JAMES 2:14-26
FAITH YOU CAN SEE

TEACH IT **COLLEGE AGE** SESSION 5

1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

- the James 2 Scripture sheet
- the student journal page for Session 5
- his or her journal pages from Sessions 1-4
- his or her own Bible, pen, and notebook

You'll also need—

- a whiteboard and markers
- colored pencils (at least two colors per student)

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 the Scripture sheets and journal pages for James 1 and 2. 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.**

Have students read James 2:14-26 from their Scripture sheets. Using colored pencils, they should mark the words *faith* and *deeds* in different ways with two different colors. For example, they could circle *faith* and draw a box

around *deeds*. If they find other words that mean the same thing (such as *action* or *works* instead of *deeds*), they should mark these words the same way.

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).*

List the students' responses on the whiteboard. If any of the points are missing, you can suggest them yourself. Then discuss—

> **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 that 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 in solitude 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.**

Instruct your students—

> **1. Find places of solitude where you can get comfortable and be alone with God.**
>
> **2. Take your Bibles, Scripture sheets, journal pages, and pens.**
>
> **3. Follow the instructions under the Cross-Checking exercise on your journal pages.**

5. Taking It Inward

Do Good and Do It Secretly

After about 15 minutes call the group back together. The finished chart on the student journal page should look something like this:

Passage	Deeds We're To Do	Deeds We're Not To Do
Matthew 25:31-46 *(Jesus is speaking.)*	*We, the sheep, get to inherit the kingdom prepared for us if we take care of "the least of these."*	
John 3:21 *(Jesus is speaking.)*	*We should live by the truth so that the things we do are done through God.*	
Romans 3:20-28 *(Paul is writing.)*		*No one can be declared righteous by doing the deeds of the law.*
Galatians 2:15-16 *(Paul is writing.)*		*No one is justified by the deeds of the law, but by faith.*
Galatians 5:6 *(Paul is writing.)*	*What's important is that faith expresses itself through love.*	
Ephesians 2:8-10 *(Paul is writing; note verse 10.)*	*We are God's workmanship, created in Christ for good works.*	
Titus 3:8 *(Paul is writing.)*	*Those who trust in God should be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.*	

Since you aren't going to write ideas from this chart on the whiteboard as usual, 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 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 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?

Make three columns on the whiteboard (see the following chart), and write the illustrations in the first column as your students mention them. Encourage the students to write the same info on their journal pages. Continue the discussion by asking the following questions and writing their answers on the whiteboard. By the end of the discussion, your whiteboard should look similar to the following chart.

What type of work does each illustration refer to, or what is a main characteristic of it?
Write the suggestions in the second column on the whiteboard.

What tangible deeds can we do today to fulfill the kind of works James is talking about?
You may want to give an example to get the ideas started. Write the suggestions in the third column.

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.*

After you've listed some ideas in the Today's Corresponding Deeds column, spend a few minutes discussing deeds using these questions:

Why do some people seem better suited than others for meeting these kinds of needs?

We would probably all agree that time and busyness are big obstacles in meeting these kinds of needs. But we always make time for the things that are important to us. So, besides these factors, what obstacles keep us from acting?

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. Maybe you can take an idea from the whiteboard—or take a minute to review the Scripture sheets and journal pages we've worked on 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:

- Keep a personal *Needs and Deeds* list with your calendar. Keep track of possible needs you see and good deeds you think of doing throughout the day. Over the next few weeks, check off deeds as they're completed and add new needs as they arise.
- Consider creating a list-service group (such as a Yahoo! Group) to bounce ideas (needs and deeds) back and forth and to share testimony about God's work as the students do deeds he puts on their hearts.

Close your session by asking for a volunteer to pray for your group—that each student would embrace a faith that can be seen, eager to meet any needs God places in his or her path.