

8. Learning to Show Faith by Works

In our last topic, we saw that God saved us and created us for good works. Christ gave us spiritual gifts that would make it possible for us to carry out those good works. We saw that once we become a Christian, we immediately begin to desire to do what is good in the sight of God and beneficial in its effects in the lives of others. However, a new Christian may not know exactly how to carry out those good works. As a result, we want to show our physical and spiritual children Biblical examples which illustrate how to carry out good works.

The first illustration is the illustration of Abraham. James 2:21-22 says, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” Since James was writing to the Jews who were scattered in various countries, James began with the illustration of Abraham, the father of the Jews. In Genesis 12:1-3, we read, “Now the LORD had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” Then, we read that Abraham was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

Isaac was born when Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety years old. Then, in Genesis 22, we see that Abraham offered Isaac on the altar. A few verses later, in Genesis 23:1, we read that Sarah died at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven. Incidentally, this is the only woman in the Bible whose age is mentioned at her death, so there must be an important reason for her age to be mentioned at this point. That would mean that Isaac was thirty-seven years old when his mother died. As a result, Isaac was probably a young adult at the time his father offered him on the altar. This would mean that Abraham had placed his faith in the promise of God at least fifty years earlier.

Here, we see that the faith of Abraham came long before the works that are mentioned here in the book of James. God said that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered Isaac on the altar. To be “justified” means *to declare a person righteous*. Romans 5:1-2 says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Abraham was justified by faith, and as a result, God declared that his works were righteous when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. Here, we see that the faith of Abraham caused him to do good works that God said were pleasing to Him. God could be pleased with his works because they were the result of faith. As a result, God was pleased when He saw that the faith of Abraham produced good works.

Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” When God first called Abraham, He called Abraham to leave his own country by faith. Hebrews 11:8-10 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And

he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” Abraham had shown that faith when he first responded to the call of God to leave his own country. Abraham continued to show that faith, by his works, throughout the rest of his life.

We see how faith and works go together in the following verses. James 2:23-24 say, “And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” Here, we see that the first and most important work any person can do is believe God. When a person turns from sin to God, and comes to God through Christ, God puts that to the account of the person as righteousness. Until a person comes to God through faith, Isaiah 64:6 says, “But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.” However, the moment we come to God, by faith in Christ, God puts that faith to our account as righteousness.

We also see that when God puts faith to the account of a person, it changes the relationship of God with that person. Abraham was called the friend of God. However, in Christ we have an even closer relationship. John 1:12-13 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Here, we see that we become the children of God through the will of God. We want to help our children learn to explain to others what it means to become a part of the family of God.

In the last topic, we saw that Christ made us a new creation. We also saw that God designed every Christian for good works. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, we see one of those good works for which God has designed each one of us as Christians. Those verses say, “Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” We see that God chose every one of us to carry out this ministry of reconciliation (helping others understand how they can be reconciled to God by repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ). God gives us the opportunity to be His ambassadors, and Christ’s representatives, and urge others to turn to Christ to be reconciled to God.

God used James to give us a second illustration of what it means to show our faith by our works. James 2:25-26 says, “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Joshua tells us how Rahab was justified. The book of Hebrews tells us why Rahab was justified. Hebrews 11:31 says, “By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.” Here, we see that Rahab was justified by faith.

Then, Joshua 2 tells us how Rahab showed her faith in God. Joshua 2:8-13 says, “Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men: ‘I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father’s house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.” Here, we see that Rahab believed in God and God put that faith to her account.

The spies told Rahab, in Joshua 2:17-18, “‘We *will be* blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear, unless, *when* we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father’s household to your own home.’” Here, we see that the faith of Rahab saved Rahab and those of her family who chose to be in the house with her. However, she had to show her faith by her works. She was told to hang the scarlet (bright red) cord in the window of the house. Just as we have to come to God through the blood of Christ, Rahab had to come to God in the way that God said in order to show her faith.

A cord that is bright red would be very obvious to anyone who saw it. Rahab showed her faith in God by placing the bright red cord in a position where anyone who looked would see the cord. This would be true, both of her people and also of the people of Israel. For the entire week before the Lord destroyed Jericho, her faith was very obvious to all and the Lord protected Rahab and her family.

James 2:25-26 says that we need both a body and a spirit to have life. In the same way, we need spiritual life, as well as physical life, in order to have eternal life. In Ephesians 2:1, we read, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” Ephesians 2:2-9 tells us how Christ paid the penalty for our sin, while we were spiritually dead; and then, how we were saved by faith, which was a gift from God. It is only after these verses, that tell how we were saved by faith, that we read what God created us to become. Verse 10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” We see that we were given spiritual life for a purpose. As we help our physical and spiritual children understand these things, they begin to realize that the Lord has given them a great privilege to show their faith by their works. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain to others what it means to show your faith by your works.