Community Group Discussion Guide

August 10, 2025

Romans 5:1-2; Hebrews 11:1-6; James 2:14-26| Faith in Jesus

MOTIVATE

⇒ *Starter Question: If you had to explain the basics of Christian faith in a letter, what would you include?*

DISCUSS

There are many who claim the label of Christianity. Yet there is more to the Christian faith than simply stating that you are a Christian. Wearing a religious badge is not the same as following God in faith. Christian faith is more than a mere acknowledgment that God exists—it is a declaration of our sin, our need for a Savior, and our dependence on Jesus, the only One who can save. It is this faith in God's grace that God uses as a means to change a soul's eternal destination.

⇒ *What does it mean to you to be a Christian?*

Once a person is saved, true discipleship in action involves obedience to Jesus, continued confession of our sinfulness, and a desire to follow Him, leaving all else behind. There are a lot of things we can say about what faith in Jesus looks like. Fortunately, in passages like Romans 5:1-2, Hebrews 11:1-6, and James 2:14-26, we have inspired writings and letters from Paul and other disciples to show us what they wanted to teach Jesus' early disciples in the church.

⇒ *What does it mean to you to be a disciple of Jesus?*

1. Faith in Jesus changes our standing before God.

Romans 5:1: *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome as they wrestled with many questions dealing with faith and right standing before God. Written to this specific gathering of Jews and Gentiles, some holding onto the Law of Moses and some unsure of what significance it still held, one underlying question Paul answered in Romans was, "How can a sinful person enter into a saving relationship with a righteous God?"

Paul was clear: for both Jews and Gentiles, righteousness comes apart from works of the law. To make this point, he started first with the reality that each soul has a sin-stained heart (Romans 3:23) and that all sin leads to death (Romans 6:23). Thus, all humankind needs something to save them from sin and death, and works are not the answer because they can never perfect our sinful state (Romans 3:20).

⇒ *Why is it vital for us to understand that our righteousness is not earned by works?*

Paul demonstrated how God provided a way to escape His wrath through the sacrifice and righteousness of Jesus, the perfect Son of God. Jesus died on the cross to pay the death penalty we all owe for our own sin. By faith, one can be "justified by his grace as a gift, through the

redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). The word for "redemption" carried the idea of the purchase of freedom for slaves. So God redeemed us—He paid to deliver us out of slavery for we were slaves to sin and death.

God redeems the faith-filled soul, and then He credits to us the righteousness of Jesus, resulting in justification, the passing over our sins (Romans 3:25). God's wrath against the sin of the individual has been satisfied in Jesus and justice has prevailed (Romans 3:26). This act of justification—being made right—results in our being declared righteous before God. Thus, our Savior changes the wrath-deserving status of a sinner to that of a justified, righteous child of God because of our faith and trust in Jesus' saving work.

⇒ *Why is it vital for us to understand that our redemption and justification comes only through Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf?*

"Therefore," Paul, after explaining these things in the previous chapters, confirmed to the church in Rome that they indeed "have been justified by faith" because of the sacrifice of the Son and the gracious redemption of the Father, instead of being at war with God, the soul is now at peace with God.

⇒ *What does the peace of God mean to you?*
⇒ *How can you better rely on the peace of God amidst chaotic surroundings, relational discord, and internal turmoil?*

Justification refers to the moment when a person is objectively declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Jesus atoning death (Romans 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through faith in Jesus and not as a result of human works or effort (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God. Justification is not the result of human effort or good works but through faith in the righteousness of Jesus. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works (Ephesians 2:10).

⇒ *While good works do not establish justification, how do they verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others?*
⇒ *What are some signs we might be leaning toward a works-based salvation instead of justification by faith?*

Romans 5:2: *Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

We not only have peace with God through faith, but justification by faith also provides "access." There are three things Paul highlighted about this access granted to believers.

a. This access is obtained through Jesus and by faith. One cannot be saved from sin by any other means. Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Jesus alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Jesus as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13).

⇒ *Why is faith more than just "a mental agreement?"*

b. This access leads into "this grace in which we stand." God has granted the believer abounding grace—undeserved gifts. The good news of Jesus is that His grace gives us glorious transformation, bringing us from spiritual death to life, orphaned to adopted, sinner to saint. These are merely the first glimpse of His grace. It is this foundation of grace on which we stand that we are propelled into an eternity of future graces.

⇒ *Describe some of the grace you have found in your relationship with God through Jesus.*

c. This access leads to hope. With right standing before God, peace with God, and a foundation of grace, there is much in which the believer may "boast," or "rejoice," as the Greek word here means both. And so, "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." This hope is assured hope, not just wishful thinking, for we know that God's glory will prevail, His plans will come to pass, His kingdom will be established, and He will call His people home as His family forever.

⇒ *How can your life reflect the joy you have in the hope of the glory of God?*
⇒ *What difference has "assured hope" made in your faith journey?*

2. Faith in Jesus changes our relationship with God.
Hebrews 11:1-6: *1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the people of old received their commendation. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

The book of Hebrews is all about the supremacy of Jesus. Through the first ten chapters, the author set out to demonstrate how Jesus is better than the prophets, priests, angels, and patriarchs. He is indeed "considered worthy of more glory" than all who came before Him (Hebrews 3:3).

Just as important as His supremacy is the sufficiency of His work on the cross, which trumped the works of the law and the sacrificial system. No longer would God's people require a human advocate to make petitions of God. Nor would they have need for a mediator to make continual reparations for their sins (Hebrews 9:11-28). Because of Jesus, sinners can draw near to a holy God through the His perfect Son (Hebrews 10:19-22), changing our relationship with God forever. And we draw near simply by faith.

But what is faith according to the author? He gave us a definition: "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of what is not seen." Like those who've gone before us, there are many things we haven't seen, either in the past or the future in terms of God's work and glory, but by faith, we believe because God's Word tells us so. For example, the author started with creation in verse 3. No one saw the creation in action, but we believe God did it.

⇒ *Have you found that you can have faith because of trusting in God's Word?*

Then in verse 4, the author began an account of the faithful in history, which is why this section is often titled "the Hall of Faith." First was Abel, who may only have heard of God and Eden from his parents. Still he believed God and worshiped Him rightly (Genesis 4:3-5). He was approved, or commended, as a righteous man, and because of his faith, his life and story still speak.

⇒ *Is there someone in your life whose faith causes his or her story to still speak?*

The next example of faith is Enoch, who walked with God and, because of his faith, did not die naturally but was taken up supernaturally by God to be with Him (Genesis 5:22-24). The people in these examples were "commended" by God—God was pleased by them and was pleased to have a relationship with them and all because of their faith—their trust in things that were hoped for yet not seen.

⇒ *The Bible gives us many examples of faithful people with whom God was pleased to be in relationship because of their faith. Can you give some other examples?*

Verse 6 provides a summary of the author's main point: "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." Faith opens up the way to a relationship with God, a God who draws us near into His presence. This verse goes on to provide two details about this drawing near. First, one "must believe that [God] exists." Faith begins with the acceptance of the testimony of the Bible that God is the Creator, Sustainer, and Benefactor of all we see and experience. Through nature and His Word, we can know the Creator as the Almighty God, sovereign and powerful in all His ways.

⇒ *Why is it impossible to please God without faith?*
⇒ *Discuss this statement: Faith involves believing that God is all that He says He is—sovereign, powerful, good, and faithful.*

The second element of this faith is the belief that God "rewards those who seek him." Faith trusts in the truths set forth about Jesus and the spiritual blessings of God that include salvation and a relationship with Him. Even in our darkest moments, by faith we draw near to the presence of God and hold onto the truth of His goodness and faithfulness. He desires to reward us. Because of the great exchange—our sin for Jesus' righteousness—the Father takes pleasure in His relationship with us, as He no longer sees our sin.

⇒ *How does it encourage your faith to know that God takes pleasure in His relationship with you?*

3. Faith in Jesus changes our actions for God.

James 2:14-19: ***14*** *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?* ***15*** *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,* ***16*** *and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?* ***17*** *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* ***18*** *But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.* ***19*** *You believe that God*

is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

The book of James is a practical one. In it, the half-brother of Jesus (who was an influential leader in the early church at Jerusalem) set out to provide God's people with concrete directives on how to live a life of consistency. James's written work contains the highest frequency of commands in the New Testament. Aimed toward a primarily Jewish audience, James infused his letter with a call for Christ-followers to move beyond a mere statement of faith.

- ⇒ *Discuss this statement: James asserted that a saving belief in God always leads to godly behavior.*
- ⇒ *What does it mean "to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22)?"*

In chapter two, James continued his admonition toward exhibiting an active faith. A mere claim of conviction does not confirm conversion. Words without actions are dead. A well-wisher is of no practical use to someone in great physical need. Happy thoughts and good vibes don't clothe bodies or fill bellies. They are empty, useless affirmations. So this statement is true: "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." Such "faith" has no substance or significance. Saving faith, however, is living and growing and evidenced by activity.

- ⇒ *How would explain the concept of "an active faith?"*

To drive the point home, James declared a startling truth: "even the demons believe," so much so that they tremble. But a mere acknowledgment of God's existence and power is not enough to deliver from sin. A living faith in Jesus as Savior is a revolutionary belief that leads to liberation, a salvation that produces transformation.

- ⇒ *How is saving faith different from the belief the demons have in God?*
- ⇒ *Discuss this statement: The seedlings of spiritual change that are birthed from faith in God's grace always result in living, active, growing Christians.*

James 2:20-26: ***20*** *Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?* ***21*** *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?* ***22*** *You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;* ***23*** *and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God.* ***24*** *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.* ***25*** *And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?* ***26*** *For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

On the heels of his assertion that saving faith always leads to actions, James turned his attention to Abraham. The author knew his audience would be well versed in the life of Abraham. With the example of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his long-awaited son, Isaac, James provided a powerful illustration of active, saving faith. Yet it wasn't the physical work of placing Isaac on the altar that saved Abraham. Every step of obedience up that mount proved Abraham's faith to be real.

- ⇒ *When and how has God tested the realness of your faith?*

Abraham's trek was more than a mere acknowledgment of God's existence. It was a soul-level trust in and devotion to the One who knows best. The Hall of Faith passage puts it perfectly: Abraham "considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19). The actions of Abraham in response to this test proved his faith in God as a redemptive one. A faith without works would never have made it to the altar. Yet the willingness to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22) was not what made Abraham righteous. Years before this sacrificial test, God declared Abraham righteous due to his faith in God's promises (Genesis 15:6). If Abraham's faith had never effected any sort of endeavors to worship God, that faith could not have been a justified one. This was James's point. Faith without fruit is fake. But the faith that leads to action is authentic.

⇒ *Discuss this statement: Those who have proven faithful in the past were those who trusted in the person and work of God and acted in response to that trust.*

In case the point was not clear, James also called to mind the story of Rahab (Joshua 2). As a woman, a prostitute, and a Gentile, many faithful Jews may have had a harder time viewing Rahab as an example of faith and righteousness. However, James called her forward as another example of justified faith. She had placed her trust in a God she barely knew. Then she proved her faith when she worked to rescue God's messengers. Regardless of background, vocation, past mistakes, or heritage, God saves the soul who actively worships Him through an outworking of faith.

⇒ *Discuss this statement: True faith in God, whom we know through faith in Jesus, always leads to action. Works cannot save a soul, but a saved soul will work out his or her salvation for all to see.*

TRANSFORM

Salvation is a free gift of God that comes only through faith in Jesus. Through His sinless life, His death, and His Resurrection, Jesus did all that is needed to provide salvation for all who place faith in Him. Because God has provided salvation from sin through our faith in His Son, we seek to live out that faith, showing the watching world the difference the gospel makes.

1. HEAD: It is possible for scholars, pastors, and leaders who know the Bible better than most to be unsaved. It is not knowledge alone about the God of the Bible that saves. It is the faith of trusting in the Bible's gospel—the truth about the sufficient work of Jesus—that provides eternal rescue. A mental acknowledgment of history and biblical narrative is not enough, as beneficial as these may be. Facts without faith are worthless when it comes to salvation.

⇒ *What are some ways you can continue to learn more about God as an act of faith rather than simply gathering facts?*

2. HEART: Though our faith-based salvation and grace-given righteous positions before God are secure, it is easy to fall into the trap of simply filling our heads with facts about God instead of relating to God. Listening to a sermon and completing a Bible study mean nothing if they don't lead us toward a deeper intimacy with God. Knowing God better is a crucial part of our spiritual growth, but maturity in Jesus is proven in our responses to what we encounter on the pages of Scripture.

⇒ *What are some practices you can add to your time with God that will help you respond in*

faith and worship?

3. HANDS: Though faith in Jesus as Savior can be simple, Christianity is not simply about faith. A saving faith will lead to observable actions that can only be explained by the internal, spiritual transformation that occurred at the moment of our salvation. Justification always leads to sanctification. The obedient working out of our faith is the outward evidence of an inward reality. Faith-filled works are the worship-filled response to all God has done for us in Jesus, and these are part of what God uses to draw others into a relationship with Him.

⇒ *What specific faith-filled works are you being called to do this week by God as acts of worship and evangelism?*

The Gospel Project® for Adults
Leader Guide CSB, Unit 21, Session 4
© 2022 Lifeway Christian Resources
Permission granted to reproduce and distribute within the license agreement with purchaser.