



June 15, 2025

Real Wisdom for a Messy World
DOES YOUR FAITH WORK

James 2:14-26



1. Opening Discussion: (You will probably want to use only one of these openers)

- a. What does the old expression, “It’s easier said than done,” mean to you? When have you used it, or heard someone else use it?
- b. Think back 5 years to B.C. (before COVID). What would you have said was your greatest non-spiritual need at that time? How did your view of what you needed change with the onset of the pandemic? In which timeframe did you feel you were most in control of meeting your own needs? In which were you most dependent upon someone else?
- c. Have you ever gone to an organization looking for help or service only to encounter a clerk, salesperson, waiter, or bureaucrat who clearly had no desire to do his/her job and provide assistance? How did his/her attitude make you feel? How did that person’s unhelpful demeanor influence how you felt about the organization? Did it influence your willingness/desire to return?

2. Prayer:

- a. By now, you are probably familiar with the *ACTS* prayer methodology. We will continue to recommend that you use it, but have shortened the descriptions to provide space to present a Least Reached People each week from the International Mission Board’s 52-week “Loving the Lost Through Prayer” guide.
 - i. Adoration – Pray a Psalm or other Scripture to focus on praising God.
 - ii. Confession – Spend time confessing any known sins. 1 John 1:9
 - iii. Thanksgiving – Thank God for answered prayers, blessings, gifts, and opportunities to serve.
 - iv. Supplications
 1. Pray for the activities of His Church locally and around the world
 2. Pray for the spiritual and physical needs of others and yourself

b. Least Reached People Group

The Makuna (mah-COO nah) live along jungle waterways in Brazil and Colombia. They believe deeply in the animistic traditions that their ancestors have passed down. The Makuna believe they are descended from an anaconda that created the world from its mouth. They also believe in reincarnation, specifically, that all animals are people and that Makuna babies receive the spirit of a dead tribe member at their birth. Shamans speak spells over food and perform other spiritual rituals for tribe members. The Makuna have no hope for eternal life with the Creator God who loves them.

3. Sermon Key Points for James 2:14-26

- a. Saving Faith Works
 - i. How are we saved from our sins? By faith!

- ii. Faith is different than knowledge or agreement with some facts
- iii. If your "faith" doesn't move you to action, it probably hasn't saved you either
- b. Does Your Faith Work?
 - i. Is your faith alive or dead? Would Jesus agree?
 - ii. Put your faith to work with Five to Thrive

4. Bible Study:

- a. **Sunday Afternoon** – As soon as possible after the sermon, make time to consider:
 - i. What stood out to you the most in this sermon?
 - ii. What new truth did you learn, or what truth were you reminded of?
 - iii. Is there a particular Scripture passage you feel God is leading you to meditate on or commit to memory?
 - iv. What is one thing God is leading you to do after hearing this message?
 - v. Did God convict you of a need to make any changes in your life and walk with Him?
- b. **Monday:**
 - i. This week's focal passage, James 2:14-26, is considered by many to be both the most significant and the most controversial in James' entire letter. It has often been a stumbling block for individual Christians and a point of division between churches. It will be beneficial to begin the week by reading the passage several times and making a list of:
 - 1. All the questions the passage raises in your mind.
 - 2. The major points you see being made.
 - 3. An initial summary "take away" that can be applied in your life.
 - ii. A valuable tool in studying a portion of Scripture is to consider the words that are repeated in the passage.
 - 1. What word appears most frequently? How many times?
 - 2. What word is next most frequently used? How many times?
 - 3. Based on these counts, what would you say was James' main theme in this passage?
 - iii. Spend some time discussing (or if working alone, writing down) what the terms "faith", "works" (or "deeds" if using an NIV), and "dead" mean to you.
- c. **Tuesday:**
 - i. Read James 2:14-19.
 - ii. What central truths does James present in
 - 1. Verse 14 (consider Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:16-20)?
 - 2. Verses 15-17 (consider Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:31-46)?
 - 3. Verse 18 (consider Luke 6:43-49 and Matthew 7:21)?

- iii. In verses 15-17, is James telling us that helping the poor is a prerequisite for being saved? Why or why not (see Romans 3:28, 11:6, and Ephesians 2:8-9)?
 - 1. As James introduces his illustration, what distinction does he make about the spiritual condition of the destitute individual? Why would this matter?
 - 2. The ESV says the person “is poorly clothed,” but the NIV and CSB say “without clothes” (compare to Job 24:7 and Isaiah 58:7). How does that translation make James’ illustration even more forceful? How does the NIV translation make it more difficult to use the excuse “I didn’t know they needed help”?
 - 3. What answer to the rhetorical question in verse 16 is assumed by verse 17? Is there any possible way you can imagine anything other than a negative response?
 - 4. While only God can judge the true condition of a person’s heart, what does it seem that James would want us to conclude about a church member who demonstrated a pattern of repeated refusal to assist a truly destitute believer? Would it be right to believe that such an individual is saved?
- iv. What does James make clear about faith in verse 19? What is it not? What do the demons believe, and how does it affect them? In what sense are the demons closer to the truth (although they can never be saved) than many in America today?

d. Wednesday:

- i. Read James 2:20-24 carefully, meditating on the points James is making and how they apply in your life
 - 1. What does James’ description of the one he is addressing as “foolish” tell us? What do Matthew 23:17, Luke 11:40, 12:20, 24:25, 1 Corinthians 15:36, and Galatians 3:1 tell us about when the term is appropriate?
 - 2. What does it mean for faith to be “useless”? Can you think of a physical analogy?
- ii. Read these highlights of Abraham’s life: Genesis 15:1-6, 21:1-5, and 22:1-18.
 - 1. When did Abraham first believe God and receive the benefit of that belief?
 - 2. What was Abraham doing when he placed Isaac on the altar? Was it an act of faith, works, or obedience?
 - 3. Based on God’s response in Genesis 22:12 and 16 to what Abraham did, what response would we expect God to have given if Abraham had refused?
 - a. What does James tell us was the result of Abraham’s obedience (verse 22b)?
 - b. Would it have been correct to say “Abraham believed God” if he had refused to obey the command to sacrifice Isaac? Why or why not?
 - c. Read Hebrews 11:17-19. What insight does this passage provide?

e. Thursday:

- i. Read and meditate on James 2:25. Then read Joshua 2:1-15.
- ii. What does the phrase James uses to start verse 25 (“In the same way”) tell us about Rahab’s justification?

- iii. From the Old Testament passages and what you may know about Abraham and Rahab, in what ways were they different (there are dozens)?
 - 1. What significance can you see in the two examples James selected?
 - 2. What different groups of people in our culture might each represent? What is James' message to both extremes (and everyone between)?
- iv. Abraham and Rahab learned about God in very different ways. How did Abraham come to know God (see Genesis 12:1, 15:1, & 17:1)? How did Rahab (see Joshua 2:9-11)? How do you think the source of knowledge about God affected their faith?
- v. James points to Abraham's offering of Isaac as the work that resulted in Abraham's justification. What work did Rahab perform that resulted in her justification?
 - 1. The work each performed included some significant risks. What did Abraham risk? Rahab? In your opinion, who faced the greater risk?
 - 2. Which can you best identify with as a model for life?
- f. **Friday:**
 - i. This week's focal passage is sometimes seen as contradicting the teaching of Paul, and other scriptures, that we are saved by faith alone. Compare James 2:24 and Romans 3:28, which may be viewed as summaries of the two books. How would you explain the apparent contradiction (which is really not a contradiction at all)?
 - ii. Read these verses in which Paul talks about our faith and justification: Romans 3:20-22a, Acts 13:39, Galatians 2:16, 3:11, and Ephesians 2:8-9. What point (event) of a Christian's (or potential Christian's) life is Paul discussing? How do these verses show that Paul is arguing against the very prevalent view that if we just do enough good deeds God will accept us?
 - iii. From the focal passage, particularly verse 19, what is James arguing against? How do these verses show that Paul shares the same concern: Romans 1:5, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and Galatians 5:6?
 - iv. Earlier, we read Ephesians 2:8-9 to show that we are saved by faith. Now add verse 10. What would be the implications of ignoring verse 10?
 - v. Paul presents the case that we cannot earn our salvation, and James presents the litmus test that shows if our faith is genuine. Which is important today?
- g. **Saturday:** Read the focal passage one more time, meditating on what it says, and considering areas in your life to which it should apply.

5. Application:

- a. James tells us in no uncertain terms that if we fail to provide for a fellow Christian who needs help, we should question our salvation. This week, make a deliberate attempt to look for and serve brothers and sisters who have such needs.
- b. Works are not just caring for others who are in need. The Bible teaches us that we all have one or more Gifts of the Spirit that are given to build up the Church. As LRBC moves forward to implement the new organization, seek out "works" you can do that will utilize your gifts.