

Steps toward Maturity: Part 2

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[0 : 00] James chapter 2 is where we find ourselves this morning. I want to continue to challenge you.

! I know Wes has reminded me several times he's taken up the challenge of reading through the book of James each week.! And that would be a wonderful thing. I'm doing it, reading through the whole book.

It doesn't, you know, 15-20 minutes. It's a relatively short book. And just reading through it over, and it's just amazing. Obviously praying and just pausing now and then and meditating on it. But it's amazing how the Holy Spirit just kind of percolates things up that I'll notice something. And it's like, well, I haven't noticed that before. And honestly to you, you know, many times I'm reading, I get distracted, and it's just like a puzzle.

There's a bunch of pieces, and I've got them all laid out. And, of course, I've got them all turned upright, you know, where the picture's on the right side. That's half the battle right there, making sure you're working on the right side of the puzzle.

[1 : 21] And so as I'm reading through the Bible, and particularly trying to do a book and a chapter at a time, sometimes it's not as difficult doing a brief little passage.

But reading through it, it just seems like there's all these pieces. And I can see, okay, that's that red, that's part of the, that's the side of the barn right there.

And, you know, the yellow part, okay, that's some of the hay over here. And, but then there are times when, you know, the Lord just brings it all together. And it just seems to all be woven together.

And it, I don't want to say it doesn't make sense here, and it does make sense here, but it just becomes complete. It becomes whole, and see the bigger picture.

And so I trust that will happen for you as you read through the book of James. Also want to make sure that you have an outline this morning. Evelyn has put the outline in there.

[2 : 22] And, of course, she only can put in there what I give her. So this week I sent her the overview. And that's on the back of the outline.

And I went through that last week. I won't go through all of it this week, but five chapters. We're on chapter two. It's all, you know, previously as we looked at Galatians, we were talking about moving forward with God.

You know, it's time to take a step. And you guys have, you know, made a big step in calling Pastor Mike. And so you're in the process of that.

But, you know, a lot of things involved. And obviously you need to know who you are. And Galatians is a beautiful book for really being reminded of who we are in Christ.

Well, James can then be that flip side of, okay, now who you are, what are you going to be doing? And James is the book of doing. And we're really going to see that head on in its most complete form in this chapter.

[3 : 24] James chapter two. Really what I would see as the key verse for the entire book is in James 1, 22. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves.

Do what it says. My wife is a teacher and we are constantly talking about teaching things. And I think most teachers, most parents, you would love if the children were listening.

You would take listening. You would just be tickled to death. They're listening. Well, probably when you made that statement, they were listening.

For those of you that have adult children, you've probably made that statement at some time. They were listening. You know, they do something. And it's like, yes, all of those speeches, you know, all of those lessons, they were listening.

You know, they're really listening because they have done something that you taught them. And so, yeah, we love to have children listening.

[4 : 37] We love to have people listening. You've got a Sunday school class. You love to have them listening. But the key, the real key and the point, you know, that they have been listening is when there is doing.

There's action from that. And then chapter 2, we're going to look at today. I talked about body parts. Well, chapter 2 would be the whole body because James mentions this in verse 26.

As the body without the spirit is dead. Beautiful picture that the Holy Spirit gave him to give to us.

Well, how does this works and faith?

Works and faith. How do they go together? They go together like a body. A body without the spirit is dead. So faith without deeds is dead.

Steps toward maturity. And then as you look at the outline today, I'm going to lay out six steps to understand how faith and works go together.

[5 : 44] Well, let me read through the passage, make a couple of notes, and then we'll go through the outline here. James chapter 1. James chapter 1. I'll be reading out of the New International Version. But I think if you have another translation, you'll be able to follow along.

James. Well, hang on here. Let me get the right outline. That's last week's outline. Not James 1. I had kept it because I had all of the pieces of the body there.

James chapter 2, verse 1. My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.

Now, I've read this verse a lot over the years, and especially when I was pastor of a church, but also when I was not pastor of a church. I always, you know, this to me just kind of jumped out.

[6 : 52] Wow, that would be crazy if some real nicely dressed person came in, and probably not so much that, but if somebody came in that wasn't dressed very nice, and, you know, we kind of put them over.

That would be rude. That would not be polite. Right, and so, it's easy for us, always, especially, you know, when we get into the Gospels where it's talking about those Pharisees.

Oh, yeah, those Pharisees. That was that group of people, real religious people that were legalists, and they had all of these bad, you know, those other people.

And if we're not careful, we'll totally miss that every single scripture in this book is speaking to us.

And we have to make sure that we're not the Pharisee. And we have to apply this as well. Now, the passage is probably so famous that I really cannot imagine a body of believers literally doing this.

[8 : 12] It would be, maybe it has happened, and obviously there's been segregation in the past. Maybe there's still some segregation. But this idea of some person that's dressed very poorly, kind of being pushed over to the back.

I've never seen that literally happen. But could there be a situation that would be very similar to that, that's not quite so obvious?

Could there be somebody that is just different? Maybe the differences are more subtle.

That we would treat the people differently. You see, James is getting right to the issue. He's talking about what we're doing. And right off the bat, he says, hey, look at this, what you're doing.

Now, he talks about, suppose a man comes into your meeting. He didn't say, suppose somebody comes to your church. Because James didn't have the concept that the building was the church.

[9 : 29] This was the meeting place. The church is made up of the people, the body of Christ, that gathers together in a meeting place. But then also is alive and active the other six days of the week.

We'll continue in verse 3. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, here's a good seat for you. But say to the poor man, you stand there or sit on the floor by my feet. Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers. Remember, we're talking about listening and doing.

He says, listen. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him?

But you've insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

[10 : 41] If you're really keeping the royal law found in scripture, love your neighbor as yourself, you're doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. That gets back to that same issue.

And we also saw this in Galatians when he would talk about the law. If you're going to go that circumcision route, you can't go halfway.

If you're going to embrace the law, you've got to embrace every single law. And if you break just one of them, you're in trouble.

Verse 11. For he who said, do not commit adultery, also said, do not murder. If you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

[11 : 49] Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. Then he shifts gears here. And this is really where I want to focus. This is where he gets into this issue of listening and doing.

Faith and works. Verse 14. And this is a question that you've got to answer. And I imagine most of you have answered this before. It always does us good to review.

Think in the Old Testament, how many times the Israelites, God had them review what had happened before. We have short memories. And so, if you've answered this before, this will be a great time of review.

If you've never answered this question, this is a question you need to answer. And I would not put off answering it today.

[12 : 58] Verse 14. What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims? Now, he doesn't say, what good is it, brothers, if a man has faith?

He says, what good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Now, if you're here this morning and you've had any kind of history in being in church, if you somewhat even regularly attended church in your life, or at least you've had spells of going to church, you're probably familiar with this concept that faith saves.

Maybe you've even seen some kind of neon light. You know, faith saves. That's, I hope, you know, in this setting, if I were in another setting, I would not assume that.

But I'm going to assume that probably everyone here this morning has heard that term, kind of familiar with that term, that faith saves. And so as you come to those points in your life, they come as the Spirit moves.

[14 : 28] It could be one day you're just driving down the road and suddenly you think, what is life all about? It could come when you get the report of some terrible thing has happened to a loved one.

And you're like, what in the world is going on? It could be that you're at the funeral of a loved one, a friend, and you're wondering, what's my funeral going to be like?

What happens after death? Am I prepared to die financially, or are my affairs in order, or everything okay with my family, or those people that I love, have I communed?

Am I ready to die? And we start asking those questions, and a lot of times, oh, okay, I have faith. I'm saved.

If I'm saved, I'm going to heaven. And technically, that's correct. But what James gets into here is, what kind of faith is it that saves?

[15 : 56] And then he begins to take that apart. And so the question we've got to ask, number one, do I have faith? Then we've got to ask, what kind of faith do I have?

And in this verse, and we'll see some others, here he tells us, he seems to tell us, that someone that has faith but has no deeds, that is not the saving kind of faith.

Now, deeds, works, fruit, harvest, however you want to describe that, if someone has faith, basically, if someone is a Christian, isn't it reasonable to think that there would be differences in their life from a non-Christian?

And so the question is, if you are claiming to have faith, and there are no differences in your life, what kind of faith do you have?

That's the answer we need to come up. That's the question we need to answer. Continuing in verse 15. Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.

[17 : 43] And you can see here, he's kind of circled back to what he started off with about the rich man and the poor man, how we're treating, how we're responding. I mean, you could do a whole sermon on the rich man and the poor man in the first half of the chapter.

But allow me to just kind of park it over here by saying that was just kind of his introduction. That was just a good example of the get us thinking, how do we treat people?

How are we interacting? How are we deeding? What are our deeds? And then here he gives another example. Suppose someone is without clothes and daily food and you say to them, go, I wish you well.

Keep warm and well fed. But does nothing about the person's physical needs. What good is it? Now that hits close to home.

I don't know about in Bartlesville, but you can't drive around much in Oklahoma City without somebody on a street corner with a sign saying homeless.

[19 : 04] Again, there's all kinds of questions. Are they really homeless?

Do they really need money? What are they going to do with the money? You know, that's kind of over here. But still, this is a, again, I don't know that there's going to be somebody walk in next week and we're going to ask them to sit.

And as a matter of fact, you know, most people come to church prefer sitting in the back row. I guess today it would make more sense if we said, you know, somebody came in all tattered and looking poor and we made them come down and sit on the front row.

That would be the punishment that we would give. But this idea basically, you know, who knows what's happening to the person on the street corner.

But there's somebody that we knew and they came to us and said, I've got a great need. And our response was, well, let me pray for you.

[20 : 20] Now, we should pray for them. But if we just say, let me pray for you and you go on about your business, I've got my business to go on to.

He finishes verse 16 by saying, what good is that? Basically saying, that's not any good. That doesn't match up.

You're not really, you're saying, oh, let me help you. Let me say a prayer for you. And yet in reality, you're not helping them in some immediate need that they have.

Somebody that you know, you know what's going on. You know it's a legitimate need that they have. And then he parallels that with this faith, verse 17, in the same way, faith by itself.

Basically, in the first, in this illustration where the person came and said, I'm starving, I need something to eat. And again, it's somebody you know, somebody you know the situation, and you say, well, let me pray for you.

[21 : 29] Go on, you know. In the same way, faith by itself. What was the, what was the emptiness in that interaction between the hungry person and the person that just said, let me pray for you and then, okay, move on.

They were just empty words. I hope you get something to eat. I'll pray you can get something to eat. But you need to move along.

Those were just empty words. And so James says, in the same way, faith by itself would be empty words.

If it is not accompanied by action, that kind of faith is dead. Verse 18. 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. Now, the show here doesn't necessarily mean prove, it means to demonstrate.

[22 : 45] I mean, you get to the same point. But basically, he's saying, demonstrate me your faith without deeds, and I will demonstrate you my faith by what I do.

Faith is unseen except by God. Deeds are the way that we see faith. Now, you could reverse this and say, just as you can have false faith, I'll get ahead of myself here in a little, thus as you can have false faith without deeds, you can have deeds without faith.
and there's a little bit of a grammatical challenge here.

There were not quotation marks in the original Greek of the New Testament. And so, in the NIV and some of the other translations, verse 16 is set off in quotation marks.

You have faith, I have deeds. And so, James is quoting this imaginary person here. You have faith, I have deeds. But, they stop.

[24 : 01] And then, in verse 19, or, the last of 18, show me your faith without deeds, I'll show you my faith by what I do.

We're not sure if that's now James saying that or James still quoting this imaginary person. But it really doesn't matter who's saying it.

James' point is the same. James, James is using this other person to illustrate what he's saying. And so, whether he's continuing the quotation or not, it's the same argument that he's wanting to present.

Verse 19, you believe that there's one God. Good. Even the demons believe that and shudder.

Now, James' readers here were Jews who'd been converted to Christianity.

And their Jewish background meant that they were very familiar with the Shema. And the Shema was the Jewish confession of faith, which is out of Deuteronomy chapter 6, which says, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[25 : 19] And so, when he was writing to this group of people that predominantly was Jewish, when he would say, well, even, you know, as important it is to you, the Shema, to make that declaration, anybody can make a declaration.

Matter of fact, the devil can make that declaration because the devil above anyone knows what's going on and that there is a living God. He goes on in verse 20, you foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

Was not Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend.

Verse 24, you see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. Now that verse right there is probably one of the most problematic verses in the entire Bible.

[26 : 38] We've got a grammatical problem that we need to struggle with. We've got a theological problem that we need to struggle with. And then we've got an application problem of verse 14.

If we have faith without deeds, what do we really have? Verse 25, in the same way was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them on a different direction.

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. Well, let me go ahead and get into the outline here.

We've already talked about this, verse 14, the spiritual problem. What kind of faith do I really have?

We talked briefly about the grammatical problem in verse 18.

The theological problem, verse 24, I think we'll see that as we go through these six steps to understanding how faith and works go together.

[27 : 48] Number one, we need to see that there's a difference between true faith and false faith. We see this in verse 14, verse 17, and verse 20.

He differentiates, and I've basically already gotten into this as I read through the passage. There's a difference between true faith and false faith. Right there, that gets us 75% down the road.

There are two different kinds of faiths being talked about here. And so you've got to answer the question, what kind of faith do I have? Number two, the next step, true faith alone saves.

We see this in verse 5. We see this in Ephesians 2, 8, 9, which we had the reading of earlier.

Ephesians 2, 8, 9, Titus 3, 5, And then, you know, Ephesians 10, that we're created for these good works, just builds into that idea that true faith alone saves.

Number three, the third step, faith is the seed, works is the fruit. Getting more into the imagery here, it helps me to see a picture, to understand something.

[29 : 37] And so a picture you could use is that faith is the seed, and works are the fruit of that. The common ground between James, and if you do any reading on this, people usually identify Paul with grace, and they will identify James with works.

And they'll want to have them competing against one another, conflicting against one another. No, I say they complement one another. other. The common ground that they find, well, there's many common, they come together with Abraham.

They both point to Abraham as an example. Romans 4, 21, yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully

persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised.

that's Romans 4, 20, 21 that Paul wrote. And then here we see that he uses, James uses Abraham as a picture to see that Abraham's actions were the theme that were so important that God blessed through that.

well, I guess a way to look at this is Paul's focus on Abraham is leading to salvation.

[31 : 15] James' focus on Abraham is leading after, from salvation. And they both come to the same point.

That point famously over the years, solifide, faith only.

Faith only. We fight for faith only. And I believe in faith only. The issue is we've got to define faith. and what faith is. Alistair McGrath, you know, some have tried to identify well, was it Martin Luther? Was it John Calvin that, you know, first came, well, neither one of them first came up with it. You know, it first came up in the Bible itself, but probably popularized, I guess, by Martin Luther.

[32 : 18] Luther. But you need to understand the context of what was happening in Luther's day. In Luther's day, Luther was a Catholic priest who is credited with starting the Reformation in 1517, which we're coming up in October, I believe, on the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 thesis on the door of the church there.

And they were his basically 95, you know, his top 95 list of grievances with the Pope and with the Catholic Church.

And so the environment that day was all about works righteousness, indulgences. You know, hopefully you don't have a preacher coming and saying, well, indulge me to go, you know, long, long, long time.

You know, we talk about indulge me, that's, well, you know, give me the opportunity. An indulgence historically was a favor from the church that you paid for.

Basically, you could pay for the forgiveness of sin, you could pay for a priesthood, you could pay for a certain position in a particular church, and so those were things that just gotten out of hand.

[33 : 59] And so everything was about what you were doing. And so in that environment, Luther had to go all the way to the other side and say, no, it is faith only to get clarity.

It's kind of like when you're studying something really close, you get in the microscope and you focus down to that one particular thing that is causing the problem.

Now, you can't live your life looking through a microscope. Regularly, you need to look up and look around and see the big picture of how everything interacts.

But there are times you need to focus down and see this is where it all begins. This is the issue.

And so that's what Luther was doing when he coined the term solify they. And so, verse, step three is faith is seed and works is the fruit.

[35 : 07] Number four, true faith produces works. We see this in verses 21 through 25 and then Ephesians 2.10, the last part of what was quoted earlier, for we are the God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This verse 24 as I mentioned earlier theologically is the most problematic because just at face value it appears to say you see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

You just take that one sentence and it's like, whoa, that seems to be the needle moving way over this other way. We've got faith only right here.

This really seems to be moving the needle over this direction. You've got to see it in the entire context of the passage. It's just a clarification point.

Faith alone without the deeds is not real faith.

[36 : 34] True faith produces works. Another quote that you know sometimes these quotes come out and you you've got to make sure you really trace them back to where they came from.

But pretty clearly John Calvin in a book called Antidote to the Council of Trent in 1547 made this statement. It is faith alone that justifies but faith that justifies can never be alone.

That's a classic statement there. And so basically step four true faith produces works. And then number five there's a difference between true works and false works.

First Corinthians three tells us about you know there are several different judgments after we die. Of course all of them by the grace of God but Paul does this teaching in first Corinthians three that there's a fire that we're going to pass through and that we use all these materials in our life gold silver and precious stones wood hay and stubble and you know the thing that jumped out of this week as I was reading this I've read that passage a thousand times I've preached on it before but I

always thought gold silver and precious stones wood hay and stubble were separated in the passage and that it was clearly defined these are the good and these are the bad but no it's all one list what is it that differentiates the materials it's the fire what's fire going to do to gold to silver even precious stones it's going to refine them what's fire going to do with wood hay and stubble they're going to burn up they're going to disappear that's the picture of our efforts many times there's no way to see on the outside whether what you're doing is a good work or a false work matter of fact there are false works that do good things if

I ever have a flat tire and somebody pulls off the road and help me fix that flat tire I'm not sure I'm going to ask them how their walk with the Lord is well I mean I may ask that just as a way of wanting to minister to them but I don't think I'm going to ask them their walk with the Lord before I allow them to help me fix my tire on the side of the road!

[39 : 56] there are good things that happen from false works but it's the better thing and sometimes the better things even go unnoticed one of the better things in the Bible the widow's mite a very small thing a very inconsequential thing something that no one else noticed except God noticed that why did God notice that because it was done through God it was done in surrender to God today we would say it was done through the power of the

Holy Spirit that actually happened before the giving of the Holy Spirit through the birth of the church so that's splitting hairs theologically if you want to talk about just how it happened it was done by God in her heart and so and so there's a difference between true works and false works and the only way to tell ultimately is when we stand before God and ultimately of course he's just going to know but the thing he'll be looking for and knowing is was it done in surrender to his will through the power of the Holy Spirit through faith or was it done of our own will through the sheer determination of our effort out of fear out of trying to gain some earthly honor and those will be true works through the

Spirit and false works through our own effort and then the last one there number six James is the book of doing why is he talking about good works because the Holy Spirit said you know what we need to make sure there's balance here God is the God of order that ark that Noah built guess what it was balanced it was an architectural marvel that floated in the water and carried all that weight and all of those people and animals God is a God of order and balance and to see the big picture we need to understand it is by faith alone that we are saved but that kind of salvation true faith then produces good works it's really for our own benefit we're like man this just makes it more complicated now

I've got to worry about all these works you don't have to worry about all those works it sounds weird to say this but I'll say you just need to worry about being surrendered to the perfect will of God and it's very very simple very very simple reading the word of God saying God help me God show me and he will show you he'll make it so clear that's the simple part and and don't get me it's not the difficult part then of doing it no the difficult part is deciding to do it having your will to be surrendered to the will of

God having your way being put under the authority of God's way having your stubbornness having your pride God having your fears having your desires well up and say no I am going to do it my way that's the difficult part salvation salvation the presence of God is simple faith true faith alone that then produces a difference in your life as you surrender to God and oh by the way we should be celebrating this because this is the confirmation this is what confirms our salvation that we're acting and that we're saying and that we're doing things we naturally would not do because there's something that's happened inside of us when

[46 : 02] God has saved us when we've recommitted our lives when we've drawn close to him in fellowship and obedience it's confirm it's confirmation it's not a guessing game it's not smoke and mirrors it's not superstitious it's the presence of God living in a temple he's made in our body blessed be the name of the Lord Thank you.