

m MASTERCLASS | JAMES

DAILY DEVOTION

DAY 9

READ

JAMES 2:14-19

FOCUS

¹⁴WHAT GOOD IS IT, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IF SOMEONE CLAIMS TO HAVE FAITH BUT HAS NO DEEDS? CAN SUCH FAITH SAVE THEM? ¹⁵SUPPOSE A BROTHER OR A SISTER IS WITHOUT CLOTHES AND DAILY FOOD. ¹⁶IF ONE OF YOU SAYS TO THEM, "GO IN PEACE; KEEP WARM AND WELL FED," BUT DOES NOTHING ABOUT THEIR PHYSICAL NEEDS, WHAT GOOD IS IT? ¹⁷IN THE SAME WAY, FAITH BY ITSELF, IF IT IS NOT ACCOMPANIED BY ACTION, IS DEAD. ¹⁸BUT SOMEONE WILL SAY, "YOU HAVE FAITH; I HAVE DEEDS." SHOW ME YOUR FAITH WITHOUT DEEDS, AND I WILL SHOW YOU MY FAITH BY MY DEEDS. ¹⁹YOU BELIEVE THAT THERE IS ONE GOD. GOOD! EVEN THE DEMONS BELIEVE THAT—AND SHUDDER.

REFLECTION from PASTOR CODY SURRATT

I remember ten years ago while I was at a pastor's conference, and the famous theologian Dallas Willard was being interviewed about this very topic, the balance between Faith and Works. You may have noticed when reading James, there appears to be tension between what he says here and what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." So, on the one hand you have James claiming that if you faith without action, it cannot save you, but on the other hand you have Paul stating that it is only by faith (not any works) that you can be saved. I will never forget how Dallas resolved this theological paradox with a simple phrase, "Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning."

What Dallas meant was that Salvation is a gift (grace), something that we could never earn but can only humbly accept. And the way we live is the evidence that we have truly received that gift. This is why Paul says in Philippians 2:12 "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." What Paul is saying here is the opposite of what many people believe intuitively and what all other religions teach about Salvation. Many believe that if we live a certain way then God will save us (or let us into heaven, reward us, etc.). But the Gospel message is the exact opposite; it says because you have been saved now you must go and live differently.

Let's see if we can pull this all together with a quick illustration. I have three young kids, all under the age of 8, and because I'm such a loving father I let them live in our house rent free (I even feed and clothe them for free too!). There's two reasons why I have given them these gracious gifts: 1. They have nothing to offer me in exchange. They are all currently unemployed, all their toys were purchased by me, their clothes won't fit me, and they have no marketable skills. 2. Because I love them. One of the primary ways we show love is through giving. Giving our time, resources, and energy. There is nothing they can do to EARN what they have; it is simply a gift they receive. However, that doesn't mean we don't expect any EFFORT from them in return. For example, a condition of these gifts is they must be good stewards of their toys (clean them up, treat them well) and do their daily chores. They may not have earned anything they have, but they can show evidence of their gratitude and stewardship through their efforts.

So the question I think James is asking us is not; Are you living a life that will EARN your salvation, but instead, Are you living a life that shows EVIDENCE of salvation? (Which often takes EFFORT!).

QUESTIONS

- WHY DO YOU PERSONALLY DO GOOD DEEDS?
- HAVE YOU EVER FOUND YOURSELF (EITHER CONSCIOUSLY OR UNCONSCIOUSLY) DOING GOOD DEEDS TO TRY TO EARN GOD'S FAVOR? WHY DO YOU THINK THIS IS OPPOSED TO THE GOSPEL?
- IF GOOD DEEDS DON'T EARN YOU GOD'S FAVOR, WHAT GOOD ARE THEY TO YOU?