

## Leading a Small Group Discussion

### 1. Prepare

Work through the materials and think yourself into your group meeting.

### 2. Pray

Pray before your group meeting.

### 3. Don't talk too much

Your job is to get people thinking and talking and keep the discussion moving from member to member rather than talking to the members.

### 4. Be A Good Listener

So simple yet so hard to do. Don't just listen to what people are saying – actively listen. The best leaders listen with their eyes and ears.

### 4. Don't Answer Your Own Questions

The whole purpose of asking the question is to create an environment where group members feel safe to share. It's not about getting the right answer. When people are silent with some of these questions, embrace the silence: this might be where the introverts are thinking and the Holy Spirit is speaking!

### 5. Encourage Responses

If no one really speaks you could say something like, "Paul, you look like you were going to say something..."

### 6. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions help group members to say more than a simple yes or no. Use 'what?' or 'how?' questions to get people to open up.

### 7. Try To Involve Everyone

Your group might be too big if everyone isn't able to speak their thoughts. Groups of over eight members will have difficulty doing this. In those cases, it might be best to divide the group into smaller groups for some of the time.

### 8. Keep the Main Thing, the Main Thing!

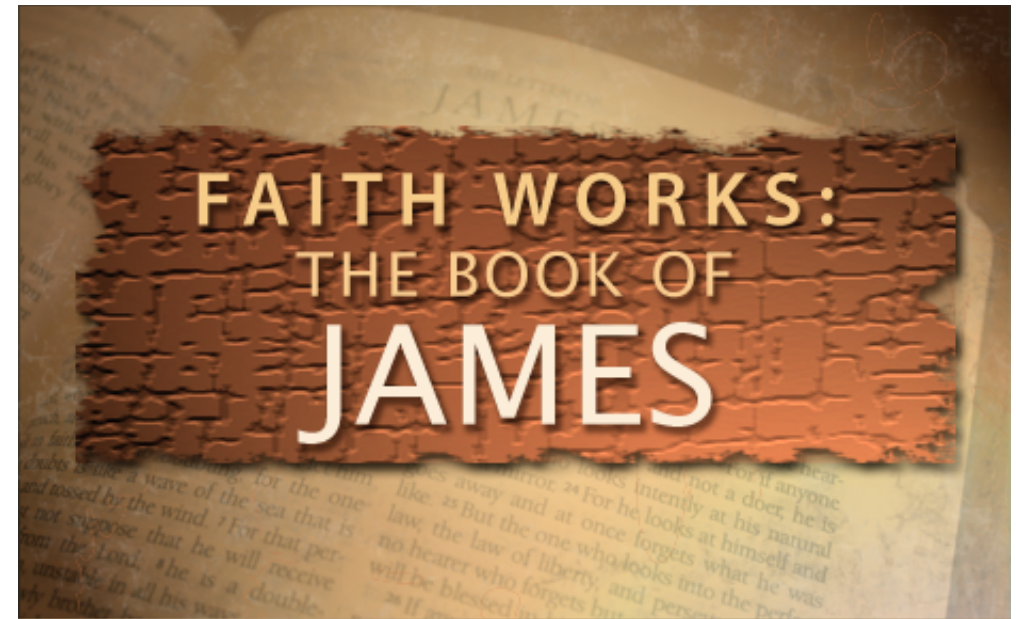
Remember, the focus is not on getting through the material and you may not cover all the questions. If the discussion is fruitful then allow group members the time they need to discuss, process, and grow with the information.

### 9. Manage the Time

Keep an eye on the clock. Don't let things get bogged down in interesting but irrelevant discussion. Bring things back on track and take the initiative to move things on when it feels right.

### 10. Leave time for application.

Make sure people have time to think about the difference that this discussion will have in their daily 'frontline' lives.



## 5. Faith Works (James 2:14-26)

## WAY IN

Can you think of ways that you have put your faith in something today (e.g. a car? a chair? a snack?) What does that say about the nature of faith?

## Read James 2:14-26

### Key Text: James 2:18

18 But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

## DISCUSS

1. How would you summarise the essential point that James makes about saving faith in vs 14-17?
2. Why is mere intellectual assent, not really faith at all? (v19)
3. James' teaching here seems to conflict with Paul's - read Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-9. How do you understand their two apparently conflicting claims (see Commentary Notes)?

4. Think about these three kinds of faith:
  - Faith THAT - believing that something is true.
  - Faith FOR - believing that something will happen.
  - Faith IN - believing that someone is worth your complete allegiance.

Which of these three comes closest to James' idea of 'saving faith'?

5. Think of the illustration of marriage. What does it mean for the couple to have faith in one another? Does their mutual faith lead to 'works'? How might this illustrate James' point?
6. How was Abraham's faith 'made complete' by the incident referred to in vs 20-24?
  - Can you think of examples from your own life where your faith has been made complete'?
7. How did Rahab's beliefs affect her and her behaviour? (v25 - and see Joshua 2:8-11; 6:22-25). What risks or cost was there for Rahab in her faith-inspired actions? What risks or costs might arise from our own faith in Jesus?

8. If you were explaining to a new Christian what it means to be 'saved by faith', what would you say, and how would James help you answer?

## WAY OUT

Share what each person is taking away from this session.

Pray for one another.

### Commentary Notes: James 2:14-26

Paul is emphatic (Romans 3:28; Eph 2:8-9): we are justified by faith alone, and not by our works. But James is equally emphatic. We are justified by what we do, and not by faith alone. The two New Testament writers seem diametrically opposed

The first thing to note is that James would not have been unfamiliar with the teachings of Paul. The two had met and knew each other. It is highly unlikely that James wouldn't have come across Paul's formulation of salvation being "by faith alone". We need to allow for the possibility that James might in fact be offering a corrective not to Paul himself, but to *followers of Paul* who have taken his "faith alone" teaching in unwise directions.

Paul's writings themselves show awareness that some believers had indeed been doing this. In his letter to the Romans, he alludes to ways in which people had been misunderstanding his teaching on justification: "Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result'?" (Romans 3:8) People were taking Paul's words and distorting their meaning. His teaching was being used to promote a glib attitude to sin and repentance, which took being justified by faith alone to mean that people could come to Christ for forgiveness and then sin with impunity. There is every possibility that James is targeting such misappropriation of Paul's teaching, rather than the teaching itself. Both Paul and James, after all, are agreed on the necessity of love flowing from true faith. Paul frequently drew his readers' attention to the necessity of love. Most famously, he reminded the church in Corinth that without love even the most radical gifting and sacrifice come to naught (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Professed faith without love counts for nothing.

Allberry, Sam. James For You: Showing you how real faith looks in real life (God's Word For You) (p. 83). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.