



# DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

## Sunday, September 4-10 (B) – James 2:1-10 [11-13], 14-17

Focus: A Living Faith

### word of life

**“So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”** (James 2:17 NRSV)

Read James 2:1-17

The Letter of James is a series of unconnected, practical tips for Christian living. The primary focus of chapter two is favoritism—especially towards the rich.

The example provided in the Letter of James could easily occur within our church on any given Sunday worship. The description is of two people at extreme ends of the economic scale who enter a place of worship, but are treated differently because of their outward appearance.

Imagine a rich person with gold rings and fine clothes entering a place of worship at the same time as a poor person. Imagine the poor person does not even wear clean clothes.

If the wealthy person is fussed over and ushered to the best seat, while the poor person is left standing, then there is a real problem. Distinctions have been made based on their exterior wealth. In doing so, we make judgments about that person – all on their outward appearance.

1. *What is the problem with treating people differently based on their economic status?*
2. *Have you ever seen this example occur within the church? If so, describe the situation.*

If anything, we are to show partiality to the poor. “Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that [God] has promised to those who love [God]?” (James 2:5 NRSV) Starting from the circumstances of the birth of Jesus, including his mother Mary, the shepherds, and stable, there is not only an awareness of the poor and outcast, but an intentional inclusion of the disfranchised.

3. *What are other examples of God’s preference for the poor?*
4. *How does it feel to hear of God’s partiality to the poor in the world?*

For those who have financial means, these are not easy words to hear and comprehend. Twice in this chapter, the writer addresses his audience as brothers and sisters. He even adds the tender adjective “beloved”.

It is important to note the gift of God’s kingdom is promised to those who love God. Consequently, just because someone is poor does not exclude that person from God, nor does it guarantee eternal life. God continues to seek a response of faith. Likewise, wealth does not mean a person is rich in faith.

5. *Explain in your own words what the writer James is trying to teach.*
6. *What are the implications of this passage?*

Once more, James urges our faith to be transformed to works, actions consistent with faith. We are not only to respond to our neighbor in need by offering comforting words, but we are to clothe and feed. In that way our faith lives. “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” (James 2:17 NRSV)

7. *Describe a faith which is dead.*
8. *Contrast a living and dead faith.*

## **Word among us**

From day one, Zee knew it was going to be a bad year. He could just tell his teacher did not like him. He heard it when she pronounced his name. It was obvious the teacher wanted to make a good impression on the mayor's son. Everyone in town knew the mayor's family was the wealthiest in the region. Zee let out a deep sigh. He made a commitment on that first day to do all of his homework, study hard, and come to school every day ready to learn. He would become the best student he could be, despite the attitude of the teacher.

1. *Have you ever had a teacher in school who had a favorite student? What was that like?*
2. *How might it feel if a parent would have a favorite child?*

James describes special treatment given to the wealthy at church. Some might justify this fussing over the wealthy because the church needs money to operate.

3. *Have you ever seen that happen?*
4. *What is your response?*

God's grace extends to the rich and poor. It is possible to be rich in material goods, but poor in faith. Likewise, it is possible to be poor in resources and poor in faith. Just because someone is poor does not mean he or she loves God in Jesus Christ. Yet it can be a powerful witness to be someone who has little, but gives thanks for the bounty given through Jesus Christ. Being rich in faith has nothing to do with economic status.

5. *Give an example of being inspired by someone rich in faith, but poor in material resources.*
6. *Does this mean the rich are excluded from the grace of God? Explain your answer.*

## **faith practice in daily life**

**Strive for justice and peace in all the earth.**

“So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” (James 2:17 NRSV)

This passage might be the most quoted verse from the Letter of James. For some Christians, this verse is simply common sense. Of course, our faith produces results. How can faith in Jesus Christ not lead to an active life of service? Jesus was active in sharing love with those in need as demonstrated when he fed the hungry, healed the sick, taught, preached, and the list goes on.

7. *What actions do you associate with a Christian?*
8. *What can someone do who no longer is physically able to be active?*

The writings of Apostle Paul emphasize the importance of faith alone. Martin Luther and the reformers summarized Paul's writings with the mantra, “Christ Alone, Faith Alone, Grace Alone”. That mantra does not immediately propel people into action—or does it?

9. *Does faith alone exclude actions?*
10. *What does it mean to you to have a living faith?*

## **Prayer**

Creator of all, stir up the embers of our faith and create a vibrant response to your love. Teach us the ways of hospitality, so all might feel welcomed. Use us to respond to the needs of the world.

## ***last word***

Reflect on your internal reaction when you see the rich and poor enter your church.

*Daily Faith Practices*

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