

One BRMC Small Group Study

Living BRMC's Legacy of Faith in Action

Leader's Guide

Please note that this study guide accompanies the pulpit sermon on 24 May 2020. The suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study.

Scripture Passage:

James 2:14-26

Context:

BRMC celebrates our 64th anniversary this week, and in his sermon Pastor-in-Charge the Rev Chiu Ming Li looks at the legacy those who came before us in BRMC have left behind – that of godly works. He relates it to the passage in James 2:14-26 where James explains that “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17), and leads us to ponder the question – what is our faith about if it does not lead us to doing good works?

Lesson Objectives:

In this lesson, we will attempt to understand the following:

- Our faith is shown by how we live and how we care for those in need.
- Our faith compels us to live in obedience to the Lord and to be more like Christ.
- Caring for others in sacrificial and radical ways is part of imitating Christ and His heart for the needy.

Introductory

1. What does James mean by “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (v17)?
 - Faith in Jesus involves believing in Him and what He did, and true faith results in a desire in us to become more like Christ. Our faith should spur us to love Christ and desire to obey Him and be transformed into His likeness.
 - What does it mean to become like Christ? It means we imitate His character and attributes, one of which is compassion. Just like Jesus had compassion on the least, the least and the lost, if we are to imitate Him that would mean we will follow in His footsteps of compassion for those around us.
 - Therefore, our actions demonstrate our faith. James’ word speaks the harsh truth: if we do not demonstrate any form of compassion to those in need (i.e. not following in Christ’s footsteps of compassion), then can we say we truly have faith at all?

2. Read Galatians 2:15-21 and compare it with James 2:14-26. How do we reconcile what both Paul and James have written about righteousness, faith and works?
 - At first glance, both may seem to be talking about the same topic but in contradictory ways.
 - Paul's mention of "works" was referring to the many religious laws and rituals that the Jews had designed to help themselves earn their righteousness before God. Paul teaches that one's righteousness in God's eyes cannot be earned through following a series of rules, customs and rituals (these are the "works of the law"), but righteousness comes through faith in Jesus.
 - Meanwhile, James' mention of "works" is referring to doing acts of compassion towards those in need. James teaches that acting compassionately to help others should be done *as a fruit and a result of one's faith and love for God*. Our faith is *shown* by how we live and how we care for those in need.
 - "James directly confronts those who misinterpret Paul's teaching that we are justified by faith alone. There is really no contradiction between what Paul taught and what James teaches. Paul taught that it was not by works of the law – that is, slavish obedience to the law – that saves us. We are saved by faith when we believe that God forgives us, calls us His children, and lavishly bestows His blessings upon us. But children of a compassionate God behave with compassion – if we truly believe that we have been made God's children, our conduct and our concern for God's world will show it. Whether or not we believe that we have now been welcomed into God's family, that we are now God's beloved children, that God pours his love upon us... will be seen in how we live towards others, will be shown by our conduct." (Pastor Chiu, sermon, 24 May 2020)

Reflection

3. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son in obedience to God. What is something you would be willing to sacrifice for God? What is something that you would find great difficulty to sacrifice for God's sake?
 - All of us have something that we cling onto – it could be tangible things such as material goods, wealth, or family, or it could be intangible things such as reputation, appearance, love, habits, or comforts that we've enjoyed. Some of these things are easier to give up and some might be harder.
 - This question is meant to get members to reflect honestly on what is important to them and also their position of obedience towards God. It can also help small group members to get to know each other on a deeper level.
4. What are some obstacles (physical or mental) that get in the way of us showing sacrificial (even radical) love and compassion to those in need?
 - Realistically, no one will say they do not feel compassion for those in need unless they were completely hard-hearted (or honest), but just like the seed that falls amongst the thorns (referring to the Parable of the Sower), there are obstacles that might come up to choke the desire to help others.

- The obstacles might be physical, such as constraint on ourselves materially, and inconvenience to ourselves.
- We can face mental obstacles as well, such as worries that we tell ourselves. These might sound like: "Is it worth it?" "What if this comes back to bite me in the future?" "Will I even make a difference to anyone's lives?" "I got hurt before while showing kindness to others, and I don't want to get hurt again" "What if they don't want my help?"
- This question helps to get us to reflect and voice out these thoughts/worries that surface whenever we are presented with an opportunity to show kindness and compassion to others.
- This question is not meant to make people feel bad about what stops them from showing love and compassion to others, but is meant for members to be honest in expressing the mental blocks they might face, and might serve as an opportunity for members to help keep each other accountable.

Application

5. Who can you show sacrificial love and compassion to in your daily life, starting from today?
 - The best way to apply the lessons from Pastor Chiu's sermon and this study would be to think of one simple and practical area where you can perform acts of compassion.
 - It is important to tell your group that they need not think of large, world-changing ideas especially if they know they will not be able to commit to doing it long-term. Instead, encourage them to think of a simple way that they know they can realistically achieve within the next week.

Prayer

6. Write out a prayer for yourself based on what you have heard and learned from this session.

(a) What is in your heart for yourself?

- Perhaps you have the desire to help others but are struggling with starting:

"Gracious Father, I know that faith without action is dead, but it is so hard to show sacrificial love and compassion to others. Help stir up in my heart the desire to love You through loving others in practical ways. Please give me the strength and resolve to overcome my inner inhibitions to show compassion to others. In Jesus' name, Amen."

(b) What is in your heart for others?

- Perhaps you want to help others but you don't know how:

“Loving Father, help me to be more like You in Your love and compassion that You showed towards the needy. Please give me creativity and ideas as to how to show them Your love for them. Please grant me opportunities to help others, and when the opportunity arises, help me not to turn a blind eye to it. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

- It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.