TEACH IT **COFFEEHOUSE** SESSION 5

1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

- his or her own Bible and pen
- the student journal page for Session 5 (The journal page is not optional for this session.)

You'll also need—

- a pack of pencils with erasers
- optional: a few spare Bibles for students who've forgotten theirs

2. Session Intro

GOALS OF SESSION 5

As students experience this session, they will—

- explore the relationship between real faith and real action.
- apply specific actions, in today's terms, to deeds we're told to do in Scripture.
- evaluate the vital signs of their faith, knowing that faith without deeds is a flatline faith.

PRAYER

After your group has gathered, open your session in prayer. Pray that students will be open to honestly evaluating their faith and seeing that meaningful faith will generate activity.

OPEN

Track the Themes

After you've prayed, have students look back over James 1 and 2, noting anything they've marked or notes they've made along the way. Ask—

> **What major themes have we seen in James so far?**
> *As the students share their thoughts, elicit the observation that James is focused on practical action. In fact, he resolves almost every issue with an outward action his readers can do: persevere, be slow to become angry, do what the Word says, look after orphans and widows, don't play favorites, and so on.*

3. Digging In

It's a Straight Line from Faith to Deeds

Transition into today's study by saying something like—

> **James encourages his readers—including us—to respond to life's situations with godly action. The passage we're about to study puts a giant exclamation point on this encouragement.**

Instruct your students—

> **1. Read James 2:14-26 from your Bibles.**

2. **As you read, mark the words *faith* and *deeds*. Circle *faith* and draw a box around *deeds*. If you find other words that mean the same thing (like *action* or *works* instead of *deeds*), you should mark these words the same way.**

3. **If you're hesitant to mark in your Bibles, write lightly so the markings can be erased. If you're still not comfortable with it, that's okay. Just eyeball and remember what James says about faith and deeds.**

When most have finished reading and marking, ask—

Take a look at the verses that mention both faith and deeds. What does James say about the relationship between the two?
-It does no good to have faith without deeds (2:14).
-This kind of faith can't save you (2:14).
-It does no good to wish people well but do nothing to help them physically (2:15-16).
-Faith without action is dead (2:17).
-Faith and action work together (2:22).
-Faith is made complete by action (2:22).
-You are justified by what you do and by faith (2:24).

What kind of connection does James make between faith and deeds?
He couldn't make a stronger statement—you can't have one without the other.

How does James' teaching on the need for works square with the fact that salvation is a free gift?
As you discuss this question, bring out some of the Insight points from your Prep It study. Mention how Luther thought that because of this apparent contradiction, the book of James should have been removed from the canon of Scripture. But be sure to note he made such statements in the preface of an early edition of the Luther Bible but removed them in later editions.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement: If you think you're a Christian but nothing in your life backs it up, then you're probably not a Christian. Explain your choice.

4. Cross-Checking

Define the Deeds

Explain—

Since the beginning of Christianity, there's been a great debate about the value of works. Some think that because salvation is a free gift from God based on faith alone (we don't have to work for it), Christians don't have to do good works. Others think that good works are required for our salvation.

In a minute you're going to spend some time on your own with God and the Bible, looking up some verses that will help you better understand the connection between faith (what you believe) and deeds (what you do). As you work through the passages and questions on your journal pages, consider the very real possibility that God wants to take you to places you've never been before in your walk with him.

Direct students to the Cross-Checking exercise on their journal pages and ask them to follow the instructions given.

5. Taking It Inward

Do Good and Do It Secretly

After about 10 minutes call for your group's attention. The finished chart on the student journal page should look something like this:

Passage	Deeds We're to Do	Cautions about Our Deeds
Matthew 25:31-46	*We, the sheep, get to inherit the kingdom prepared for us if we take care of "the least of these."*	
Galatians 5:6	*What's important is that faith expresses itself through love.*	
Romans 3:20-28		*No one can be declared righteous by doing the deeds of the law.*
Titus 3:8	*Those who trust in God should be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.*	

Check with your students to see how they did finding the info. Let other students offer suggestions if anyone had difficulty. Then discuss—

What insights do you have now about the relationship between deeds and faith?
There are deeds of the law that don't save us (Romans 3:20-28). There are deeds that are an integral part of living out our faith such as deeds of love (Galatians 5:6), and good works that are the result of a relationship with Christ (Titus 3:8).

If salvation is free, what's the big deal about all these deeds and works? Does James contradict other theology found in Scripture?
Use this question to point out that James isn't suggesting that we need to do deeds in order to be saved. His deeds come about as a result of faith. We do good works because we're Christians, not in order to become Christians.

We still sometimes get it backwards. What are things that we do today that might fall into the category of trying to earn our salvation?
Sample answers might include: trying to live up to someone else's expectations, keeping up with daily disciplines, paying more attention to a list of rules than to the Holy Spirit.

Next you'll be talking with your students about James' illustrations of good deeds and what they might look like today. Say—

James uses three illustrations to show the kind of works he is talking about. Look at James 2:14-26 again. What examples does he give?

Ask students to write down the illustrations as they are mentioned. They can record them in the James' Illustrations column of the Deeds Then and Now chart on their journal pages. Continue the discussion by asking the following questions. By the end of the discussion, your students' charts should look similar to the following chart.

What type of work does each illustration refer to, or what is a main characteristic of it?
Ask students to write the suggestions in the second column of the chart.

What tangible deeds can we do today to fulfill the kind of works James is talking about?
Have students write the suggestions in the third column of the chart.

DEEDS THEN AND NOW

James' Illustrations	Types or Characteristics	Today's Corresponding Deeds
Helping brothers and sisters with physical needs (2:15-16)	*Meeting physical needs of people*	*Collect food for the church's food pantry, clean out closets and give away possessions, keep a stack of food gift certificates handy to give to downtown panhandlers.*
Abraham sacrificing his son (2:21-22)	*Sacrificial works*	*Sponsor a child through Compassion or a similar group, offer your time and talent to a local charity or ministry.*
Rahab helping the spies (2:25)	*Showing kindness and helping others*	*Tutor at an inner-city after-school center.*

6. Wrapping It Up

Needs and Deeds

This segment of James is one of the most practical passages in the entire Bible. Don't close the session without giving students an opportunity to commit to some outward expression of faith. James gave several examples of outward action in the first two chapters of his letter. In your own words, say—

> **Before we close, let's each lock in on something God may be calling us to do as a result of what we've studied in James 1 and 2. Take a minute to review James 2:14-26 along with the parts of James 1 and 2 we've looked at so far.**

After a few minutes let students share how they would like to respond. Before closing with prayer, lead the group in a brainstorming session about how they can encourage each other to follow through with their commitments. Here are two suggestions:

- Try to meet some type of need before this day is over. Set a time at the end of the day to check in with each other—either by text message or email—on the needs met. If it's already late in the day, try to meet some type of need within the next 24 hours and set a check-in time at the end of the 24 hours.
- Keep a personal *Needs and Deeds* list with your calendar. Jot down possible needs you see and good deeds you think of throughout the day. Over the next few weeks, check off deeds as they're completed and add new needs as they arise.