

# DG Guide: James 2:1-13

## Opening Prayer

Pray for open hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit as you jump into James 2 tonight.

## Ice Breaker

Imagine someone runs a reference check on your faith this week. They don't read your beliefs off a page. They ring three people who know you well - a spouse, a housemate, a work colleague, a sibling. They ask, "Judging only by how this person actually lives, what do they believe about God?" What do you think the three of them would say?

*(Don opened the sermon with the resume vs reference check. Keep this light and a bit playful. The honest answer will come later - just open the door here.)*

## Key Takeaways

Read or summarise in your own words before moving into discussion.

1. **James and Paul are not on opposite teams.** Don's image: Paul and James are both standing on Mount Lofty, looking from the same vantage point, but in different directions. One looks west to the city and the ocean. The other looks east to the trees and the country. Same mountain, two questions. Paul asks, "How can a sinner be saved?" His answer is faith alone. James asks, "How do I know my faith is alive?" His answer is what it produces.
2. **There is a kind of faith James calls dead.** The Greek word is *nekra*. Not fake faith. Not heretical faith. Real faith with no breath in it. A corpse is a real body - it just has no life. James says some of what we call faith is exactly that.
3. **"Go in peace, be warm and filled" is the problem in miniature.** Religious-sounding words spoken over a brother or sister in genuine need, with nothing behind them. Don's modern version: "Yeah, that sucks - I'll pray for you." The words are warm. The work is absent.
4. **Calendar and cash.** Don kept circling back to this. Show me your schedule and your wallet, and I'll tell you what you actually believe. Your life preaches louder than your words. It even preaches to you.
5. **The arrow, not the equation.** Faith plus works does not equal salvation. Saving faith produces works. Works do not produce saving faith. Spurgeon's line: "*The grace that doesn't change you doesn't save you.*"

# Discussion Questions

## 1. The reference check

Don opened with the gap between a polished resume and a real reference check. Where in your own life do you notice the biggest gap between what you'd write down about your faith and what the people closest to you would actually say? Be specific. We're not after a confession - just an honest look.

## 2. The alarm clock

Don told us about waking up early on the morning of the sermon and going back to sleep, trusting his alarm. Then he contrasted that with the nights before a 4:30am flight, when he sets three alarms and still wakes up five times. What does that picture tell us about the difference between belief and exercised faith? Where in your walk with Jesus do you sleep soundly, and where are you still setting backup alarms?

## 3. Calendar and cash

This was the diagnostic Don kept returning to. If James opened your calendar from the last month and your bank statement from the last month - just those two - what would he say your living faith looks like? What pattern would he see? Where would he point and say "there - that's a faith in action," and where would he point and say "what's actually happening here?"

*(Hold the silence here. The honest answer is the point. Don't rescue the room.)*

## 4. A "go in peace" person

Don's most direct application was this question: do you have a "go in peace, be warm and filled" person in your life right now? Someone whose need you've noticed, whose situation you've blessed with words, and walked past? It might be a friend you said you'd call. A neighbour with an obvious gap. A family member whose burden you've kept at arm's length. Who is that for you, and what is one concrete thing - this week, before our next DG - that would close the gap between your words and your works?

## 5. The false divide

Don pushed back on the way we've sorted Christians into camps - the social-justice-and-helping-people churches over here, the gospel-centred-and-biblically-faithful churches over there. He said Scripture knows nothing of that divide. Which camp do you naturally drift toward, and what would moving toward faithful, faith-filled works cost you? What would you have to learn or unlearn?

# Personal Reflection

Give the group a few minutes of quiet before sharing.

James didn't hand us a verdict on Sunday. He handed us a diagnostic. He asked us to lay our stated beliefs and our actual lives side by side and see how close they really are.

Take a few minutes now and do that honestly. Pick one specific area - a relationship, a habit, your money, your calendar, something you've been saying you'll do but haven't done. Where is your faith alive? Where has it gone still? Don't reach for a dramatic answer. The ordinary answer is usually the true one.

This is not a guilt exercise. It's an invitation to ask the Spirit to put breath into something that has gone quiet.

## Group Commitments

"This week, I'm going to do the one specific thing my faith has been saying but my life hasn't yet done. The thing is \_\_\_\_\_. The person or situation is \_\_\_\_\_. Next DG I'll let you know how I went."

Write down what each person says. Bring the list back out next week. That is what Galatians 6:2 looks like in practice - bearing one another's burdens by helping each other actually do the thing.

## Closing Exercise

Each person says, aloud, the one concrete action they're committing to before next DG. You don't have to go into detail, just a quick reminder.

After everyone has spoken, pair up with the person on your right. Pray for them by name. Ask the Spirit to give them the nerve to do what they said and the follow-through to finish it. Then text them during the week to check in.

## Closing Prayer

Thank Jesus for His finished work, for His empowering Holy Spirit, and ask for boldness in living out your faith this week.

## Leader Notes

### The tension to hold all the way through:

This passage has been wrenched in two opposite directions for 500 years. In Sunday's sermon, Don named both errors carefully, and the group needs you to hold both.

- *Moralism / works-righteousness*: "Do more good and you'll be saved." James isn't saying that. He's describing what living faith looks like, not prescribing how to earn standing with God. If the group starts grinding into self-improvement mode, bring them back to the arrow: saving faith produces works, not the other way round.
- *Easy-believism*: "If I just know the right things, I'm fine." James says that puts you in the same category as the demons, who have all the doctrine and shudder. If the group starts retreating into "but I believe the right things," push them back into the diagnostic.

The sermon's resolution is the arrow. Use it as your anchor when the conversation drifts.

### **Pastoral situations that may surface:**

- The person who realises their faith has gone quiet and is sitting with that exposure. Receive it without rushing to reassurance. James 2 is meant to expose so the Spirit can do His work.
- The high-effort, high-pressure person who hears the sermon as license to grind harder. Redirect them. The energy for works comes from a faith that is alive in the Spirit, not from squeezing harder.
- Someone who is themselves the "naked and without daily food" person in someone else's life. James's example was about real material need. If someone in your group is actually carrying something heavy and quietly, Galatians 6:2 cuts both ways - this might be the moment for them to make a burden known. Watch for it.
- People with Catholic, Orthodox, or LDS background in the room. Be gentle about how the comparative faith material is handled.

### **Pacing note:**

If you're short on time, focus in on Question 3 (calendar and cash) and Question 4 (the "go in peace" person). These are the two that produce the most actionable conversation, and Question 4 is the application from the passage that Don explicitly made from the front. Question 5 can be dropped for time.

### **On the explicit DG handoff:**

Near the end of the sermon Don said, "I've got more to say, I have no time to say it. So we might, as we get into our discipleship groups this week, can we do something together? Can we commit to one another to do this?" He went on to ask groups to drill down into the gap between belief and life and to hold one another to it. This guide is the thing he asked the church to do. The Group Commitments and Closing Exercise are the centre of gravity - don't skim them in favour of more discussion. If you have to cut something, cut a discussion question. Don't cut the commitments.

## Alternative Discussion Prompts

1. James 2:19 says "even the demons believe and shudder." If theological accuracy were the bar, the demons clear it before any of us do. What does that mean for us in our pursuit of sound doctrine and good works?
2. James names Rahab right after Abraham. A Canaanite, a prostitute, a woman from outside the people of God. Why do you think he picked her specifically as his second witness? What does the pairing of Abraham and Rahab say about who faith-in-action is for?
3. Don quoted Spurgeon: "The grace that doesn't change you doesn't save you." Some hear that line and feel hope. Others hear it and feel afraid. What does this make you feel, and what does that tell you about how you view grace?
4. Galatians 6:2 says "bear one another's burdens." Don pointed out that we have to be willing to make our burdens known if anyone is going to bear them. What are you carrying quietly that this group could help carry, if you let us?