

Faith Without Works is Dead

Eugene Peterson created a translation of the Bible using the language you would use to talk with your friends or write a letter. That translation is called *The Message*. Listen to the *Message's* version of James 2:14–17.

"Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, 'Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!' and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?"

In other translations, that last sentence reads "faith without works is dead." This verse says you can't say you have faith and have no actions to show for it. Let's be clear, this passage is not saying that our works save us. Ephesians 2 says, "[f]or by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works...." Works don't save you. However, there are two sides to this coin. Saying you have faith without actions suggests you may have a dead faith (Matthew 7:22, 23).

Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit." Jesus has an underlying expectation that with faith comes fruit.

But what are "good works" and what did Jesus mean when he said, "bearing fruit?" If we see someone who does good things, does that mean they have faith in Jesus? If someone doesn't seem to be bearing any spiritual fruit, does that mean they don't have any faith or their faith is dead?

Go through these questions in your Growth Group.

- What are "good works?" What verses can you find to support your answer?
- What does bearing fruit look like? Can you find verses to support your response?
- How do you help a believer in Christ who doesn't seem to be bearing spiritual fruit or doing good works? Are there verses you can show them?
- How do you share with a person who feels that their good works get them into heaven?