JAMES 2:14-26
FAITH YOU CAN SEE

TEACH IT **TALK** SESSION 5

This talk guide is just that: a guide. It's not intended to be a manuscript to read aloud. It's here to give you ideas, structure, and stories to blend with your personal study (Prep It) as you prepare your talk.

The content complements the other Teach It guides, allowing you to give a talk on the same topic students are studying in other settings (like small groups) without too much overlap.

1. Materials (Optional)

- Three or four students to catch you in the game *Trust Fall*
- An order of french fries from a fast-food restaurant

2. Optional Openings

VISUAL ILLUSTRATION
Call three or four volunteers forward. Ask them to stand behind you and instruct them to catch you as you let yourself fall backward into their arms. While they hold you, go ahead and start your talk or give some announcements. Check in with the students holding you to make sure they're not getting tired. If they are, ask for a replacement. After a few minutes share with the group that when you fell backward you stopped trusting in your own strength and began trusting in others to support you. You were letting your actions reflect your level of trust.

QUOTATIONS
Share a few of the following quotations to introduce the idea of letting your ideals and convictions be supported by action:

Resolve that whatever you do, you will bring the whole man to it, that you will fling the whole weight of your being into it.
—Orison Swett Marden (1850-1924, American writer of inspirational and motivational books)

Your actions, and your actions alone, determine your worth.
—Johann G. Fichte (1762-1814, German philosopher)

You have to be before you can do, and do before you can have.
—Zig Ziglar (1926-present, American author, salesperson, and motivational speaker)

Action may not always bring happiness, but there is no happiness without action.
—Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881, British prime minister and literary figure)

If you keep thinking about what you want to do or what you hope will happen, you don't do it, and it won't happen.
—Joe DiMaggio (1914-1999, Major League Baseball center fielder for the New York Yankees)

Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it?...Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?
—James, half brother of Jesus (James 2:14, 17 *The Message*)

3. Digging In

PERSONAL STORY

Share a personal story that involves the relationship between bragging (trash-talk) and the ability (or inability) to back up the talk. Here's an example:

> **When I was a freshman, there was a senior at my high school who just bugged me. He drove me nuts. I don't think it was just me, either; he really bothered a lot of people. He was on the golf team but he was friends with a lot of the senior guys who were on the football team. For some reason this guy, who was maybe five feet six inches tall and weighed about a buck-thirty, liked to pick on freshmen. Now, you should know that I was on the wrestling team and could probably have picked on him, but I didn't. (Keep in mind that I wasn't a Christian when I was in high school.) I didn't ever get into it with him because of all his friends. They always had his back, and he knew it. He'd talk crazy smack to anyone he came in contact with because he knew that nobody would mess with him. He couldn't back up his smack, but his friends probably would have. And that was annoying.**

4. Digging Deeper

Tell your students—

> **James 2:14-17 says, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."**

Continue the personal story, saying—

> **What good is it if you talk about something, but can't back it up with your actions? The annoying senior at my high school couldn't back anything up—all his talk was based on what his friends could do. In the same way, I can talk all I want about how great Christians are. We build hospitals, we feed the hungry, we care for the sick, we visit prisoners. I can talk all I want about how great Jesus is. And that's all true. But the real question is: "What am I doing to back up this great talk?"**
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> **I can talk all I want about my desire to get in shape, but it's not really true until I put down the donut and jump on the treadmill. Talk is nothing but wishing for a better reality; action is wanting something enough to work toward that reality.**
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> **When James says that faith by itself is dead, he's saying that if we really believed our so-called beliefs, we'd live them out. Doesn't that make sense? If we believe students will hold us up when we fall backwards, we fall backwards. If we believe the movie is going to be worth $9, we buy the ticket.**

OPTIONAL MIX-INS

You may want to point out a few facts about these verses in James:

-This is one of the most famous and pointed passages from the book of James. To help visualize dead faith, think useless, inactive, inert, and lifeless.

-Some early church fathers saw this verse as contradicting various Bible passages that teach salvation by faith alone. A simple way to see it: the deeds James speaks of are deeds you do because of your faith, which has saved you—not to gain salvation.

*-When the Bible talks about faith and belief, it's the same Greek word—*pistis *(the noun form of* pisteúō*). The two words are interchangeable in Scripture and mean the same thing. This refutes a common misconception that there are varying degrees of belief in Christ, the highest form of belief being faith. According to Scripture, you either believe (have faith) or you don't. Faith is either alive or dead—and living faith is accompanied by action.*

-The phrase "daily food" expresses the idea that on a regular basis, the brother or sister lacks what is considered a normal day's supply of food.

5. Taking It Inward

Continue with—

> **It's funny how we'll take chances on things like movie tickets, but we hold back when it comes to living out our faith in God. How silly is it to say, "I'll trust in this movie, but I'm not going to trust God when he tells me to love even my enemies; that's just too much"?**

VISUAL ILLUSTRATION

Take out a bag of french fries that were crisp, hot, and delicious when you picked them up, but now are cold and limp. Show them to your students, then say—

> **Consider the french fry. Who doesn't love french fries? But who among us hasn't also had the occasional burnt, or worse yet, soggy, floppy fry? Did you give up on the fry? No way! You, like me, continue to follow after the deliciousness of the fried potato. We know french fries are good, and just because we get a bad batch doesn't mean we're done with fries, concluding that all fries are now bad. They've earned our trust, so we give them another chance. We don't give up on things we know to be great. Bad fries or not, we're going to keep ordering them.**
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> **So the question is: are you ordering up God on a daily basis? Are you trying out your faith muscles enough that you're seeing some big changes in your life? If so, you'll probably experience the occasional "burnt" or even "soggy" period. We all fall on our faces on occasion. Faith doesn't always equal fun and joy—sometimes it's hard and doesn't feel good.**
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> **So ask yourself, Am I willing to give God a chance? Will I step out in faith and see what happens? Do I really trust him? He's done more than enough to earn our trust.**

5. Wrapping It Up

Share with your students—

> **Jesus said in John 14:21, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me."**

Finish with—

> **Jesus and James say similar things here. Maybe they're showing their sibling similarities. Love without obedience is no love at all. We show our love for Jesus by doing what he says. In the same way, it's evident we have faith when our actions line up with the things God asks of his people: take care of widows and orphans, do something about the physical needs of a brother or sister.**
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> **Have you ever heard married people say something like this to each other? "You say you love me, but your actions don't show it. What I need is a little less talk and a lot more action!" They are simply confirming what we've been talking about. What good is love if it doesn't show up in some kind of external, loving action? And how do you know you have faith if it's not impacting your behavior?**
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> **The Christian faith is an action-oriented faith. The gospel is a message that transforms. If we haven't been transformed in some way, there's a good chance we haven't really embraced the gospel. Those are blunt words, but no more blunt than James': Faith without deeds is dead.**