

Chapter 2

• LIVING FAITHFULLY THROUGH ACTIONS •

READ: JAMES 2:1-13 | LUKE 16:19-31 **INCLUSIVE AND IMPARTIAL LOVE**

When I was expecting our second child, I was somewhat concerned. I know you'll probably think I'm being silly for even saying this out loud, but the truth is, I didn't think I could love another child as much as I loved my first born. Brendan had been with us for six years before Madison came along. He was my baby boy, my snuggle bug, my thumb-wrestling buddy. How could anyone possibly fill his shoes when my heart was already bursting with love?

And then it happened. On one chilly December morning, I fell in love all over again. The moment they put her in my arms, my heart expanded in a way I never thought possible. Madison's tiny fingers wrapped around mine, and I realized that love isn't about dividing—it's about multiplying. Both children were unique, and my heart had plenty of room for both.

A year later, Graham was born (we like to call him G), and two years after that, our sweet and goofy Nathaniel. The ability to open my heart, and open it much wider yet, has shown me the boundless and ever-expanding power of love. A love that always protects, always hopes, and always endures. Could I ever pick one that I favor the most? Not a chance. They don't compete for space in my heart; they complement and enrich it in their own unique way.

The things we see and touch have limits. There's only so much room in the house, so much money in the bank, and so much food in the fridge, so

we ration, budget, and save. When someone moves in, you divide your existing space to make room. But the heart is different, my friend. Instead of dividing our love, our capacity to love expands.

When we realize that our love, like God's, has the capacity to expand beyond our understanding, we can begin to embody the principles of mercy and equality that James emphasizes. By embracing this boundless love, not just within the walls of our home but in every aspect of our lives, we reflect God's inclusive and impartial love, treating everyone with the same kindness and respect we'd want others to show us.

The dangers of showing favoritism are powerfully illustrated in the story of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16:19-31. The Bible tells us that the rich man lived in luxury while Lazarus, a poor man, lay at his gate, longing for the scraps from the rich man's table. Despite their proximity, the rich man showed no compassion or mercy towards Lazarus. When both men died, Lazarus was carried by angels to Abraham's side, while the rich man found himself in torment in Hades. The rich man's favoritism and lack of compassion led to his ultimate suffering, highlighting the importance of treating everyone with equal love and respect.



This story echoes the message in James 2:1-13, reminding us to be inclusive and impartial, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Chances are, you're not a rich woman living in luxury while a poor man lies at your gate, but perhaps you find yourself favoring certain friends over others, prioritizing those who are similar to you or who are easier to spend time with. Maybe at church, you give more attention and opportunities to those who are more outgoing or who share your interests, unintentionally neglecting others who are quieter or different.

It's natural to have close friends and people you connect with more easily. However, it's also important to make an effort to include others and

to reach out to those who might feel left out. Take the time to get to know people who are different from you, and be intentional about showing kindness and making space for them in your life. Small acts of inclusion and kindness can make a significant impact in someone's life, and in many cases, draw them closer to Christ.

Final Thought:

By expanding our hearts and embracing a love that goes beyond our understanding, we can avoid the pitfalls of favoritism and truly embody the principles of mercy and equality that God calls us to live by. This boundless love not only enriches our lives but also reflects God's grace and inclusivity, bringing us closer to His ideal of treating every person with dignity and respect.

❓ What are some modern-day examples of favoritism in our communities or churches? How can we guard against this in our own lives?

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KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 2:1-13

FAVORITISM:

The practice of giving unfair preferential treatment to one person or group at the expense of another. In this passage, favoritism refers to showing partiality based on external factors such as wealth or status, which is condemned as incompatible with the teachings of Jesus.

KINGDOM:

Refers to the reign or rule of God, especially in a spiritual sense, where those who love Him and follow His teachings will inherit eternal life. The "kingdom" here denotes the spiritual inheritance and blessings promised by God to those who are faithful, regardless of their worldly status.

LAW:

The commandments or rules given by God, particularly those found in the Old Testament, that dictate moral and religious conduct. In verse 10, "law" refers to the entirety of God's moral law, indicating that breaking even one part of it makes one guilty of breaking the whole law. This differs from the "perfect law" mentioned earlier, which focuses on the New Testament teachings and the law of liberty that leads to spiritual freedom.

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READ: JAMES 2:14-26 | GENESIS 22 & JOSHUA 2

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

Every morning before leaving for work, Michael used to walk over to my side of the bed, tuck me in, kiss my forehead, and tell me he loved me. He's retired now, but I still get kisses throughout the day along with gentle reminders that whisper "I love you." The beautiful thing about those three little words is that they're backed up with actions day after day.

Michael likes to do things to show me he's been there and how much he cares. Some days he's sweet, and other days he's just silly, like the time he put his toolbox under my pillow (I didn't notice until about 2am). Or the day he tied all of my hairbrushes together with elastic bands. He hides my toothpaste, moves my toothbrush, and builds a five foot tower of toilet paper when all that I needed was one. He puts Q-Tips in my makeup bag, chocolate bars on my desk, and candy in the cupboard. Just last night he put every pillow he could find on my side of the bed.

He goes the extra mile to give me warm hugs and hot chocolate on cold winter nights. He buys me spring flowers, sits on the deck with me on warm summer nights, and cleans up our yard in the fall. His thumbprints are everywhere, speaking louder than words.

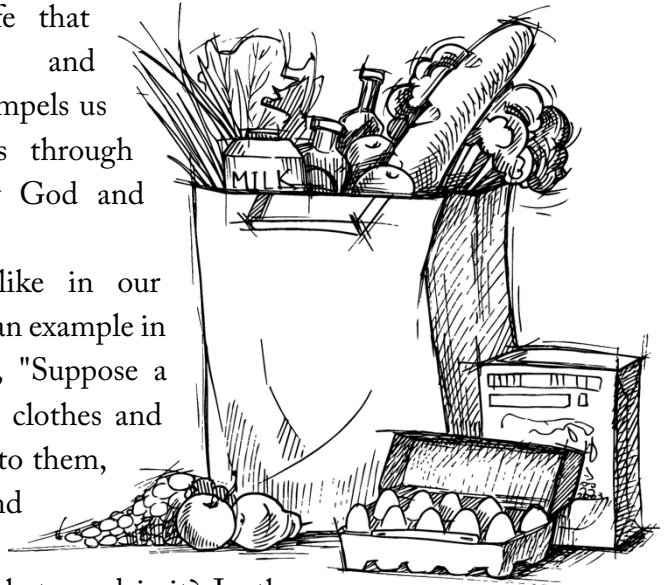
Words are meaningless if we don't back them up, aren't they? If we say that we care, but every action we take clearly shows that we don't, we're just full of hot air. In the same way that words without action are empty, faith without works is dead.

So, what is faith exactly? Does it mean that you believe in God? Yes, but there's more to it than that. The words faith and belief are often used synonymously, but they have important distinctions. Belief is simply accepting that something is true. For example, you might believe that God exists. Faith, however, goes beyond belief. Faith involves trust, reliance, and acting on that belief. True faith manifests in actions that demonstrate our trust in God.

Notice what James says in 2:19: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." James is pointing out the fact that belief alone is insufficient, as even demons acknowledge the existence of God. What sets faith apart is the elements of trust and

obedience, leading to a life that reflects God's teachings and commands. Genuine faith compels us to live out our convictions through tangible actions that glorify God and serve others.

What does that look like in our everyday lives? James gives us an example in this chapter when he writes, "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:15-17, NIV).



Faith is the conviction of truth, and when we're truly convicted that Jesus is Lord, faith is at work in our lives—moving, serving, and pleasing Him with all that we do, even when our faith calls us to the altar of sacrifice.

James gives us two examples of genuine faith in this chapter: Abraham and Rahab. In Genesis 22, God tests Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. Despite the heart-wrenching nature of this command, Abraham obeyed God, demonstrating his faith through his actions. As he prepared to sacrifice Isaac, an angel of the Lord stopped him and provided a ram as a substitutionary sacrifice. Abraham's willingness to go to such lengths showed his profound trust and obedience to God.

Similarly, Rahab took an enormous risk by hiding the Israelite spies and helping them escape. Her actions in Joshua chapter 2 were a demonstration of her faith and trust in the God of Israel. Because of her faith, Rahab and her family were spared during the fall of Jericho, and she became part of the lineage of Jesus.

A more recent example that comes to mind is our dear sister in Christ, the beloved Corrie ten Boom. During World War II, Corrie and her family risked their lives to hide Jews from the Nazis, driven by their unwavering

Christian faith and deep belief in the dignity and worth of every human being. Even after being arrested and sent to a concentration camp, Corrie's faith didn't falter. She continued to share the love of Christ with her fellow prisoners, offering hope and comfort in one of the darkest places imaginable. Her steadfast faith and commitment to living out the teachings of Jesus spoke louder than words ever could.

Every day we see opportunities to shine in this world and to live out our faith. It could be something as simple as giving up a Saturday to help a friend move, offering a listening ear to someone in distress, volunteering at a local shelter, or sharing a meal with someone in need. These small sacrifices are powerful demonstrations of our faith in action, showing the love of Christ through our deeds.

The lyrics from Casting Crowns' song "If We Are the Body" challenge us to reflect on our actions and ask ourselves if we're living by the faith we profess:

"If we are the body,
Why aren't His arms reaching?
Why aren't His hands healing?
Why aren't His words teaching?"

Looking at people like Abraham, Rahab, and Corrie ten Boom, we see how actions reveal the depth of one's faith. Three living testimonies of strength that inspire us to step out boldly and live out our faith with unwavering conviction and grace. Their examples encourage us to trust God fully, live out the faith we profess, and spread the gospel of Christ.

Final Thought:

Let's not be content with merely believing. Let's be doers of the Word, allowing our faith to move us to action. By serving others with the gifts and resources God has entrusted to us, we become living testimonies of His grace and love. It's through these acts of faith that we can make a real, lasting impact on the lives of others around us.

❓ What is the difference between belief and faith? How does understanding this difference influence the way we live out our faith in practical ways?

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❓ Can you share a time when someone's actions spoke louder than their words in your life?

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KEY CONCEPTS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

JAMES 2:14-26

FAITH:

Complete trust in God and His promises. In this passage, faith manifests in actions that demonstrate our trust in God. True faith goes beyond intellectual agreement and is demonstrated by living according to God's love and commands. Faith without deeds is considered "dead," meaning it is not active or living.

BELIEVE:

To accept something as true, particularly the belief in God's existence and His attributes. In this passage, belief is acknowledged as essential, but the writer of James points out that even demons believe in God—yet this belief alone does not lead to salvation. Belief must be coupled with faith that transforms one's actions and life.

DEEDS:

Actions that reflect one's faith in God, often called "works" or "good deeds." Deeds are the visible evidence of true faith, showing that belief is genuine. While they do not earn salvation, they naturally flow from faith and are essential in demonstrating a believer's relationship with God.

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ANSWER KEY

Please note that the answers provided are intended to guide your understanding, but they may vary depending on personal perspectives. Many of these questions invite thoughtful reflection, and your responses might differ from the ones given here. My goal is to encourage you to consider the teachings and how they apply to your own life and faith journey.

CHAPTER 2

What are some modern-day examples of favoritism in our communities or churches? How can we guard against this in our own lives?

Some examples might include: a wealthy donor receiving special recognition during a church service while smaller donors are overlooked, a church consistently calling on the same volunteers for important tasks while not giving others the opportunity to serve, or a church youth group planning activities that only cater to one specific clique. And of course, cliques of any kind where there is a failure to consider the inclusion of others.

To guard against this, we can regularly examine our attitudes and actions, strive to treat everyone with equal respect and kindness. Being intentional about including and valuing those who might otherwise be overlooked is key to avoiding favoritism.

In what ways have you noticed yourself showing favoritism, either in your family, friendships, or church community? How can you work towards being more inclusive?

This answer will be different for everyone.

What is the difference between belief and faith? How does understanding this difference influence the way we live out our faith in practical ways?

Belief is an acceptance that something is true, while faith goes a step further by acting on that belief, trusting in God's promises even when we cannot see the outcome. Understanding this difference helps us to live out our faith more actively, encouraging us not only to believe in God but also to trust Him in our daily lives, make decisions based on His guidance, and take steps of obedience, even when it's challenging.

Can you share a time when someone's actions spoke louder than their words in your life?

This answer will be different for everyone.