 15:6).
- d. Abraham’s actions proved true faith was in his heart. His change was evidenced by his actions.

2. **A Prostitute**

- a. Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho when Israel first entered the Promised Land after leaving Egypt.
- b. She made her profession of faith in Israel’s God to the Israelite spies in Jericho when she proclaimed, “. . . the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (Jo 2:11b).
- c. She proved her faith change with her actions by hiding the Israelite spies, lying to the king of Jericho, and safely letting the spies out of town before the city fell to Israel.
- d. “By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient (unbelieving)” (Hb 11:31).

Reflection questions posed by Max Lucado

1. Why is faith “dead” if it is not accompanied by works?
2. How do believers demonstrate their living faith in Christ?
3. How do some people rationalize inactive faith?
4. Why is it not enough to merely *believe* there is one God?
5. Read Genesis 22:1-12. How did Abraham demonstrate his faith in this story?
6. Read Joshua 2:1-14. How did Rahab demonstrate her faith in this story?
7. What are some ways to “show up” and practice your faith through your words and actions?
8. What are some ways you can better “listen up” to show you support another person?
9. What are some situation in which you need to “speak up” to encourage a friend?
10. Why do you think the Bible stresses the importance of helping others?
11. How is helping others part of a disciplined spiritual life?
12. Who specifically will you reach out to help today to show your faith in action?

Bonus Journaling Question: How do faith and works go together in your life?