

“LIVE YOUR FAITH”: FAITH AND WORKS IN JAMES 2:14-26

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Last Updated: 05/17/2011

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***Abstract* — James’ letter is packed full of practical instruction and godly wisdom for the Christian believer. In 2:14-26 James argues for the proper characterization of true faith as a faith that has works along with it. He claims that faith without works is dead. What James is getting at is that true faith is proven to be real because it changes the way the believer lives their life. They will act in accordance with that faith and demonstrate that their faith is genuine through their actions. Thus, genuine faith is a faith that results in works. Or to say it another way, “True faith is a living faith.”**

***General Research Topic(s)* — The Letter of James, Faith, Christian Contextualization, New Testament Studies, Exegesis/Hermeneutics.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The letter of James encourages and exhorts twelve communities of Jewish believers (“the twelve tribes in the Dispersion”) to stand strong in faith and loyalty to God and to put their faith into practice (1:1). The letter is structured around imperative exhortations and admonitions that are woven throughout the letter in conjunction with figurative illustrations of imagery that support the instruction provided. The letter opens with an exhortation to “consider it nothing but joy” when trials are faced (1:2), but if any person needs wisdom from God, they are admonished to ask for this wisdom “in faith, never doubting” (1:6a). This admonition is immediately supported by a simile for illustration: “for

the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind” (1:6b).

James is concerned with cultivating steadfast faith that is both genuine and unwavering in his readers who apparently had faced economic oppression and abuse for their faith in Jesus Christ (2:6-7). James’ main focus in the letter is on the practical wisdom of showing genuine faith and living with godly conduct. Genuine faith will be evident in a person’s actions because it is evidenced by good and charitable deeds that flow from love working through faith. Therefore, a believer must “be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves” (1:22) like a person who looks at their reflection in a mirror and immediately forgets what they saw when they stop looking (1:23-24). Such genuine faith evidenced by good works is exemplified by the active manifestations of faith that were demonstrated by the renowned ancestor of the Jewish believers, Abraham, and the Gentile woman, Rahab (2:14-26). By embracing the Jewish heritage of his audience with specific OT testimonies, James connects how the actions of these two believers exemplify the good works that are to accompany faith because, as James aptly states, “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (2:17). Believers therefore should behave and exhibit charitable deeds that evidence their genuine faith.

Furthermore, when a person speaks both blessing and cursing from their mouth, James says, “this ought

not to be so” (3:10), just like a spring does not bring forth both fresh water and salty (or repulsive tasting) water out of the same place (3:11). Rather, the believer must submit themselves to God (4:7), resist the devil (4:7), and draw near to God (4:8). Those who are indulging in sin and disloyal in their faith are commanded to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts (4:8). The believer is to have patience when awaiting the Lord’s coming (5:7) and to be strengthened in their faith by the knowledge that the time of his coming is not far off (5:8). These are all exhortations for godly living and are intended to help strengthen the reader in their steadfast endurance during the challenging times that they are facing (2:6-7).

In his exhortations and admonitions, James employs familial language to introduce and appeal to his audience in order for them to embrace his wise counsel. He calls his audience “dear brothers and sisters” to add a tone of endearment and comfort to his words. This familial language is often used at the introduction of a new topic of thought and serves as one point of reference for dividing the text of the letter into sections (e.g., 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19).

As James solicits obedience from believers to his many appeals for their loyalty to God, this affectionate greeting is spread throughout his persistent entreaties for their faithful response. The familial language aids the consideration and attentive receipt of James’ pressing message likely in order to not incur offense or rebuttal on the part of his readers because they might misunderstand his kindness and care for them underlying the numerous exhortations, admonitions, and reproofs. It seems that this language is employed so that James’ readers would then more likely respond to James’ call for genuine faith with uplifted enthusiasm rather than disdain due to his amiable salutations and entreats.

II. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The introductory theme of the letter is that perseverance and endurance are at the bedrock of constant and unwavering faith. James first teaches that believers need to have endurance that results from having patience during times when their faith is tested (1:3-4). This endurance must also last through the times when they are tempted, and they must not wrongly attribute the temptation to God (1:12-13). Doing so would equate to being “deceived” and not acknowledging the true origin of temptation, which is from one’s own selfish desires that, if pursued, ultimately lead to sin (1:14-16). Thus, perseverance and endurance are directly connected with the ability of a person to not succumb to temptation but rather let God’s righteousness abound in their lives.

Likewise, the imperatives to “be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger” (1:19b) and to “welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls” (1:21b) are also directed at bringing forth godly obedience in the lives of the readers. The exhortation to obey God’s Word (1:22) is the pinnacle of what it means to have genuine faith that is evidenced by putting that faith into practice. This section is summarized with an aphorism that describes pure religion in God’s sight as caring for orphans and widows in times of distress and remaining undefiled by the world (i.e., to demonstrate faith through kind and charitable deeds and not become infiltrated with the cares and wickedness of the world).

After setting up this strong argument for pure religion that is acceptable in God’s sight, James transitions into an example describing the antithesis to this pure religion by showing the error involved in having favoritism and partiality in church meetings (2:1-4). Through a rhetorical question, “Has God not chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?” (2:5), James draws to his readers attention that it

is the poor who have been blessed by God, and ironically, it is the rich that are wrongly given honor and recognition (2:3) for they are the ones that oppress them and dishonor the Lord's name (2:6-7). James goes on then to address partiality when it comes to obeying God's commandments too. His argument is that it is inevitable that judgment will come for breaking any part of the Mosaic Law, but in the grand picture, mercy and charitable deeds triumph over this judgment as part of the royal law, so speak and act as those who will be judged by "that" law (2:8-13).

In the following section, James writes that those who are teachers of God's Word will be judged more strictly (3:1) because their words have the ability to impact many for good or for evil and they know the difference themselves. The man or woman who is able to speak perfectly all the time is said to have the ability to keep his or her behaviors in perfect check, but all people make mistakes (3:2). Discourse about the inability to tame the tongue follows this declaration and leads to another important imperative in the letter. "Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom" (3:13).

The distinction between wisdom that comes from God and the wisdom that comes from the devil is made clear. Works that are done with gentleness demonstrate true, godly wisdom whereas hearts full of envy, bitterness, and selfish ambitions are devilish (3:14-15). Again, James employs figurative imagery of agricultural bounty to describe true wisdom from God, which is full of mercy and "good fruits" and yields a "harvest" of righteousness "sown" in peace for those who strive to make peace (3:17-18). Such agricultural imagery was meant to speak to the minds of the first-century believers to whom James writes as they would have surely been familiar with agricultural practices. Yielding good fruit only comes from constant care and attentiveness to the field where the seed is sown. That means, continual watchfulness is needed in order to reap such a harvest. This translates into a clear relationship

between what is sown and what is reaped by living according to the wisdom that is from above (i.e., godly wisdom).

Once again, going back to the idea of purging wickedness and wrong behavior from the lives of his audience, James introduces a series of confrontations followed by a series of imperatives that comprise a climactic section of warnings and instruction in his letter. He confronts his readers on their quarreling and fighting among themselves (4:1), their covetousness of what others have and their scheming and killing to obtain these things (4:2), and their jealousy and warring (4:3a), all of which are done with wrong motives (4:3b). They are motivated by friendship with the world, which puts them in stark opposition to God, for which they are declared "Adulterers!" (4:4). Loyalty correctly belonging to God has been usurped in their closeness with worldly pleasures and likeness to the world through wickedness and disobedience to God. The description of these worldly behaviors ties back into the earlier description of what is pure religion, namely, to keep oneself unspotted from the world with its sinful actions and thinking (1:27).

Further imperatives are then given that warn against judgment and criticism of one another by speaking evil (4:11-12) and against ignorant planning of one's future without recognizing that the events in life are subject to God's sovereignty (4:13-17). But James provides final exhortations in the closing sections of his letter that remind the believer that the ultimate goal is still steadfast perseverance and unwavering faith in God that is demonstrated through their actions in accordance with God's commandments and righteous decrees.

The themes of patience and endurance act as bookends for this letter, appearing both at the beginning and at the end (1:3-4; 5:7-11). James has his readers consider the imagery of a farmer as he waits for rain to bring a harvest as an example of the patience they are to have in waiting for the Lord's return (5:7). In difficult

times when a person sins or wrongs another believer, James includes another imperative exhorting them to confess such a sin to whom they wronged so that the two believers may be healed and unified again (5:16). At the end of his letter, the vision that James has for his readers is unshakable faith and restoration to God's plan of obedience for their lives so that they may show forth their fruit-producing, genuine faith that is manifest in their good works and charitable deeds.

Thus, James' letter holds many exhortations and admonishments about how to live a godly life and how God's wisdom will result in a harvest of good fruit in the believers life if the believer is willing to keep their steadfast endurance during trials and afflictions and show works of love attesting to the genuine faith that is in them. Overall, the letter's theological emphasis is on practical divinity toward leading the believer into a more perfect way of living their faith and walking in the counsel of the Lord.

III. DO THE WORD AND FULFILL THE LAW – JAMES 1:22-2:13

As will be seen throughout this section of the letter (1:22-2:26), James is concerned with instructing his readers regarding what true faith looks like and what it means to actually have faith. Just as Paul declared that “the only thing that counts is faith working through love” (Gal 5:6), James will set before his readers how true faith is manifested in what a person does (i.e., through obedience and benevolent acts), and not simply in what they merely “believe” to be true. His conclusion will be that it is faith demonstrated through good deeds that is true faith—a faith that is alive and produces fruit—and likewise, faith without obedience or any good works is nothing.

The context of James' argument in 2:14-26 can be traced back to 1:22-25 where he exhorts his readers to be “doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves” (1:22). Then, James enters into a

discourse where he warns his readers against having partiality and favoritism. His argument begins with, “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” (2:1). James is asking, “How can you ‘believe’ (Gk. *pistis*) in our Lord Jesus Christ if you show favoritism and partiality to fellow brothers and sisters?” This rhetorical question implies a negative response as indicated by James' use of the Greek negative particle *mē* in the question.¹

The logical inconsistency of this question is then set forth through an illustration regarding poor and rich guests coming to a church meeting (e.g., in a believer's home) where the rich are noticed and treated well but the poor are ignored and given the least provision (2:2-4). The partiality involved in favoring the rich over the poor is proven by James through another rhetorical question, this time expecting affirmation according to the use of the Greek negative particle *ou*: “Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom?” (2:5). However, James continues, “You will do well,” to fulfill the royal law, which states “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (2:8) because partiality is incongruent with this law (2:9).

James' main point throughout 2:1-12 is that if a person has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ then they should show no partiality toward fellow brothers and sisters just like they should not show favoritism in obedience to God's commandments. At the end of 2:1-12, James delivers another aphorism urging his readers to understand the message he is trying to get across to them: “So speak and so act as those who are to be

¹ Patrick Hartin points out that the argumentative style here clearly resembles that of a *diatribe*. James is asking a question from which no actual response is intended. It is simply asked to further the point under consideration through internal reflection by his audience. Patrick Hartin, *James* (SacP 14; ed. D. J. Harrington; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003), 149.

judged by the law of liberty” (2:12). In essence, James is saying, “Let your actions fall in line with your faith and live according to the law that has set you free from sin and by which you will be judged.” It is precisely this principle of “living out your faith” that James then turns to elaborate on further in 2:14-26.

IV. FAITH AND WORKS – JAMES 2:14-26

James 2:14-26 has been a topic of considerable debate for centuries, likely more so than any other section of the letter. As James is a book filled with practical wisdom, this section focuses on admonishing the reader to understand how faith and works have an inextricable connection and that *genuine* faith will result in good works validating that it is indeed real faith.

James begins the section with a rhetorical question at the outset of 2:14-26, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?” (2:14a), extending the feature of the diatribe from the previous section (2:1-13) to here as well. James’ thought seems to be focused on addressing the lack of profit for a person who has faith but does not have works associated with it. However, the implication is not that faith by itself is utterly profitless but he wants his readers to ask themselves what is the “good” of one’s “faith” if it is devoid of “works”?

Before moving on, the word “works” (Gr. *ergon*) here is not referring to “works of the law” as in things done in obedience to God’s commandments in the Mosaic covenant. James is using the word “works” in a positive sense to denote “works of faith” as in works of love and obedience, that is, works done out of one’s own volition and desire to obey. But the “works” James is referring to are also works that are done to demonstrate the inner convictions of one’s faith. James is speaking about the evidence of the desired fruit in a believer’s life because they believe. In other words, James’ question about “faith” and “works” can be thought of as: “What good is faith if it has nothing to show for itself?” and, by

extension, then asking: “Can faith that results in no action actually be authentic, real faith?”

James follows with another direct question, “Can faith save you?” (2:14b). This question, implying a negative answer (according to the use of the particle *mē* again), seems to suggest that James is saying faith alone is inadequate for a person to receive salvation. So then, what is James getting at? Is he questioning the validity of justification by faith alone? No, he is not.²

Undergirding James’ entire argument is not the efficacy of pre-conversion works to bring about justification from sin but in post-conversion works displaying the character and authenticity of one’s faith.³ In the original Greek, the question, “Can faith save you?” (2:14b) has the article with the noun “faith” (Gk. *pistis*) referring back to the “faith” that was just mentioned, that is, the faith a person claims to have but without any works (2:14a).⁴ Thus, what James is really asking is, “Can that sort of faith (i.e., faith professed without works) save you?” And James’ answer is “No, it cannot.” To be clear, the meaning of “save” (Gk. *sōzō*) here is referring to being saved from God’s righteous judgment in which this sort of shallow “faith” will not vindicate a person from his wrath against sin. James’ argument is not that works must be *added* to faith in order to receive salvation; but, for those who are saved,

² “It is apparent from the tenor of the epistle that James was convinced (as was Paul) that a true saving faith will result in a changed life and will produce works.” C. R. Jenkins, “Faith and Works in Paul and James,” *BibSac* 159 (2002): 62-78.

³ “The difference between Paul and James consists in the *sequence* of works and conversion: Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works.” Douglas J. Moo, *James* (TNTC 16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 102 (emphasis original).

⁴ This aspect of the text’s grammar is acknowledged by numerous other scholars and writers who agree with this analysis. See Robert Stein, “Saved by Faith [Alone] in Paul Versus Not Saved by Faith Alone,” *SBJT* 3 (2000): 4-19. Moo, *James*, 100.

genuine faith naturally includes works because those works are the proof that their faith is real and not just some superficial concession or agreement about truth.⁵

Next, James draws upon a hypothetical allegory regarding the good works he is talking about which should accompany genuine faith. Aimed at highlighting the point of his previous questionings, James constructs a scenario about dismissing the needs of poor believer with mere kind words and best regards without any true benefaction when their impoverished condition is readily evident (2:15-16a). What this scenario is aimed at is to get the reader to see the contradiction in someone who says they have “faith” but that their “faith” has not changed the way they act. James follows up again by rhetorically asking, “What is the good of that [sort of faith]?” (2:16b). The implied answer is again “None” (through the use of the negative particle *mē*), seeing that the believer’s needs have gone unprovided for. James’ point is that to neglect a fellow believer who is in need violates the foundation of genuine faith. If a person truly has faith, they cannot sit idly by or dismiss the obligation to help their fellow believer.

Thus, the conclusion James promptly responds with is that “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (2:17). But, what does James mean that “faith without works is dead”? The contrast James is making is between “faith with works” and “faith without works,” not “faith” or “works.” James’ question is specifically addressing the case of “faith without works” here. The phrase “is dead” in the Greek is *nekra estin kath’ heautēn*, which literally means “is in itself dead,” according to the use of the reflexive pronoun *heautēn*. Also, the word “dead” (Gk. *nekros*) here takes on a figurative usage to mean “inactive” or “useless.” In other words, to refer to faith being “dead” means that it does not do anything of substance; it is inert and ineffective. James’ point is that a person may have faith but if it produces no good

works, then it is “useless,” and it will not be of profit on the Day of Judgment. It is important to realize that an argument is not being made by James regarding the inclusion of works for salvation. James is specifically handling the issue of the evidence of good works in regard to genuine faith and how works are a testimony of that faith.

Next, by bringing into his argument an imaginary opponent (commonly done in Greek rhetorical argumentation), James vies for the position that if someone says they have faith but do not have any good works to show for it, that faith is merely mental concession, and even demons have that degree of faith (2:18-19).⁶ But, as James continues, that type of faith (i.e., without works) does not amount to any appreciable value. As Douglas Moo asserts, “Genuine faith must go beyond the intellect to the will; it must affect our attitudes and actions as well as our beliefs.”⁷

In verse 20, James now gets right to the heart of confronting his imaginary opponent who has advocated against the need for good works to accompany one’s faith. He bluntly interrogates his opponent by asking, “Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren?” The word “senseless” (Gk. *kenos*) means “void” and “empty” referring to the person’s lack of understanding or comprehension, and the word “barren” (Gk. *argos*) means “idle” or “unproductive.” Thus, with a sort of play on words James is essentially saying, “Do you want me to show you how faith without works does not work?”⁸

To substantiate his refutation against his pretend interlocutor, James then draws on the OT testimonies of

⁶ McKnight also sees James’ use of an unidentified interlocutor in the series of questions as a tactic of James’ argument for faith with works. Scot McKnight, “James 2:18a: The Unidentifiable Interlocutor,” *WTJ* 52 (1990): 355-364.

⁷ Moo, *James*, 107.

⁸ Sharyn Dowd, “Faith That Works: James 2:14-26,” *RevExp* 97 (2000): 195-205.

⁵Moo, *James*, 99.

Abraham and Rahab in verses 21-25. In the case of Abraham, he was willing to offer his son, Isaac, on the altar because he believed in God's promise (2:21-24), and also Rahab was willing to hide the Israelite messengers and send them on their way safely along another route because she believed in God (2:25). Interestingly, James asks the same question about the testimony of each of these records: 1) "Was not Abraham justified by works?" (v. 21), and 2) "Was not Rahab justified by works?" (v. 25). However, James is not using "justified" (Gk. *dikaioō*) in the same sense that Paul uses it in his letters.

Paul asserts that a person "is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:16; cp. Rom 4:2). But, in contrast, James states, "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jas 2:24). However, these two Christian writers are not at odds with each other. Paul and James utilize similar vocabulary and draw upon the same OT example of Abraham to make two very distinct points. Furthermore, by closely examining James' argument, it will become apparent that James and Paul are, in fact, not in conflict with their respective claims regarding "works" and "justification."

The distinction between James and Paul is found in the nuance with which each author uses the words *dikaioō*, *pistis*, and *ergon*. James claims that "faith alone" is insufficient for justification. James' argument is not that a person is justified by works but that they are not justified by a faith that results in no works. A faith that saves is a faith that then issues in good works. For James, just like Paul, faith is the sole criteria for salvation. However, James is concerned with describing what faith really means, whereas Paul is more concerned with whether one needs faith or not in order to be justified. As Moo succinctly states, "Paul wants to make clear that one 'gets into' God's kingdom only by faith;

James insists that God requires works from those who are 'in'.⁹

To prove that an empty faith is worthless was James' entire purpose for citing the example of Abraham and Rahab. Abraham's obedience to God's instruction was the proof of his genuine faith in God's promise, and his obedience showed that his faith had been brought to completion (2:22). In other words, Abraham's obedience (i.e., his works) showed his faith to be true.

Therefore, James concludes 2:14-26 with the aphoristic statement, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead" (2:26). The imagery of this simile captures the idea that just as the human body is an "empty shell" (i.e., "dead") without the life-giving, energization of the spirit, faith, in the same manner, is "empty" and "useless" and produces no fruit without good works done out of love to energize and bring it to completeness.

V. REFLECTION: LIVE YOUR FAITH

James 2:14-26 addresses a critical component in the life of the believer concerning the meaning of *genuine* faith. The important admonition that James seems to be getting at is to either prevent his readers from becoming complacent with their faith and thus sinking into a mundane lull of unfruitfulness, or from backsliding into the ways of the world with its perverse perspectives and culture. So, James' exhortation centers on being persistent in doing good deeds as evidence of one's faith lest a believer fall away from living out their faith and demonstrating its genuineness.

Good deeds are done out of love. They can come in all forms and fashions dealing with nearly every category of life. James' bottom line seems to be, "If you believe, then you should act like it!" Examples of good

⁹ Moo, *James*, 110. (emphasis original)

deeds might be, helping to pay part of another believer's rent if they come up short that month and have no way to cover the expense, volunteering to be a chaperone at a youth event with your school or church, or agreeing to watch another believer's child after school until their parents are able to come pick them up safely. However, good deeds that bring more worldly pressure might be standing up against harassment of others at work, reporting criminal activity of associates or co-workers, or extending a helping hand to un-believers and even anti-Christians. All of these actions are not self-centered but faith-centered.

Love is the Christian's badge of faith. True love is manifested in willful decisions, especially in decisions that involve actions. A very simple way for a Christian to manifest good works is in providing transportation to someone who otherwise would be unable to attend a worship or church service. Sometimes there are people who truly want to know God and hear his Word taught but are unable to make it to the place where this occurs because they have no means to get there. How easy is it to offer this transportation to a fellow believer, especially if their house or location for pickup is not far from your usual route that you take? Even in situations that require very little effort and giving on the part of a believer, if the self-centered nature is not subjected to God, obedience to give charitably to those in need will likely be avoided and reasoned away with some lame self-justifying excuse.

The ways of the world are cruel, apathetic, and self-centered. Instead, James is calling Christians to be Christ-centered and live a life with a new mind, not conformed to this world (Rom 12:2). A myriad of excuses can seem to flood our minds such as: "I am too busy," "I do not like doing that kind of work," "I do not have any experience with that subject, therefore I cannot be of any help," "someone else is probably more excited about it than I am," "you caught me at a bad time," or "sorry, I'm busy (when you really are not), maybe next time." But when we choose to act in service to our

fellow believers and the rest of the world as Jesus Christ taught (Jn 13:14), we will be pleasing to God and demonstrating genuine faith.

Having faith is more than confessing in your heart something to be true. It means to model your life according to that truth. For the believer, if Jesus is your Lord and you have put your faith in him, then your thoughts and actions should follow that belief. Otherwise, what good is it calling him your Lord if you do not follow his teaching? If you do not follow his teaching, then you are not his disciple because a disciple is one who does what their master says. There are many people in the world who call themselves Christians yet only attend a church service on Easter or Christmas every year to show their affiliation with the religion. These people do not strive to live lives of discipleship because for them Christianity is meant only to be observed on "special" days of the year. For the rest of the time, these men and women do not give attention to reading the Word of God (1 Tim 4:13), much less studying it (2 Tim 3:16), meditating on it (Ps 1:1), or giving themselves wholly to follow the Lord in obedience so that the profit of doing God's Word may be evident in their lives (1 Tim 4:15). Without works of love, faith is life-less and idle and is not complete (i.e., mature). Christians who go to church on select days of the year epitomize this because their lives do not exemplify their faith. A church affiliation does not make a person a Christian, but a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is a true Christian.

Another example of how a Christian can demonstrate genuine faith through his or her works is in the realm of family support. Christian parents who give of themselves to raise their child in a loving environment where needs are met and development of a godly lifestyle can be fostered are certainly deserving of love and care in return when they become elderly and may have physical needs (cf. Mk 7:9-13). If the child was raised as a Christian and continues to prosper in God's blessings yet ignores the needs of his parents

when they are older, the adult child is not demonstrating genuine faith when they are not giving of themselves where they have the opportunity to do a work of love. The scriptures say that we are to do good to all people as we have opportunity with particular emphasis on fellow believers (Gal 6:10). Giving to parents in their old age who have needs equates well with the definition of pure and undefiled religion before God (Jas 1:27). Likewise, a believer should also help other family members if needs arise that may be met by them. It is important to remember that good works are not reserved for parents or close family members alone but for all the members of God's Church and even non-believers as opportunities arise.

The ability of a believer to demonstrate genuine faith is not something that only adult Christians are able to do. This ability may be exemplified in the very young as well. For example, if a young child in elementary school is coloring a picture with multiple crayons and a fellow classmate has only one crayon, the young child has a choice to make. Either the child selfishly withholds all their crayons, thinking, "These crayons are mine why would I share them? They can get their own." Or the child can lovingly offer some crayons to their classmate to temporarily use. The latter choice would be characterized as a good deed that would demonstrate genuine faith on the part of the giving child. Perhaps a young believer in middle school is just learning to play a musical instrument. On the day of a concert, one of his fellow musicians ends up breaking a reed on a woodwind instrument, which is an essential piece of equipment for playing the instrument. If the young believer has an extra reed, he can either offer it to his fellow musician who now has a broken reed at the time, or he can choose to withhold the reed because after all, it is his reed and he likely does not have very many of them and it could be of great use to him in the future.

Choosing to help a fellow student in time of need is a way that young believers can demonstrate their genuine faith through good works. In high school, a

believer might choose to spend his/her Saturday helping another classmate who is struggling in a particular class with an assignment that the believer is very knowledgeable of. The believer could selfishly claim to be busy on Saturday if asked to help their classmate with the assignment, or he/she could choose to give of their time, perhaps sacrificing an extra hour of "beauty sleep" that weekend.

Lastly, in college, a believer may choose to help a friend or neighbor lift heavy furniture as they move into or out of an apartment or dorm room. Who wants to lift heavy furniture anyway? The believer could just ignore the request and act like they have better things to do like go to the rec center or watch TV in the lounge.

All of these examples show that no matter what stage of life, the ability to manifest genuine faith and do good works that exemplify the love of God is always present. The choice of whether we will demonstrate our genuine faith is up to us.

VI. CONCLUSION

So, in accordance with James' message in 2:14-26, we are exhorted to examine the character of our faith. Is it reflected in the choices we make in our lives? Are we striving to do our very best every day to take the opportunities we are presented with to give of our time, talents, and resources and perform good deeds to help those in need? James is clear that without such good works, our "faith is dead" (i.e., useless and idle), producing no fruit or discernible benefit. It is not mental concession of the truth that demonstrates genuine faith but the truth in action in one's life that matters. Genuine faith consists of looking out for the needs of others, treating all believers equally, reaching out to the world, and above all else, maintaining steadfast patience and endurance to faithfully live as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ through all types of difficult trials and circumstances.

We are called to live lives that are faithful and fruitful, not just a few sparse days here and there when we feel like it. James' take home message is that genuine faith is a lifestyle and one should seek to exhibit their faith in their actions, proving it through all that they say and do.

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