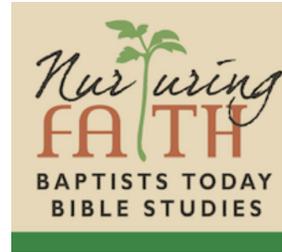


Adult Teaching Resources

September 6, 2015



Serious Church

True Faith — James 2:1-26

Pure Speech — James 3:1-12

Highborn Wisdom — James 3:13-4:10

Fervent Prayer — James 5:13-20

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FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Before the Lesson: Make copies of the handout, “Spiritual Action Heros,” for the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship Question

Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

My favorite action hero is/was:

The last time someone treated me with special favoritism was ...

Information

“James,” the author of this book, is the half-brother of Jesus, according to tradition. If this is true, we can only imagine how James’ understanding of who Jesus was grew throughout his lifetime. There was that time that Mary and the kids went to see Jesus at work...

[Have a class member read Matthew 12:46-50.]

For Jesus, faith was more than ritual and more than correct doctrine. Faith was proven as faith by action — “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven.” Jesus’ little brother eventually grew up to be a follower of Jesus and a leader in the church. In that role, he wrote this letter.

[Have a class member read James 2:1.]

This is quite a challenge. “Favoritism” is something that comes natural to us. Who are people we “favor”? (We favor people we know and like. We favor people like us. We favor people we aspire to be like. Etc.)

But the favoritism James is speaking of here may be a little bit different.

[Have a class member read James 2:2-7.]

Why do you think these believers favored the rich? (they were in need and the rich had what they needed; they wanted to be connected with people with money/power; etc.)

Information *continued*

Why did these believers dishonor the poor? (they had nothing to offer, financially; they would be a drain on the already limited resources, etc.)

Some of our demonstrations of honor are overt, as James illustrates. Other demonstrations are more subtle and maybe even subconscious. How does a church demonstrate honor? dishonor?

How does our church behave in this area?

James says that this kind of partiality is more than a bad idea or being “not nice.” It is sinful.

[Have a class member read James 2:8-13.]

Jesus would sometimes teach, “You have heard it said...but I say to you...” Jesus took a well-understood law and gave it more breadth. Here, James implies, “You have heard it said, ‘do not murder;’ but if you dishonor a poor person, you’re just as evil as someone who murders them.” Or “You have heard it said, ‘do not lust;’ but if you lust after the rich person’s money, they have become an object rather than a person to love as you love yourself. You have adulterated your soul for dollars.”

How do you interpret what James is saying in this passage?

[Have a class member read James 2:14-19.]

What would a person be referring to if they said, “I have faith”? (I have belief; I have correct doctrine; I worship; I pray; I trust in God, etc.)

There is a saying, “They are so heavenly minded, they’re no earthly good.” What does that saying illustrate in reference to this passage?

Of course, the opposite might also be said. An “action hero” may do a lot of things, but act out of shallowness or out of a self-centered hope for recognition.

One way to refer to “faith” might be “contemplation” and one way to refer to “works” might be “action.” Parker Palmer says, “Rather than speak of contemplation and action [as separate poles in one’s spiritual life], we might speak of contemplation-and-action, letting the hyphens suggest what our language obscures: that the one cannot exist without the other. When we fail to hold the paradox together, when we abandon the creative tension between the two, then both ends fly apart into madness. ...Action flies off into frenzy — a frantic and even violent effort to impose one’s will on the world...Contemplation flies off into escapism — a flight from the world into a realm of false bliss.” [Parker J. Palmer. *The Active Life: Wisdom for Work, Creativity and Caring*. HarperSanFrancisco. 1990. p. 15.]

When have you experienced or seen this “hyphenated” spiritual life (when both contemplation and action were held together)?

James is certainly not criticizing someone who says they have faith. He is saying we cannot have faith without action. THE BIBLE LESSON writer notes, “The evidence of genuine faith is

Information *continued*

not found in the words of a creed, but in the works of a changed life.”

James then offers two Biblical examples of persons who put their faith to action.

[Have a class member read James 2:20-26.]

Abraham’s “faith was brought to completion by the works.” How do you interpret what James is saying?

Transformational Exercise

[Distribute the handout, “Spiritual Super Heroes.” If you choose, read the mission statements aloud. Or simply allow time for class members to read and complete their own mission statements.]

[After class members have had time to complete the assignment, close in a prayer something like this: *Giver of every good gift, Even faith is a gift from you. Give us the faith that is not satisfied with faith alone, but seeks ways to live out an active faith in this new week. Amen.*]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The book of James — We cannot be dogmatic about the author of this letter, except to say that his mother didn’t call him James. His name was really Jacob, a good Hebrew name. Though the Greek form *Iakobos* mirrors the Hebrew, it is always translated into English as “James.”

Several men named James appear in the New Testament. A traditional view is that the book was written by James, the younger half-brother of Jesus, who was recognized as the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

The book itself is in the form of a sermon letter with occasional asides that sound more like wisdom literature. The letter is addressed “to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (v. 1).

“Dispersion” reflects a technical term (*diaspora*) used to describe those Jews who had been scattered throughout the world during Israel’s stormy history. Thus, it is generally thought that James intended this letter as a message to Jewish Christians, many of whom were forced to leave Jerusalem because of persecution. His audience, then, was predominantly Jewish by heritage, probably included few Gentiles, and is strongly flavored by Jewish traditions.

If James the brother of Jesus was the author, the date of writing would be no later than the early 60s CE. The Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities* XX, ix, 197-203) says that James was stoned to death in the year 62.

In the book of Acts, James is pictured as one who took a mediating position between the Jewish Christians who thought all believers should work to follow the Jewish law (sometimes called “Judaizers”), and those who agreed with Paul that faith was preeminent. These themes of faith and works are central in the book of James, because faith, rightly understood, is active. Faith works.

The text — The text chosen by the Revised Common Lectionary is James 2:1-10, 11-13, and 14-17. Instead of hitting the high spots, we’ll take a look at the entire chapter.

Synagogue? — James’s orientation as a Jewish believer writing to other Jewish Christians is evident in several ways, including his use of the word “synagogue,” the name for a Jewish assembly, in 2:2. The word is usually translated as “assembly” (NRSV, NET, KJV) or “meeting” (NIV11), so English readers rarely notice it. James does use the word *ekklesia*, usually translated as “church,” to refer to the congregation in 5:14, suggesting that he and the people to whom he was writing were comfortable with both Jewish and Christian vocabulary.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Too much, too quickly? — While we often admire the description of early church members sharing their resources and selling their property to help others (Acts 2:44-47), such wholesale actions may have been motivated in part by a belief that Christ would return soon, and may have been shortsighted. On Paul’s final missionary journey, one of his primary concerns was to raise an offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4, 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15, Rom 15:14-32).

The royal law — James’s reference to the “royal law” uses the adjective *basilikon*, which means “kingly,” or “pertaining to a king.” James may have used it in the sense of the “supreme” law: As a king is the supreme ruler of a land, the law of love was the highest law governing Christian behavior.

The law and love — It may sound strange to hear James use the words “love” and “law” in the same sentence. Can the love of neighbor be legislated? Some have tried.

Back in 1997, following the death of Britain’s Princess Diana in a violent car crash in Paris, a number of Parisian paparazzi were arrested for taking pictures as the wildly popular princess lay dying in the mangled wreckage. They were charged, among other things, with breaking the “Good Samaritan” law. In France, according to news reports, those who see someone in need but don’t offer to help can be charged with breaking the law.

Abraham’s faith — James used Abraham’s example to argue: “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (v. 24). He does so by contrasting the empty faith of spurious belief with genuine faith that works itself out in obedience to God. Abraham had faith enough to leave his home in Mesopotamia, faith enough to build altars in the desert, faith enough to defeat a coalition that had captured his nephew Lot, and faith enough to offer tithes to God through Melchizedek, known as the “priest of Salem.” Most memorably, he had faith enough to be willing, if he believed God commanded it, even to sacrifice his son Isaac, the only link to the promise of many descendants. Abraham was known as the “friend of God,” not because he professed faith, but because he proved it.

Thoughts to ponder — Are all persons equally welcome in your church? Really? Can you recognize prejudices of your own? What can you do to overcome personal partiality?

James claims that true faith produces evidence of itself. How would your faith stand up to such scrutiny?

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Does James contradict Paul?

Martin Luther didn't like James because he thought James minimized faith and contradicted Paul's teaching of salvation by grace through faith and not works. But it is helpful to understand the simple truth that James and Paul didn't always use their vocabulary in the same way.

I can remember an instance, when I was a pastor, in which the minister of music and I became really frustrated with each other while discussing a matter related to worship. In the end, we realized that our individual backgrounds and contexts had led us to understand certain terms in different ways. Once we realized that we were using the same words, but with different meanings, we were able to resolve the differences.

When Paul uses the word "faith," he speaks of a sincere and personal trust in Jesus Christ that leads one to obey God. Thus, Paul could argue that we are justified by faith alone, because his concept of faith naturally resulted in faithful works. When Paul used the term for "works," he had in mind the legalistic works that Jews were required to perform in order to be acceptable to God. In contrast, James often uses the word "faith" to mean little more than intellectual assent. He employs the word "works" not to describe legalistic requirements for salvation, but the legitimizing works of love that grow out of one's redemptive experience.

In a similar way, Paul sometimes uses the word "Torah," especially in writing to the Galatians, with reference to rituals such as circumcision that some Jewish Christians were demanding of Gentile believers. When James speaks of the Torah, he has in mind the law that calls God's people to love their neighbors.

We can illustrate this further through the different ways Paul and James call on the example of Abraham. Paul emphasizes how Abraham responded to God in faith, while James points to how Abraham's faith — as in the near sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22) — was proven by his actions.

It also helps to recall that James and Paul were addressing different situations. In letters such as Galatians, Paul was doing battle with people who wanted to force all Christians to become Jews by demanding conformity with the Jewish law and its attendant works. In contrast, James was dealing with a group of people who had reduced faith in God to a statement of identity that demanded nothing from the believer.

The difference between James and Paul is not so much one of doctrine, but of emphasis and vocabulary. (For a lengthier comparison of James and Paul, see Edgar McKnight and Christopher Church, *Hebrews-James* [Smyth & Helwys, 2004], 362-63).

SPIRITUAL ACTION HEROES

How does faith shape your behavior? What is your “spiritual mission/vision statement”?

Here are some mission statements from a variety of organizations that encourage good works based on faith. Read through them, then work on creating your own “spiritual mission/vision statement.”

Sojourners: We envision a future in which Christians put their faith into action in the passionate pursuit of social justice, peace, and environmental stewardship, working in partnership with people of other perspectives, for the common good of communities, families and individuals.

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit Christian housing organization founded on the conviction that everyone should have a decent, safe, affordable place to live.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship: We are a Christian Network that helps people put their faith to practice through ministry efforts, global missions and a broad community of support.

EthicsDaily.org: Challenging people of faith to advance the common good.

Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation’s decisions makers to end hunger at home and abroad. Moved by God’s grace in Jesus Christ, we advocate for a world without hunger.

The mission of the **Diana R. Garland School of Social Work** at Baylor University is to prepare social workers in a Christian context for worldwide service and leadership.

Evangelical Immigration Table: Preaching God’s heart for immigrants.

Center for Responsible Lending: Supporting faith community efforts to end predatory lending.

New Baptist Covenant: To facilitate cooperation among Baptists so that Jesus’ mandate as found in Luke 4 can be realized

Operation Inasmuch invigorates the body of Christ — the church — to live out the Gospel through daily acts of compassion by serving the un-served, loving the unloved, and reaching out to the un-churched.

Some examples of personal mission statements:

My faith in Jesus Christ leads me to...

The fruit of my faith in Jesus Christ is shown by my ministry of...

My contemplation of the “royal law” to love my neighbor as I love myself leads me to...