

## **Small Group Guide**

### **FAITH WORKS: FAITH ACTS**

*The Church at Brook Hills, Dr. David Platt*

*September 13, 2009*

*James 2:14-19*

This guide is designed to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use, and there may be instances when you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience, not complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool rather than a rigid teaching task list.

## **Connect**

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

### **Option 1**

Invite learners to share about a time when they saw someone in dire physical need. It could have been in the United States or while living or visiting abroad. (If necessary, you could expand the question to include people/events they've seen on TV like 9/11, Darfur, Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, etc.).

Ask questions that help them identify the feelings and responses that the sights elicited. How did they feel when they saw the need? How did they personally respond? What actions did they take? What were their concerns/fears/frustrations? How did they show mercy or not show mercy?

Explain that today we will look at our call to respond to brothers and sisters in need at home and around the world, according to James 2:14–17.

### **Option 2**

Invite learners to discuss the possible differences between “talkers” and “doers.” Give some examples from everyday life (politics, work, home, the church).

Ask: Whom do you respect more? Why? Who is the one person who spoke rightly and did rightly all the time, at great personal sacrifice? Can we truly call ourselves Christ-followers if we are not attempting to follow His example?

Explain that today we will look at the evidence for true, saving faith in our lives, according to James 2:14–19.

## **Review the Message**

In today's passage, James led by the Holy Spirit looks at the connection between faith and deeds.

### **The Truths...**

- 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.
  - Acts of mercy are not means to salvation.
  - Acts of mercy are necessary evidence of salvation.
- Ultimately, deed less faith is use less faith.
  - Faith is not mere intellectual assent.
  - Faith is not simply an emotional response.

### **Discussion...**

- Ask for a volunteer to read James 2: 14-19
  - Can faith be separated from deeds? Why not? (vs. 14–17)
  - What separates true, saving faith from “demonic” faith? (vs. 18–19)
- Read Matthew 7:15–23. Jesus illustrates a spiritual principle from the natural world.
  - What type of fruit do you think Jesus is referring to?
  - Does an apple tree work at producing apples, or does it happen naturally?
  - How does this relate to faith and deeds?
- Is there such a thing as true faith by itself (without deeds)? Is there such a thing as faith without willful obedience?
- Ask two learners to read John 14:21 and John 15:12–14. What does Jesus say is the relationship between faith and love and obedience?
- Are ‘fear of hell’ or ‘belief that Jesus is the Son of God’ the same thing as saving faith? (v. 19) Are intellectual assent and emotional response aspects of true faith?

### **Application...**

- Ask learners to read Matthew 25:31–46.
  - How should Jesus' personal identification with the poor affect our attitude toward the poor?
  - Is this especially true when the poor are our brothers and sisters in Christ?
  - What kinds of people are included in these verses as “the least of these”? (the hungry and thirsty, strangers, those needing clothes, the sick, those in prison) Where are these people in our county? in the world?
- If faith involves willful obedience, how can we train or discipline ourselves to exercise faith, especially to the “least of these” in our county and the world?
- How do we misrepresent faith by reducing it to mere words? Why do we do that?

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- We know that saving faith is a gift from God (James 1:17–18). If we feel a lack of love or compassion for the poor, what can we do about it? Whom can we ask to help us?

#### The Situation...

- Over           a billion           people in the world live on less than \$1 a day.
  - Low Income, \$825 or less:           37           %
  - Lower Middle Income, \$826 to \$3,255:           38           %
  - Upper Middle Income, \$3,256 to \$10,065:           9           %
  - High Income, \$10,066 or more:           16           %
- Every day, over   26,000           children die of either hunger or preventable diseases.

#### Discussion...

- Discuss initial reactions to the statistics Dr. Platt presented. Were you surprised, shocked, discouraged, convicted, burdened, indifferent, overwhelmed, etc.?
- What would you do if you had to live on \$1 a day? \$10 a day?
- Is the real issue salaries/cost of living or the fact that around 2 billion people are undernourished with 500 million on the verge of starvation? More than 2 billion do not have safe water to drink?
- Have you ever worried about having clean water to drink? What kinds of basic needs do we have easy access to that we take for granted?
- Why do you think 26,000 children die of hunger or preventable diseases each day?

#### Application...

- Read 1 Timothy 6: 6–10. The vast majority of people in Shelby County have access to the gospel, access to clean water and food, and enough clothes and shelter to keep warm.
  - Are we content with those things?
  - If not, why are we not content? What could happen if we were content with just the basics of life?
  - How much financial resources could each family give to help brothers and sisters in our area and around the world if we were just content with the basics?
- How can God use your/our abundance to bless others?
- How has God used you in the past to meet the needs of others? What may God be calling you to do in the future? What would keep you from obeying Him?

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### The Challenge...

- **The Radical Experiment**
  - For one year, to           sacrifice           our money in order to           spend           our lives on behalf of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world.
    - **One Year: A clear           established           timeline.**
    - **Radical Sacrifice: Every           possible           dollar.**
    - **Radical Spending: Urgent           specific           need.**
  - **Two Avenues...**
    - **As a           church          .**
    - **As           individuals           and           families          .**

### Discussion...

- Read the statement of the radical experiment carefully as a group.
- For how long will it last? Why is this important?
- What is being sacrificed? What is sacrifice?
- Why are we being asked to sacrifice? For whom and for what? What is spiritual poverty? How does a specific goal or a face or a name or a specific situation help you to give up something?
- For whose glory is this challenge issued? Why does that make all the difference? How should Christ's glory affect our decisions regarding the radical experiment?
- Discuss the statement: A raise in our earnings could increase our standard of living or our standard of giving.

### Application...

- How can we differentiate between needs and luxuries in our lives? Are there other categories? (urgent needs, needs that could be delayed, occasional luxuries [celebrations], waste, excess, gluttony) Can we turn an urgent need (food for example) into a wasteful excess?
- Take time to pray together about the radical experiment. What is God calling you to as a family or an individual? What about your small group? What about the church?
- What next steps need to happen in order to prepare for the radical experiment? (personal budgeting, church budgeting, prayer, discussion with family members)
- What kinds of opportunities exist to help the spiritually and physically poor in our area and around the world? How should these opportunities be evaluated?
- Remind your group to pray regarding these matters, leading up to next Sunday. Input for the church body can be directed to [radical@brookhills.org](mailto:radical@brookhills.org)