JAMES
Week 2: Display Your Faith

This includes:
1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW
God wants everyone to believe in him; he is looking for a real faith, something beyond, “I believe God exists.” As we discover in James 2, the depth of our faith is shown by actions and choices—how we respond to faith. Teenagers will be challenged to demonstrate their faith by their actions.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
1. WHAT: God wants Christians to display their faith through actions, not just words.
2. WHY: An active faith is an effective, genuine, vibrant way to reveal God’s love to others.
3. HOW: Students will be encouraged to demonstrate their faith with their actions.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE
James 2:14-26

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES
James 2:1-13 and 1 John 4:7-14

TEACHING PREP
The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you’ll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your small group lesson.

Read James 2.

As Christians, we have the opportunity and the obligation to display our faith through our actions. It’s worth remembering that the first Christians didn’t ask to be called “Christians.” They got that name from people who observed their actions as Christ-followers. It was obvious by the way these Christians lived their lives that they loved and followed Jesus.

The Bible clearly teaches that salvation comes through faith in Jesus, not in works. We can’t earn our way to heaven, we can’t deserve grace, and we can’t make ourselves good enough to stand in the presence of our perfect God.

There are lots of kinds of faith and belief. We have everything ranging from weak opinions to strong convictions. James clearly defines the kind of faith a Christian ought to have: one that translates into action. He makes it really simple and clear: Faith without deeds is dead.

Challenge your teenagers to take their faith outside their church doors and their small group by the way they treat peers, respond to stressful situations, interact with authority figures, and care for those in need. Opportunities to show God’s love are endless.
As we’re noting each week in this series, if your teenagers have a relationship with Jesus and want to grow spiritually, hold them accountable—talk about how God wants us to respond to his love by the way we live our lives. Emphasize grace and forgiveness, but also talk about how Christians are called to live lives that honor God through our actions. Being disciplined and making intentional choices to get sin out of our lives is biblical and important—these are choices that grow from our love of God because of his love for us!

If you have teenagers who have not yet decided to follow Jesus, use this as an opportunity to share with them how God desires to give us full, complete, meaningful lives and how sin gets in the way of that.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [optional]

Text Message Questions
We’ve provided a few different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Are your actions pointing people back toward Jesus? Come to small group tonight and find out how to keep your faith alive and growing.
- What’s the difference between an opinion and a conviction? I’d love to see you at small group tonight.

Parent Email
We’ve provided you with an email below that you can send to your parents following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

This week our small groups continued their series in the book of James by discussing ways to display their faith. In chapter 2 of his letter, James says that if we’re going to claim to be Christians, then it’s important that we act like Christians. Our faith is dead when we don’t respond to it with actions in our lives, but our actions can become tangible, vibrant ways of pointing people to Jesus.

I’d encourage you to find some time to talk with your child about this week’s lesson. Here are some questions you could include during your conversation:

- James wrote that just believing God exists isn’t enough for true faith, so what does it take to have a living, genuine, truth faith?
- James also wrote that faith without good works is dead. Does that mean good works can revitalize a person’s dead or dying faith, or is something else required?
- What is one way you can respond to God’s love and do something this week that reflects your faith?

Talk about ways to display faith in God by the way your teenager has treated others, used words to encourage or chosen not to use words to discourage, dealt with stress at school, or treated those who are hard to love. Share how you demonstrate your own faith as an adult and where God is challenging you in this. Thank you for being part of the team and encouraging your student to respond to God’s love by loving others!
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2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]
As you begin your small group, welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, then ASK:

- What’s the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “hypocrite”?
- Why is it so easy to hate hypocrisy? What makes it so distasteful?
- Nobody starts out wanting to be fake and two faced. What do you think drives people to being hypocritical?

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you’d like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING POINTS
The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen here are (1) True faith leads to action and (2) True faith rejects prejudice.

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it’s up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read James 2:14-26 together as a group. Consider allowing one or more of the teenagers to read the text.

So what does faith really look like? Let’s spend a few minutes examining what James can teach us about this topic.

1. True faith leads to action

People in our culture have a lot of different ideas of what it means to be “spiritual” or to have faith in God. James says it’s not enough to just believe God exists—or even to believe that there’s just one God. He says even demons believe this and “tremble” because of this truth.

If James says just believing God exists isn’t enough for true faith, what does it take to have a living, genuine, truth faith?

After reading these verses in chapter 2, what is your view on the relationship between your faith and your deeds?

James says faith without good works is dead. Does that mean good works can revitalize a person’s dead or dying faith, or is something else required? Explain.

It’s important to remember that we don’t “earn” salvation or God’s love. God loves you exactly the way you are, no matter what. And you can never be “good enough” to earn God’s salvation. It’s a free gift that has nothing to do with how good or bad
you are. However, when we love Jesus and choose to follow him, we are called to respond and put our faith into action. It’s our love for God and love for others that will lead to action.

2. True faith rejects prejudice

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: It’s natural to spend time with a best friend, do favors for others on a sports team, buy birthday gifts for family members, and encourage classmates we like. But the challenge that James presents in the first part of chapter 2 is for Christians to demonstrate faith by the way we love all people—especially those who might be considered “different” or “outcasts.”

ASK:
- How do you define the word “prejudice”? How is this word connected to such other ideas as discrimination, injustice, racism, and hatred?
- Read James 2:1-13. What examples of prejudice does James mention in this passage, and which of these examples remain with us today? Give some examples of how you’ve seen or experienced these prejudices.
- In your world, which groups of people are often the victims of prejudice, and which groups of people are often the recipients of special attention?

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [optional]
ASK:
- Read 1 John 4:7-14. How would you summarize what John wrote about the way Christians are called to treat each other?
- When do you find it easy to follow this kind of advice, and why? When do you find it difficult to follow this kind of advice, and why?

APPLICATION
ASK:
- Name one person who is easy for you to love and care for. What recent actions show that you love and care for this person?
- Without naming anyone, think about people in your life who are harder to love and care for (and if you’re sitting next to one, don’t poke them). What could you do to show that you love that person or those individuals?

Pair up with another person in the group for these questions.

ASK:
- James uses Abraham and Rahab as examples of people whose faith and actions were connected. What people in your life might serve as role models as you take steps to put your faith in action in greater ways? What can you learn from these individuals?
- What is one way you can respond to God’s love and do something this week that reflects your faith? When will you do this? And how can we hold each other accountable, to encourage this step of faith in our lives?
**SUMMARY**
End your small group lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

**FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]**
Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

*So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless (James 2:17).*