



Good Shepherd  
Sermon-Based Study Guide  
James 2:14-26 | October 5, 2025  
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## I. Introduction to this Study

In this section of his letter, James takes aim at a faith that exists only in words. He asks the piercing question: *"What good is it...if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?"* (2:14). James insists that authentic faith is not just what we believe, but how we live.

Here James echoes what Dietrich Bonhoeffer later called the difference between **cheap grace** and **costly grace**. Cheap grace is belief without change; costly grace is belief that obeys, follows, and acts. For James, as for Bonhoeffer, faith and obedience are not two separate steps but one united reality: *"Only the obedient believe, and only the believer is obedient."*

The examples of Abraham and Rahab show that faith is always alive, active, and costly. Faith without works, James concludes, is not just weak—it is *dead*.

## II. Connecting with One Another

If you had to prove what you believe by a single action, what "faith move" would you pick—helping someone, speaking up, giving something away, etc.?

## III. Study the Text

*Read James 2:14-17*

- James asks, "What good is it...?" How does he illustrate empty faith with the example of words without help?
- In our modern context, what are some ways Christians might say the right thing but fail to act?
- How does this picture parallel Bonhoeffer's "cheap grace"?

*Read James 2:18-20*

- James imagines an objection: "You have faith; I have deeds." How does he respond?
- What does James mean when he says, "Even the demons believe—and shudder"?
- How does this challenge us to go beyond mere intellectual agreement about God?
- James challenges us to "show" faith by deeds. How is this different from Paul's emphasis in Galatians 2:16 that we are not justified by works of the law?



*Read James 2:21-24*

- How did Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac show that his faith and actions were working together?
- What does James mean when he says Abraham's faith was "made complete" by what he did?
- How does this passage push back against the idea of faith without costly obedience?

*Read James 2:25-26*

- Why is Rahab's action so central to James' point? How does her faith go beyond belief into costly obedience?
- How does James' closing analogy of "the body without the spirit" sharpen our understanding of Paul's words in Galatians 5:6: *"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love"*?

*Reflect and Respond*

- When you think of your own life, where are you more tempted — to rely on your "works" to prove yourself to God (like Paul warns against), or to rely on "belief without action" (like James warns against)?
- What's one concrete way this week you could live out a faith that is both **rooted in grace** and **alive in deeds**?

#### IV. Prayer

*Spend time in prayer together:*

- Thank God that salvation is by grace through faith, not by earning or striving.
- Confess where you've leaned toward cheap grace (faith without works) or toward legalism (works without faith).
- Ask God to give you a faith that is living, active, and expressive in love.

#### V. Digging Deeper

*For further study on James and Paul together:*

- **Romans 3:28** – Paul: justification by faith apart from works of the law.
- **Galatians 2:16** – Paul: not justified by observing the law but by faith in Christ.
- **Matthew 7:15–21** – Jesus: true disciples are known by their fruit.
- **Galatians 5:6** – The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.
- **Hebrews 11:17–31** – Abraham and Rahab as models of faith-in-action.

