

The Power Activator

Faith & Love Part 05
James 2:14-19 4-26-2015

Summary: Many people are confused about salvation because so many preachers fail to distinguish between dead faith and saving faith. “Faith” that does not produce deeds of love for brothers and sisters is dead (nonexistent) faith that cannot save. And faith that is mere agreement with doctrine but does not produce trust in God and love for God is nonexistent faith. Application 1: Get your assurance not by asking how genuine your conversion was, but by examining your faith right now to see if it is saving faith. Application 2: The solution to every problem in your spiritual life is faith. If the problem is not enough deeds, the solution is not to add deeds, but to increase the faith that produces deeds.

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James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? **15** Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. **16** If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? **17** In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. **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 what I do. **19** You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

Introduction

Assurance

One of the most common questions people ask me is, “How do I know for sure that I’m saved?” Many, many people who are genuinely saved still struggle with doubting their salvation. And many, many people who are not truly saved believe with all their hearts that they are saved. Those are the ones

who should be doubting, and they don't have any doubts at all. If there is one thing in Scripture that is clear it is that it is possible for you to be wrong about your assessment of your own salvation. On Judgment Day there will be people who spent their lives serving Jesus Christ, and they will be shocked to hear Him say, "Away from me, I never knew you." And so people ask, "How can I know for sure I'm not one of those?"

Two Kinds of Faith

What determines whether you are saved or not? The simple answer is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But that answer by itself is not enough, because there are actually two kinds of faith – one kind that can save you and another kind that can't. So the answer to the question of whether you are truly saved or not is this: it depends on which kind of faith you have.

Starting in chapter two verse 14 all the way through the end of the chapter, James is very concerned to teach us the difference between those two kinds of faith. Verses 14-19 describe the kind that cannot save you, and the rest of the section describes the kind that can save you. Look at the end of verse 14.

James 2:14 ...Can such faith save him?

(The answer implied in the Greek is no – it can't.)¹ In verse 16 he describes that kind of faith and asks, "What good is it?" Answer: no good - no value. And in verse 20 he calls that kind of faith **useless**. No value, no use, it can't save you - and here's why: because it is dead. He makes that point in verse 17 and again in verse 26. So the two kinds of faith are dead faith and saving faith.

Very often people will say, "I invited Jesus into my heart when I was seven, but I never really got serious about following Him and walking with Him until I was 30." And they want to know, "During that time between age 7 and age 30, was I saved? At what point did true salvation come?" The answer is this – true salvation came when you went from having the dead kind of faith to having the saving kind of faith.

For many years now the trend in the evangelical world has been in the direction of more and more vagueness in the presentation of the gospel. They want lots and lots of converts. But if you are clear about the gospel, it will offend most people, and most people will reject it. But if you are vague, you can get hundreds of people to raise their hand or come forward and make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. If you are vague about what the Bible says, each person assumes you are affirming what they believe and so nobody gets upset, and you can have a huge church and everyone is happy.

And when I say that there is a tendency to be vague when sharing the gospel – it is not that everything is vague – mainly the part about faith. If you want to know how to share the gospel with someone, here is a quick outline to keep in mind: God, sin, Jesus, salvation, faith. Tell them about God and His law, then explain about sin and how that separates us from God and provokes His wrath, then let them know about the cross and what Jesus did, then describe what salvation is (forgiveness of sins, peace with God, becoming a new creation, eternal life, etc.), and then, after you have explained all that, you get to the bottom line and explain to them how they can obtain that salvation.

And the thing I have noticed about how people share the gospel is that they do a good job with those first four points, but then they are vague about the last one. They do okay talking about God and about sin. They do a great job talking about the cross and what Jesus did. They can go on and on about forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But then when it comes to that last point - what do I have to do for Jesus' payment on the cross to be credited to my account so that I can be saved? – that is where it gets fuzzy. Many times it gets reduced down to just one sentence – "Just invite Jesus into your heart." What on earth does that even mean? Or they will say, "Just have faith in Jesus," but they don't explain the difference between the two different kinds of faith. They don't bother to define what true, saving faith is.

And the result is you have thousands of people who hear that presentation of the gospel, respond with the wrong kind of faith – the dead kind that can't save, and now they think they are Christians and on

¹ Jesus made exactly the same point in the Sheep and Goat Judgment in Matthew 25 – people whose lives were not characterized by deeds of love for brothers in Christ are not saved.

their way to heaven, but they are not. It is tragic. One of the cruelest things you could ever do is make someone think that he is saved when he is not saved. And so it is good for us to study this long section in the book of James that teaches us very clearly exactly what the differences between the two kinds of faith.

Salvation from God's Wrath

Now, before we jump into studying the difference between the two kinds of faith – the saving kind and the non-saving kind, we need to make sure we understand what James means by saving. In verse 14 James asks the rhetorical question: **Can such faith save him?** Save him from what? What is it the danger or threat or calamity that we are saved from? The answer is in Romans 5:9.

Romans 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

If you are an unbeliever, the reason you need to be saved is because you are in great peril. You are in terrible danger, because the wrath of God is burning against you. The reason you need forgiveness is because right now God has not forgiven you for a single one of your sins. He is furious with you over every single one of them. Jonathan Edwards described it as you hanging by a tiny thread over the raging fire of hell, and that is read as being held in the fingers of a God who is raging in anger against you. That is the horrible situation that you need to be rescued or saved from. Every single person in this room either was in that position or is currently in that position. Some of us were in that position and have been saved from it. Others are still in that position because they have not been rescued from it. Which one are you? It all depends on which kind of faith you have. If you have the dead kind, the wrath of God is still against you, and He could let go of that thread at any moment. But if you have the other kind of faith, you are no longer dangling over the fire, and the God who is in charge of your destiny is not angry with you. In fact, when He looks down and sees you, when He thinks about you, He is delighted! That is what “saved” means.

Structure

The structure of this passage is fairly straightforward. James gives two illustrations of dead faith and two illustrations of saving faith. The two illustrations of dead faith are, 1) the talker in verse 16, and 2) the demons in verse 19. The two illustrations of saving faith are Abraham and Rahab.

More Than What You Say

The Talker

So let's start with the first illustration: the talker.

James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith...

That is why I call this guy the talker – he is claiming to have faith.

14 What good is it ... if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

When he says **such faith**, he is referring to the kind of faith that **claims** to exist but does not produce any action.

15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

Go, I wish you well. Lit. Go in peace. That is a very common Jewish greeting that typically signaled the end of the encounter. You know how certain things you say are kind of a signal to let the person know the conversation is over?

"Well, sure appreciate your dropping by..."

That is a subtle way of saying, "It's time for you to go now." If they are standing there shivering in the rain and starving and you just say that but do nothing to help them, **what good is it?** That is the second time he asks that.

James uses an extreme example that nobody would argue with. Even non-Christians would read that and say, "I agree – doing that would have zero benefit." James wants to establish something that is self-evident, namely, that mere words that are not backed up by actions are worthless. So the first thing we learn about saving faith is this – it's not a matter of what you say. It is something more than that.

Deeds of Love for the Brothers

And there is something I'd like you to notice here that is very important. The topic at hand is faith without deeds – claiming to have faith but having no action. But in the example James gives, the person never makes any explicit claim to have faith. This fellow in verse 16 – what is it that he claims to have? It seems to me what he is claiming to have is love. **I wish you well; keep warm and well fed** – those are all implicit claims of love. I care about you – I'm wishing you well. I am rooting for you to be warm and have plenty of food. Clearly in this guy's words he is claiming to have love in his heart for this person.

If he is talking about people who claim to have faith but have no action, why does he give an example of a person claiming to have love without action? Has James changed the subject from faith over to love? No, he is definitely still talking about faith. Look at the conclusion he draws in the next verse.

17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

So he is still talking about faith. I think what James is showing us here is the connection between faith and love. You can never separate those. Remember, this whole discussion is coming out of that last verse in chapter 1 about true religion.

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

What is true religion? What is faith in God all about? Keeping yourself from the world, and showing love to people in need. And then where did James go from there?

James 2:1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

And then he goes on to point out that favoritism is a violation of the royal law – love your neighbor as yourself. So he is saying, "As believers in Christ don't violate love." Why? Because true faith will love God and love people – that is true religion. For James, trusting God and loving people are glued together so tightly, there is absolutely no way to have one without the other. And so there is nothing strange at all in James' mind when he wants to give an example of faith without deeds, and the example ends up being a person who claims to have love but has no deeds. So the point of all that is simply this: true, saving faith produces deeds. What kind of deeds? Deeds of love. Paul taught exactly the same principle:

Galatians 5:6 The only thing that counts is faith working through love.

Faith always works. And what kind of work does it do? The work of love.

If God blesses you with money, and you have true, saving faith, you are not going to use that money to just keep getting a bigger house and nicer cars and more expensive vacations. If you trust Him to supply all your needs, and you believe what He says about it being more blessed to give than to receive, you will share with those in need.

Not Faith Plus Deeds

All of that is pretty basic. Most Christians understand that much. But there is a danger that comes up at this point that James wants to warn us about when it comes to understanding the relationship between

faith and deeds. Right here is where your inner legalist wants to jump in and say, “I knew salvation couldn’t just be a matter of faith alone. I knew I had to pitch in something for my salvation.” They think there are two parts to becoming saved.

Part 1, trust God – have faith in Jesus Christ.

Part 2, repent of your sins and follow and obey Christ.

Only when you add those two parts together are you saved. That is the mistake the guy in verse 18 makes.

The Objection

18 But someone will say

That is a formula that always indicates an objection. So this guy is not on James’ side, but he sounds like he is.

18 ... “You have faith; I have deeds.”

James has been saying *you have to have deeds!* Faith without deeds is worthless. So you expect the objector to be anti-deeds. What you expect James’ opponent to say is, “You have deeds, I just have faith.” But this guy is pro-deeds, just like James. He is saying, “**You have faith, I have deeds.**” Commentators really scratch their heads over this one. It is considered one of the most difficult statements in the whole New Testament to interpret. I won’t get into all the various views. I will just tell you where I landed. I think the point here is that this person, even though he is pro-deeds, is still totally missing the boat because he is separating faith and deeds. He sees someone like that talker in verse 15 who is claiming to have faith and he says, “You have faith, I have deeds - we all have our different gifts. We are all at different stages in our faith journey. Maybe you’re still in that period between when you invited Jesus into your heart, and the time when you get serious about it. You accepted Jesus Christ into your heart as your personal Savior, you confessed your sins and asked forgiveness, you consider yourself a Christian – but you just haven’t quite gotten to that place where you’re a full-blown disciple yet like I am. Following the will of God no matter what, doing whatever the Bible says to do – you’re just not quite that serious about it. You believe Jesus died for your sins, you affirm everything in the Bible is true, but there’s no real fruit in your life. Your life is pretty much like the average unbeliever’s life for the most part. That’s ok! You’re still saved. Don’t doubt your salvation just because you aren’t living a Christian life. I’ve progressed the point where I have deeds – you’re not there yet – you just have faith at this point – that’s fine for now.” There are a lot of preachers and authors preaching that message today.

It is the doctrine sometimes referred to as “easy believism.” They say, “Believing has to be easy. As soon as you make it hard, you are adding works, and you have a works-based salvation.” The people who preach this message usually don’t like the label “easy believism.” They prefer to call it “free grace,” or something like that. I don’t call it that because that is misleading. All grace is free – by definition. Grace is free, but it is not cheap. You don’t have to do anything to earn it, but receiving the free gift does involve giving up substitutes. It is like a treasure you found in a field. You sell everything you have to purchase the field and get that treasure.

Show Me

So what is James’ response to these people who want to separate faith and deeds, so that it is possible to have one without the other?

18 ...Show me your faith without deeds

You say, “Hey James, I’m a Christian!” James says, “Oh, that’s great. Show me.”

“Show you?”

“Yeah – you have faith, I’d like to see it. Let me take a look.”

“Faith is in your heart – how can you show someone your faith?”

Easy. Find a good, sturdy chair and ask someone, “Do you trust this chair to support your weight?” If he says yes, ask him to show you. If he sits down in the chair, now you can see his faith – you can see that he trusts that chair. When James says, “Show me your faith,” if you have saving faith, that’s easy. All you have to do is point to the things you are doing in your life for no other reason than your trust in Jesus Christ as the guide of your life. Point to all the things you’re doing for no other reasons than the promises God has made that you are banking on. But if your faith is only inside you, with no impact on your manner of living, it is dead faith.

Dead Faith is Non-Faith

If you are in that period between accepting Jesus into your heart, and actually getting serious about obeying Him – no spiritual fruit in your life – if that is you, but you claim that you believe, James says, “Show me,” and for you it’s an impossible request. Basically what James is saying here is, “Show me your imaginary friend.” When someone asks you to show him your imaginary friend, the reason he is asking is because he wants you to come to grips with the fact that your friend is imaginary. That is exactly James’ point. Your friend does not exist. This faith you have in Jesus, that has no impact on your life – does not exist. He is not talking about weak faith or little faith or sick faith. Faith without deeds of love is not true faith that has a problem – it is non-faith. Dead faith is no more faith than a corpse is a person. He will make that point down in verse 26.

I once heard someone teaching this passage and he said, “Faith without works is like a car without gas.” Can you see why that’s a bad illustration? A car without gas is still a car. Faith without works is not faith – it is nothing. A better illustration would be to say faith without works is like a car that does not exist.

Another preacher said faith and works are like two oars in a row boat. If you just have one and not the other, you go in circles. I think that illustration is another example of the very error that James is arguing against here. To say that faith and works are like the left and right oar is to say that there are two things we must do to be saved – believe and work. But that is wrong. There are not two requirements – just one. Just faith. But it has to be the kind of faith that produces works. That oar illustration is kind of like saying, “In order to have a windstorm, you need two key ingredients: the effects of wind, and the wind itself. Once you put both of those together, you’ve got yourself a windstorm.” You wouldn’t say that. For a windstorm all you need is wind. If you have wind, the effects of the wind will be there.

You can see the effects of faith

And there James introduces a very basic truth about faith – *you can see it*.

18 ...Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

You can see the effects of faith. How do you know if it is windy outside? You can see the trees bending and dust flying through the air. How do you know if true, saving faith is present in someone’s heart? You can see the effects it has. You can see the actions of love that it causes. Is there such a thing as faith that has no effect on behavior? No – no more than a wind that has no effect on the leaves.

And it is not just that what you believe has some little effect on your behavior at the margin. Every single thing you ever do, you do because of what you believe. You get a drink of water because you believe it will quench your thirst. You get in a car because you believe it will get you to where you are going. Emotions - you feel fear because you believe something painful will happen. You feel joy because you believe something good is happening. Everything we ever do or say or feel comes from what we believe to be true. If I tell you that this building is on fire, I can tell that you don’t believe me because you’re not all running away. If someone walked up to you and said, “Show me how to get to Water World from here,” and you said, “Follow me,” and started walking west on 88th, and instead of following you they went south on Huron, you could tell right away – they don’t trust you as a guide. They claim to have

faith in you, but you can tell, when they are not willing to follow you, that they trust their own ideas more than they trust you. When someone says, “I trust the Lord Jesus Christ,” but every time the Bible says, “This is the way to joy,” and they really feel like this other way would make them happier, they always go with their own impression rather than Scripture – that person proves he does not really trust God as a guide for his life. You can tell when wind isn’t there because nothing is happening. And you can tell when faith isn’t there because nothing is happening.

As an unbeliever, you held something other than God as the highest treasure. Then when you became a believer, the thing you believed is that Jesus Christ is the greatest treasure. Is it conceivable that someone could go from holding this world as their greatest treasure to holding Christ as their greatest treasure and that change has no impact on how they live? No.

I started by saying there are two kinds of faith – dead faith and saving faith. But it would be more accurate to say there are two kinds of “so called” faith. In reality there are not two kinds of faith, because the dead kind is not faith at all. Dead faith is like dead wind. What happens when the wind dies down? What is dead wind? It is no wind at all. Same with faith – dead faith is no faith. It is imaginary faith. It is pretend faith. It is nothing.

More Than What You Believe

So what do we learn from the talker in verse 15? That saving faith is more than what you say. Claiming to have faith in Jesus does not make it so. Now, in verse 19, James is going to take it a step further and say, “Not only is faith more than what you say – it is more than what you believe.”

The Theologian (Demon Faith)

19 You believe that there is one God.

James picks the most central, basic, essential doctrine in the entire Jewish religion – there is one God. Every single day, twice a day, a faithful Jew would recite what is known as the Shema.

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

That was the most basic, most orthodox, most essential statement of doctrine they had. James says, “You affirm that as true. Nice job.”

19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You have impeccable theology. Congratulations – you are as smart as a demon. If you interviewed every single demon in existence, you wouldn’t find one single atheist. Every demon is not only a theist, but a monotheist. If you go through and read everything the demons ever said to Jesus in the gospels, you could put together a great theological statement about Christ.

Mark 3:11 Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.”

Mark 1:24 “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”... 34 He drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Luke 8:28 ... “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!”

Demons not only have good Christology, they have good eschatology. They are experts on end-times prophecy.

Matthew 8:29 “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?”

There are no preterist demons – they knew it was no t time yet for the Second Coming and their ultimate defeat. Demons have excellent theology. Every demon believes in the Trinity, substitutionary atonement, the virgin birth. Forty-nine percent of Methodists believe Jesus literally rose from the dead. Sixty-five percent of Presbyterians believe it. Seventy percent of Episcopalians believe it. One hundred percent of demons believe that Jesus rose from the dead. I believe the devil is a pre-millennial, post-tribulation young-earth creationist who believes abortion and homosexual behavior are detestable to God.

Shudder

Is that faith? Well, what effect does it have on them?

19 ... Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

This shuddering is not the normal word used for fearing God. It is not the good kind of fearing God. This is a decidedly negative term. It means to be horrified and to bristle against something, and to be in great distress. This is not the fear a child has for the father he dearly loves. This is antagonistic, distressed, hateful horror. There is nothing relationtionally good in this word.

Faith and Loving God

Demon faith is a great example of dead faith that does not save because it does not result in loving God. The talker had dead faith because it did not result in loving people. The demons have dead faith because it does not result in loving God. Genuine, saving faith causes love in your heart – love for God and love for people – especially the people who love God.

So true faith is more than what you say, and it is even more than what you believe. It goes deeper than words, and it goes deeper than mere agreement with the truth of Scripture. Saving faith not only believes, but also trusts, and trusting is relational. You believe information; you trust a person – and both are essential for saving faith. Trust is a component of love. When you trust someone, that is an act of love toward that person. When you withhold trust from someone, you are withholding love.

1 Corinthians 13:7 ... Love always trusts

There are many people in the church – even pastors, who put their confidence, not in Christ, but in their doctrine. They know more theology than the Apostle Paul. They have a theological system that is airtight, and they can cream you in any theology debate (and they are eager to do so). Doctrinal accuracy is a good thing, but if you place your faith in that rather than in Christ, it becomes a worthless idol. These people are like the guy who tries to prove his faith in the chair by going on and on about the physics of the chair. But he will not sit in it. That may be a form of belief, but it is not trust.

Charles Blondin was a famous tightrope walker in the early 1800's. He would walk a tightrope without a net blindfolded, on stilts, standing on a chair with only one chair leg on the rope, etc. He is especially famous for walking a tightrope across Niagara Falls. He went back and forth several times, each time making it harder. At one point he got a wheelbarrow and filled it with bricks, and pushed it all the way across – no net, no safety line. The crowd went nuts. Legend has it that he then asked the crowd, “Do you think I could do it with a person in the wheelbarrow?” And they all said, “Yes! We know you could!” And so he looked at a guy who was affirming that and said, “Get in.” What was he doing? The same thing James is doing here – he was saying, “Show me your faith.” That is exactly what God is saying to some of you right now – “Get in. You trust Me? Then entrust your life to Me completely.”

So, those are two examples of dead faith – the theologian who does not love God and the talker who does not love people. The rest of the passage gives two examples of saving faith – Abraham and Rahab. Abraham is an example of someone who loved God (he was called God's friend), and Rahab is an example of someone who showed love to God's people. We will plan on looking at those examples in some detail next time. For now let me just give you two applications of this that I think will help you.

Applications

1) Assurance Comes from Faith (Right Now)

First, I started the sermon talking about assurance of salvation. One of the most important things you can learn from this passage is to always make sure that your assurance of your salvation is always connected to your faith and nothing else. I think part of the reason why so many people struggle with assurance, is because when they first heard the gospel, and it got to the part about how to become a Christian, they were told to pray a prayer, or come forward in an altar call. Maybe someone led you in a prayer and told you, “If you prayed that prayer *and meant it*, you’re saved – and don’t ever doubt it!” So you walked away thinking that you got saved by praying a prayer and meaning it. Or by inviting Jesus into your heart and meaning it. Or walking forward and really meaning it. So then, years later when you run into some doubts about your salvation, what you do? The natural thing to do is to think back to that prayer you prayed and ask yourself, “Did I really, really mean it?” So all of your security and all of your assurance is riding on how much you meant something all those years ago. And that can be pretty unsettling – especially if your memory is like mine and you can’t even remember how you felt a few days ago, much less 10 or 20 years ago.

And besides that, it is possible that a person could pray that prayer and mean it with all his heart and still not be saved. Faith is not a matter of what you say, or even what you mean by what you say. Whenever the Bible gives us tests to find out for sure if we are really saved, it never points back to your conversion. It never says, “Think back and figure out how much you meant it when you were converted.” Notice that throughout this whole section James is using present tense verbs. If you are wondering if your salvation is genuine, the answer to that question does not lie in the past. The answer is not in figuring out how genuine your conversion was. The answer is very simple. If you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ right now, you are saved; if you don’t, you are not saved. And the way you can tell if faith is there is the same way you can tell if wind is present – you look for the effects of it. Do you have the kind of faith that talks a big game but has no impact on loving people, or does your faith in Jesus Christ produce actions of love for people? Do you have the kind of faith that affirms good theology but does not involve any love relationship with God? Or do you trust Him? In other words, if you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

2) Faith Taps into Divine Power

The other application I want to leave you with is this – the reason faith always works is because faith taps into Divine power. Faith is what activates the power of God in your life. This is so incredibly important for living the Christian life. Sometimes people get overwhelmed trying to keep track of all the things they are supposed to be doing in the Christian life. Week after week they hear sermons and find out areas where they need to improve, and it can really pile up, and become too much to even remember, let alone do it all.

If you sit in this sermon and hear about the big talker and you get convicted and think, “Man, that’s me. I really need to get busy with having more deeds of love” – that is the wrong response.

“But if the problem is not enough deeds, isn’t the solution to add more deeds?”

No. The solution is to add faith. If you look outside and say, “I can tell there’s no wind, because there are no newspapers blowing around in the air,” so you go outside and grab some newspapers and whip them around in the air - you still don’t have any wind. When you see a lack of deeds, the solution is not to add deeds. That is like duct taping apples onto a dead branch – it will not accomplish anything. If you want fruit, you have got to get that branch grafted into a healthy apple tree so that life-giving sap will come up from the tree into the branch and produce fruit.

Finding out you are failing in some area of love is like discovering a symptom of a disease. From that point, the goal is not just to reverse the symptom, but to deal with the disease. If you feel sick and run

down and have no energy, and you have a fever – those are symptoms. So you go to the doctor, find out the underlying cause is some infection. It is not enough to just try to reverse the symptoms. You don't just say, "Well, I'm lacking energy so I'll take an energy drink, and I have a fever so I'll take a cold bath." No – you go after that infection. Cure that, and the symptoms will go away. Any time you lack deeds in your life, that's not the disease – that is the symptom. The disease is lack of faith in that area.

So always remember, the solution to every single spiritual problem you have is faith. If you don't love people, trust God more. If you don't have compassion on those in need, that is a symptom. What's the infection? It is something to do with your faith. You need to deepen your belief in what God says about how He feels about that person. You need to increase your belief in the rewards God promises to those who show compassion. You need to increase your faith in the promise that your greatest joy will be found in loving others, rather than in loving yourself. And that will work because faith activates the power of God in your life.

If you don't read your Bible enough, the solution isn't to just read your Bible more. The solution is to trust God more. If I am lost, and you are a guide, if I really trust you as a guide, I'm not going to have to discipline myself with a bunch of rules, "Make sure you ask directions from the guide every morning before you start walking!" If I really, truly believe that I am lost on my own, and I really, truly believe that you are a reliable guide, then asking you for guidance will be automatic. Why? Because faith activates the power of God in your life. If you don't pray enough, the solution is to increase your faith. If you're not giving enough, you need more faith. If you have trouble being patient with people, work on your faith. Activate the power of God in your life by trusting Him more in that area.

"What about self-discipline? What about planning and thinking things through and accountability and working hard on making changes in your life? Isn't all that important for making spiritual progress?"

Yes, those things are necessary. But you are not going to be able to do any of them much more than you already are until you tap into greater power from God and that will come when you trust Him more.

Benediction: 2 Thessalonians 1:11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. Which tends to be the greatest danger in your spiritual life – spiritual laziness (being content not to have many deeds), or legalism (focusing more on deeds than on faith)?
2. When you look at the deeds in your life right now, what are the top one or two areas where you need to increase your faith?
3. On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate your current level of assurance that you are genuinely saved? If it is less than 10, what is hindering your assurance?