

Faith Works: Living What We Claim to Believe

Faith Acts

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FAITH ACTS James 2:14-19

If you have a bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to James 2. James 2—my original plan was to preach through 2:14-26 all in one week, and plans have changed. As I have gotten into this text, there is absolutely no way we could get through this whole passage in one week, so we are going to take the next three weeks, and we're only going to get to verse 19 today. And even that is a bit of a stretch. I mentioned last week, James messes you up bad. You cannot walk through this book and continue to live the same. You can't just listen to it. When he says at the very beginning, "Don't listen, do it! If you don't do it, you're missing the whole point of Christianity, so do it!" So that's really the essence of this text that we're going to be diving into over the next few weeks.

Now I want to ask you to kind of walk with me, patiently, deliberately, very intentionally, through this text, because there are truths here. We're going to walk through three truths together this morning that are open to misunderstanding in a variety of points, and it'll be the same over the next couple of weeks. These verses are much discussed, even much debated. How do these verses tie in with the rest of the teaching of the New Testament? So we're going to have to walk carefully through them, and in the process we're going to see some truths that I'm convinced will radically challenge and change our lives.

James 2:14:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.'

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

Oh God, we do not want to settle for dead faith, and we certainly do not want to settle for demonic faith. We want genuine faith, faith that believes you and follows you. Faith that receives your truth and reflects your love. We know that this kind of faith only comes as a gift from you, by your grace. So we pray that by your grace, through your Spirit, you would take our hearts, and you would open our understanding to the faith that is inside of us. That today you might draw people in this room – in many cases for the first time – to faith in you. And we pray that the faith you birth in us would lead to extraordinary action in the world. For your name's sake we pray. Amen.

The Truths...

James picks up in verse 14, right where we left off last week. We saw at the end of chapter 2:12-13 James saying that when you receive the mercy of God in your heart, then you reflect the mercy of God in your life. And that picture, particularly as it pertains to favoritism and helping the poor and not showing preference to the right, he carries over into this passage three truths that I want us to walk very deliberately through this morning. And they really reiterate the same reality. What we'll see in this whole passage is James repeating the same thing over and over and over again, saying it in different ways.

Faith in Our Hearts is Evident in the Fruit of Our Lives

First truth: faith in our hearts is evident in the fruit of our lives. Faith in our hearts is evident in the fruit of our lives. This is the theme, I would say, of James 2:14-26. It's repeated three different times—beginning, middle, and end of this passage. Beginning, look at verse 17; you might underline this every time it says this: "*In the same way, faith by itself,*" here it is, "*faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*" Underline that. "*Faith by itself, if it's not accompanied by action, is dead.*" Then you get to verse 20 and it says "*You foolish man,*" middle of the passage here, "*Do you want evidence that,*" here it is, underline it, "*Faith without deeds is useless.*" "*Faith without deeds is useless.*" Then you get to the very last verse, verse 26: "*As the body without the spirit is dead,*" here it is, underline it, "*So faith without deeds is dead.*" Faith without action—dead. Faith without deeds—useless. Faith without deeds—dead. You get the point.

Now what does it mean for faith to be dead? It means that it does not save. Verse 14, does this kind of faith save? And the implication is "no." It's faith that does not save. It does not justify—we'll get to that in verse 24—does not make us right before God. It has no life in it. It is nonexistent. And this is key right here, because faith...James is not contrasting immature faith with mature faith. He's not contrasting nominal faith with devoted faith. He's contrasting faith with nothing—no faith.

Now, don't miss it, it's a man who claims to have faith, and this is the picture from the very beginning here in verse 14. Don't miss it. It is possible to claim to have faith, to claim to have a faith that saves, and not to have faith at all. This is dangerously deceptive.

I urge you to hear this, this morning. It is possible to claim to have faith, to claim to have a faith that saves, and the reality is, you don't have faith, don't have a faith that saves at all. Well how do you know then? How do you know if you have faith? Faith that saves? How do you know if you have faith? And James says look at the fruit. "I'll show you my faith by what I do." Faith produces fruit. You can tell if faith is present based on whether or not fruit is present. This is exactly what Jesus said in Matthew 7, "*By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them*" (Matt. 7:16-20). When you see apples hanging from the limb of a tree, you say, "That is an apple tree." How'd you know? "It has apples on it." It's that simple. What is evident on the outside makes clear what is on the inside, so if you see fruit, then that is evidence of faith. If there is no fruit, there is no faith.

There is no fruit, there is no faith. Faith always produces fruit. Now James is not saying you need to add deeds to faith in order to be saved. James is saying faith produces deeds—flows from faith. It's the overflow. So this is the picture from the very beginning. Faith in our hearts is evident in the fruit in our lives. Now that truth sets the stage for the second truth that is jaw-dropping that James illustrates. Faith in our hearts is evident in the fruit of our lives.

People Who Claim to be Christians but Fail to Help Poverty-Stricken Fellow Believers are in Fact not Saved

It is the next step in this passage, what he illustrates, truth number two people who claim to be Christians but fail to help poverty-stricken fellow believers are in fact not saved. People who claim to be Christians but fail to help poverty-stricken fellow believers are in fact not saved. Now I know some of you think I'm nuts. Others are already formatting the email response in your heads, so stick with me for just a moment. Is this not the abundantly clear truth of James 2:15-16? Think about it. "*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food*" (Jas. 2:15). He is at your doorstep, with barely enough clothing to cover him, has rags on. And has no food, literally no food for the day, no means to provide food. He is starving. Shamed, cold, miserable, and hungry, he stands at your doorstep, and you say to him, "Go, I wish you well." Literally "go in peace." This was a benediction you would say or even pray over someone when they were leaving. "God bless you. God be with you." "Be warm and well fed." Now in the original language of the New Testament, these verbs could be middle voice or passive voice, which means there are two possible translations here. Middle voice—the translation would be "warm and feed yourself." How crass! "Warm and feed yourself", as if they could! Passive would be "stay warm and be well fed", as if they would; as if they could do that in their lives. The picture is it's ludicrous. Obviously, James says, "What good is that for this person? And what James is saying is in the same way that such faith does not save this person in their need, help this person in their need, so this kind of faith does not save your soul. In the same way this kind of faith does nothing for the person in need, this kind of faith, so-called faith, does nothing for your soul.

People who claim to be Christians and fail to help poverty-stricken fellow believers are in fact not saved. You can do cartwheels all around this text to try to find a way out of that, but it is the glaring truth there. Someone who responds to a brother or sister like this in need clearly does not have faith. It's the same thing 1 John 3:17 says: "*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*" The implication is there's no way the love of God can be in him, because if the love of God was in him it would bear fruit. But because there is no fruit it's exactly what we saw in the previous truth. Because there is no fruit—the fruit is mercy toward the poor—because there is no fruit then it's clear evidence there is no faith. Now I want to be very careful here; I want to walk you through two kinds of sub-truths here that are crucial, vital for our understanding this.

First, acts of mercy are not means to salvation. Acts of mercy are not means to salvation. We do not help the poor in order to be saved. Let me repeat that. We do not help the poor in order to be saved. Acts of mercy are not means to salvation. What is the means to salvation? Mercy and grace of God in Christ is the means to salvation. Only means to salvation.

And James has shown us this already. Back in James 1:17-18 remember what he said? "*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*" Verse 18, "*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth.*" That's grace. God, by His initiative, has given us birth. He's

given us life. The Word planted in us, down in verse 21, has saved us. God has given us life through His Word inside of us. Who in here, once dead, can choose to become alive? No one can. You have to be given life. That's the whole picture that James has already set up for us. The mercy of God is the means to salvation.

I want you to think about this for just a second. I want you to think about the glorious, gracious mercy of God in your life. You were born into a context where you have been exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are a billion people in the world who cannot say that today; more than a billion. You were born into a context where you have been exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I'll take it a step further—not just spiritually, but physically. You were born in a context where there is, compared to the rest of the world, abundant supplies of clean water and food. We say, "I'm starving." We have no clue what starving is. We were born into a context where there is abundance of clean water and food. Born into a context where you have heard the gospel and been surrounded by clean water and food, and ladies and gentlemen, I want to remind you this morning you had absolutely nothing to do with that. You were born into this context only by the grace and mercy of God. So His mercy is the means to salvation, not our acts of mercy. Our acts of mercy are not the means to salvation. So here's the difference: acts of mercy are not means of salvation, but acts of mercy are necessary evidence of salvation.

Acts of mercy are necessary evidence of salvation, and natural overflow of salvation. Now we're going to talk more about this next week when we look at James and compare him with Paul, but suffice to say at this point when James talks about deeds, he's talking in a very different way than Paul is often talking about works. What James does, whenever he talks about deeds all throughout this passage, he's talking about deeds not in the sense of earning favor before God. He's talking about deeds as the fruit of faith in God. It's a big difference. He's not talking about deeds as something we do in order to earn favor before God. He's talking about deeds as the fruit, like we saw the fruit of faith in God. And what he's saying is mercy toward the poor is evidence of mercy in our hearts. If the mercy of God and the gospel has transformed your heart, then you will not see someone in need and do nothing. That's impossible! Mercy flows from you. It's evidence of what is in your heart, in the same way that apples are evidence of an apple tree.

Tim Keller, pastor of a great church in New York City, does mercy ministry all over that city and around the world. Love this quote from him. He said, "Mercy to the full range of human needs is such an essential mark of a Christian that it can be used as a test of true faith. Mercy is not an optional addition to being a Christian. Rather, a life poured out in deeds of mercy is the sign of genuine faith. If there is no mercy toward the needy, then there is no faith. Acts of mercy are evidence of salvation." You want to know where this is clearest? Go over with me to Matthew 25. Take a left; go back to the Gospels. First Gospel, Matthew 25, look at verse 31. This is a passage that I'm guessing is familiar to many of you. This is where it's just clearest, and most humbling, most penetrating. Matthew 25:31, a passage talking about future judgment, and this is Jesus speaking. Listen to what happens.

Matthew 25:31. It's crystal clear here that faith in Christ bears fruit of mercy toward the poor, and if there is no mercy to the poor, then that means there obviously is no faith in Christ. Look in verse 31, "*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.*" Verse 32, "*All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King 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'*" (Matt. 25:32-34).

Pause right there. That's mercy. That's grace. Do you hear that? "Blessed by my Father." "Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." This is echoed in Ephesians 1. Before the creation of the world, predestined to be adopted as sons through the redemption that comes through Christ; this is the picture. Grace and mercy. Now I want you to see how that mercy is expressed in what they do. In verse 35, now let me encourage you to circle every time you see a first-person pronoun here, either "I" or "me." "I" or "me." This is Jesus speaking. "*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, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me*" (Matt. 25:35-36).

Side note: verse 36 there, "you looked after," same word that's used in James 1:27 – "Look after orphans and widows." Same word in the original language of the New Testament. "*Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'*" (Matt. 25:37-40). Wow! Did you catch that? Jesus says that your response to the poor and needy was just as if you were responding to me.

Think about that. If you saw Christ hungry, would you feed Him? If you saw Christ thirsty, would you feed Him? Yes! Absolutely. If we didn't, there'd be a lot of reason to question whether or not we were Christians, right? And what Jesus is saying is that what you have done to the least of these brothers is a reflection of what you do to me. What a powerful image! Now it's powerful in an encouraging way when we think about Christ in the poor, but then the converse picture. Verse 41,

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.'

Those who ignore the poor do so as if they were ignoring Christ Himself, and those who ignore Christ show that Christ is not real in their hearts, and eternal fire is their destination.

Don't miss it. This is not Jesus or James saying, "Do good deeds, acts of mercy, in order to be saved." It's Jesus and James saying, "When Christ is in your heart, acts of mercy will flow toward those who are needy around you," which is how we can say this truth, that if you do not care for poverty-stricken believers, then you are in fact not saved.

I love what Spurgeon said here. This is so important, this fact that we do acts of mercy not as means to salvation but as the overflow, the evidence of our salvation, because this is where we realize practically our giving to the poor is not motivated by guilt. Follow with me here.

Our giving to the poor is not motivated by guilt, as if we have to do these things, we're obligated to do these things, we have to in order to get something. No, we are not motivated by guilt as followers of Christ; we're motivated by the gospel, the power of Christ, faith in Christ as He lives in us, the overflow of our hearts where we are compelled to give to the poor. Where it's not a duty as much as it is a delight. Where we enjoy giving to the poor, because in the same way that we would enjoy giving to Christ Himself. I love what Spurgeon said about this passage in Matthew 25. He says, "They fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick. Why? For Christ's sake, because it was the sweetest thing in the world to do anything for Jesus. They did it because they delighted in doing it; because they could not help doing it; because their new nature impelled them to do it." This is the fruit of faith: mercy toward the poor. Now that sets the stage for the final truth again in a sense the same reality, expressed in a different way. Faith in our hearts evident in the fruit of our lives. People who claim to be Christians but do not help fellow poverty-stricken believers are in fact not saved.

Ultimately, Deedless Faith is Useless Faith

Third truth: ultimately, deedless faith is useless faith. James continues this dialogue and he brings in an imaginary person who says, "Okay. You've got deeds. I've got faith." And he tried to separate the two from one another. Some people have mercy, some people don't. Some people have works, some people don't. And James says, "No. There's no way you can separate these two. I'll show you my faith by what I do." And then he gets to verse 20, back here in James 2:20 and he reiterates what he just said. And we're going to dive into this more next week, but he said, "*You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?*" (Jas. 2:20). It's useless. If you have this kind of so-called faith, what good is it?

It's no good to your brother or sister who's in need. What kind of good does that do them? It's no good to them, and it's no good to you, because it doesn't save your soul. It is useless faith. It's nothing—it's worth nothing. It's dead. And this is where James makes things very, very clear. He says faith is not mere intellectual assent. Faith is not mere intellectual assent. "You believe there is one God?" And every good Jewish man or woman knew the Shema—Deuteronomy 6:4: "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one.*" He said, "Good! The demons believe that."

So you've said, "I believe in this," but the reality is demons...Think of all that demons believe. Demons believe in the existence of God. Demons believe in the deity of Christ. Demons believe in the presence of heaven and hell. Demons believe that Christ is the eternal judge. Demons believe that only Christ is able to save. Demons believe all of those things. I fear that there are countless men and women who have adopted a soul-damning faith that consists only of intellectual assent to the truth of God and Christ. I'm guessing that there are people all across this room this morning who have a right belief about God, but do not have faith that saves.

It's not mere intellectual assent. Second, it's not simply an emotional response. Not just intellectual, what demons have; it's emotional as well. "Even the demons believe that and" what? "And shudder." They tremble. They are emotionally affected by the reality of God. Faith not merely an emotional response. I wonder how many of us have based our eternal security, our understanding of faith, based on our feelings at any particular moment? Our feelings about God. "Well, I feel this, or feel that." Faith is not mere intellectual assent, and faith is not simply an emotional response. You can have both of those and still be on the same plane as the demons. Faith involves willful obedience—that's the point. You know faith, you show faith, not just by what you think or feel, but by what you do. Faith acts.

Now I'm not saying...James is not saying, that what we believe in our minds, what we feel in our hearts, is not important. Our emotions, our intellect, are extremely important in this picture. But if faith is limited to those two realms and avoids willful obedience, then it's not faith. It's not faith. Faith acts. Faith acts, and if it doesn't act, it's dead. So these are the truths. Faith in our hearts is evident in the fruit of our lives. People who claim to be Christians and fail to help poverty-stricken fellow believers in fact are not saved. Acts of mercy are not means to salvation but evidence, overflow, of salvation. Ultimately deedless faith is useless faith. Faith not just from intellectual assent or emotional response; it is willful obedience. It's faith acts.

The Situation...

Over a Billion People in the World Live on Less than \$1 a Day

So here's the situation I want to put before you, people of faith. Over a billion people in the world live on less than a dollar a day. Over a billion people in the world who live in extreme poverty. That's, I know, hard to get our minds around, particularly when we don't see anything like that around us immediately in this community. So I want to put some numbers before you that maybe give you a little perspective here.

According to the World Bank, divided into four income classes—this is strictly income—those who make the low income in the world, less than \$825.00 a year: 37% of the world. That is 2.5 billion people who make less than \$825.00 in a year. Lower middle income—raise it up to \$3,000.00: 38% of the world. Put those two together, you have 5 billion people making \$3,000.00 or less in a year. 5 billion! Overwhelming majority of the world. And we talk sometimes about upper middle class. Let's think about what the upper middle class is in the world, \$3,000-\$10,000.00 a year: 9% of the world. 9 percent! And all that leads to the wealthiest people in the world, the high income people who make over \$10,000.00 a year: 16%. So if you or your family make more than \$10,000.00 a year—that's simply based on income alone—you are in the top 16% of the world's wealthiest people.

If you take this up another level, if you make \$25,000.00 a year, that puts you in the top 10% of the world's wealthiest people. \$25,000.00 puts you in the top 10%. And then if you took it up one more level to \$50,000.00 a year, if you make \$50,000.00 a year you are in the top 1% of the world's wealthiest people. The top 1%. Now I want to be really careful right here, because I know a variety of situations around this room where brothers and sisters are struggling in the current job market and current economy, and wondering what to do on a week by week, day by day even, basis. So I in no way want to be insensitive to that.

At the same time, it is clear that we are among the wealthiest people in the world. We have untold wealth relative to the rest of the world. Filthy rich, with resources at our disposal that most of the world does not have. And we are surrounded by dire need. One picture, last number I'll put before you, but one picture of the dire need. Every day over 26,000 children die of either hunger or preventable diseases. Now let that soak in; today over 26,000 children will die because they did not have a meal or because they had a disease that could have been prevented—malaria, children dying of diarrhea. I put that in my life and it's 26,000 Joshua's and Caleb's. Put it in your family. Put it in our community. We are talking about the needs of children in our community. The reality is if this were the case in Shelby County, if this was happening today in Shelby County, then all of the children in our county would be dead by noon. All of them. I want to put a face on this in a short video. It's a video that's made by Compassion International, which you are probably familiar with after

an emphasis we did at the end of last year. But the point is not Compassion International in this video. The point is I want you to see a picture of this need come to life in the world. Watch this with me.

"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" (Jas. 2:15-16). I put these truths before you and this situation before you, not to pour guilt upon you, but to arouse faith in you, that you would see the mercy of God. That I would see, that together we would see the mercy of God in us, and that His mercy would produce fruit through us in a radical way.

The Challenge...

The Radical Experiment

So I want to challenge you as pastor, as a group of elders this morning, with a challenge that to my knowledge we have not experienced. I want to call it a radical experiment. Here's the deal. We are coming up on budget season, which if I can be just plain honest with you is the worst time of the year for me as pastor, because every time we get to this point of the year we come face to face with the reality that we are still spending, His church, on ourselves and our preferences and our wants as opposed to dire need in the world. And we have been working, trying incrementally to make changes in that budget over these past few years, and by God's grace I praise God for leadership, for staff in this body who have made sacrifices. Who have made some difficult decisions in order to free up money for other things.

We have made good incremental changes, but I believe we have the potential to put our faith into action in much deeper ways in the days ahead. Last year when we were walking through the Radical Series, looking at Mark 10:17-31, the story of the rich young man, we discussed what would it look like if in our lives we put a cap on our spending? What if we differentiated between necessities and luxuries as best as we could, and put a cap on our spending? Whatever that cap looks like. And anything that God entrusts to us above that cap, small or big, we're free to give away, radically, for His glory and His church and among the lost and among the poor.

One thing that my family and I have learned over the last year, I think, is that it's easier to give up something when you know the benefit that is coming from that. It's easier to sacrifice something when you know someone or something that is going to benefit as a result of that sacrifice. So I began thinking. The elders, we began discussing, what if we had a practical need that we could meet with every single dollar we could save or sacrifice? What if, hypothetical example, what if in light of these realities, what if you could feed one of these starving children for \$100.00 in a year? Just a hypothetical example. If so, then what would it look like for us to go through our church budget and every line item possible ask the question, "Is it better for us to spend money on this or for a child who has no food for the rest of the year?" And we began to say, "We're going to sacrifice our wants and our desires for that which God has clearly said is most important to His heart." What could happen as a result of that? It would put our stuff in the church in perspective, and it would free us up to give radically for the sake of the glory of God and His church and win the lost and the poor. So here is the challenge – Radical Experiment for 2010: for one year to sacrifice our money in order to spend our lives on behalf of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world.

Every word there important. Sacrifice our money in order to spend our lives on behalf of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world. Follow me here. One year...For one year: a clear, established timeline. Now I emphasize that because there are some things, some expenses that you can postpone for a year that you can't avoid for 20 years. So we're talking in a clear, established timeline. For one year let's sacrifice all the stuff that appeals to our preferences and our desires and our wants. Let's sacrifice it all for one year in our lives as Christians in the church, let's put that aside, die to self, and say, "For this year" – clear, established timeline – "let's make radical sacrifice: every possible dollar."

Every possible dollar. Any and every place that we can save. Not just talking excess, the things that we don't really need anyway. That's not sacrifice. Sacrifice is giving when it hurts. Giving not according to our ability, but giving beyond our ability to give. To sacrifice every possible dollar for radical spending on urgent, specific need. This is key. Identifying a need, like the hypothetical situation I mentioned, and saying, "What if for a small amount we could provide a child food for the next year?" Go through the budget and ask that question. Is it more important for us to do this than to feed this child?

Two Avenues...

I'm talking two different avenues here. Follow with me here. One as a church for The Church at Brook Hills to say, "For one year we're going to radically change the way we do church in a self-centered, self-entertaining culture" – not just culture – "a self-centered, self-entertaining church culture. We are going to sacrifice, die to self, and we are going to live out our faith in a radical way for the glory of God with the way we spend our money as a church. To do this, we are going to sacrifice the way we maybe have even grown up or have expectations for what church looks like. We're going to sacrifice that so that families can eat and live."

And then as individuals and families, what if individuals and families across this room took the next year and we all did individually what together we are going to do corporately. What if we all took our spending on a daily basis and began to look at it through the lens of real dire, urgent need around the world? And we all said, "For one year in our lives, in affluent Birmingham, Alabama, United States, for one year in our lives we are going to sacrifice extravagantly so that we can spend our lives on behalf of the poor in the name of Christ." What could happen if we radically changed our lifestyles and the way we did church for one year?

Now I shared and we discussed this two weeks ago as an elder body, and as we were talking about this, praying, thinking through this, it was powerful the way the Spirit of God just took hold in that meeting, and brothers saying, "Yes, we want to. We need to do this." And then one brother spoke up. He said, "I'm wholeheartedly behind this, but I think it would be the grossest sin for us to wait until January 1, 2010, to start caring about children who are dying, if they're dying today." And so we began to pray and talk, how can we do this as soon as possible? But that's where we came to a conclusion that in order to do this as a church, it is going to take the whole church. That it involves all of us as a church saying, "We want to do this." And so I began meeting with different leadership teams in our body that has to do with finance and other things, with staff, and we began talking about what this would look like. And my goal is to meet with some more of those leaders this next week and come back to you next Sunday with a proposal to put before this body to say, "Here's what we can do right now, and here's how we can get geared up, 2010 and this picture in action."

And I want to bring that proposal to you just like...By no means there's nothing about this in the by-laws. By no means do we have to do this, but I believe it is important for our faith family to decide together if we are going to be onboard with a picture like this. But to bring to you, just like we bring other major decisions we have at the church to this faith family, bring a proposal next Sunday. We're going to have two weeks like we normally do with other decisions to pray through, discuss that picture, and then two weeks later have the opportunity to affirm that proposal, if the Lord so leads to say, "How can we do this now and in the days ahead?"

The reality is and the reason I emphasize that is because I am convinced doing something like this would require a unified focus in this body greater than any other unity we have ever had to have before. Because I am convinced the adversary would like at every turn to keep this from happening, and the adversary would like at every turn to get our eyes off of what is important to what we want and what we desire and what appeals to us. I think that the spiritual battle involved in this picture is huge, and therefore it involves all of us on our faces seeking after God.

A unified focus—I don't want to say unified focused on the poor, on these children and their families, because it's more than that. A unified focus on the glory of Christ in the poor, and hearts that are saying, "We want to feed Him. We want to clothe Him. We want to serve Him. By His service in our hearts He has aroused faith in us. We do not want to merely listen to the Word and so deceive ourselves. We want to do what it says. We want to go running after Him." And that kind of unified focus on Him I think radically changes the way we do church.

And so what I want, today, to invite you to do is two-fold. One, I want to invite you as individuals and families all across this room to begin praying, begin considering doing this in your own life and in your own family. I'm not saying I know, or any of us know all that that means, but a challenge is to begin praying and considering what it would look like for you in your life and you in your family to do this for a year.

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