

DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL CONFIDENCE

James 2:14-26

Do you ever people-watch when you're at the airport? If you've ever passed time that way, I'm sure you've noticed there are two kinds of people who fly ...

The conscientious flyers. They're the ones who check in early, get their boarding pass and then find a spot to read or watch CNN or settle in to sleep. They can be leisurely because they're prepared.

The last-minute flyers. I'm sure you've seen them. These people are pacing, tapping and usually acting obnoxious. When you fly stand-by, you don't relax until they call your name. When they do, suddenly this nervous wreck of a person takes on a new personality. Now they relax like the conscientious flyers. Now they go find a place to sleep.

The reason for this change is because now they know they'll make the flight. They're relieved because they can get to their destination. You know, there is a huge difference between **hoping** and **knowing** about something. Knowing gives you direction. Either you know you should keep going in one direction or you know to change direction.

John wrote ...*I write these things to you who believe in the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.* (1 John 5:13) This verse, and others like it, informs us that it is possible to have confidence, **to know**, about our standing in eternity. The Bible is also clear about self-deception creeping in. Jesus says ... *“Not everyone who claims to believe in me will enter the kingdom of heaven.”* Mt 7:21

Sometimes people develop a false sense of security. They think they are set when they get baptized or confirmed or married in the church. This is proof that these people have no clue as to what it takes to secure a place in heaven. Today I want to talk about what it takes to be a member in the family of God. This is important and I want to make myself understood. Our text is (James 2:14-26)

Jesus reminded us, ***“Not everyone who claims to believe in me will enter the kingdom of heaven.”*** So, if someone claims to have faith and professes to be a Christian, and has no corroborating evidence, there isn't much to substantiate the claim, is there? A 2011 CNN poll reported that 50 million Americans claim to be Christians. I wonder what percentage live by that claim. Talk is cheap. A few years ago Larry Flynt, the publisher of “Hustler” magazine, said he was born again. But he forgot to change something — how he lived. He kept right on publishing pornography, never skipping an issue. He has since recanted his statement of salvation. We may claim to be Christians, but our lifestyle may say something different.

In another poll by Barna they were trying to determine if people lived by what they said they believed. Here are the questions with the majority answers:

Are you a Christian? **Yes.**

Do you attend church regularly? **No.**

Do you donate your time to charity? **No.**

Do you tithe, or give money to the church? **No.**

Do you live in close community with other believers? **No.**

These verses in James 2 are, what you might call, the “prove it” section of the New Testament. He is telling us we can't just claim to be Christians, there must be action to back up that claim. You can claim to be an architect, but that won't make you one. Remember George Castanza on *Sienfeld*. He wanted to be an architect, to him that was the height of success. But in his little pretend life, if he were ever asked where he went to school, where his office was, what buildings he has designed, he couldn't answer those questions truthfully because he was not an architect! That type of behavior is what James 2 is driving at. It is saying, many people say they are Christians, but there is no visible evidence to back up the claim. He tells us not to kid ourselves – ***He saves us, not because of the good things we have done, but because of his mercy.*** (Titus 3:5)

Once we obey the gospel, we should demonstrate this new life in our actions. Our life has changed and so should our lifestyle. It is by our actions that we prove to others what we claim to be is true. Our behavior, our manner of life is our testimony. There are six proofs that each of us can demonstrate to the world that we are changed:

1. Gratitude. We should live with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what Jesus has done for us. How can one express gratitude to God? One way to express gratitude would be by attending services on a regular basis. It's great! We praise God by worshiping and giving thanks. In worship we say, "Thank you for all you've done for us."

2. Sharing. The second proof that our faith is genuine would be in looking for the opportunity to tell others about the love of Jesus and His gift of salvation. The Bible says that word-of-mouth advertising is how we should spread the message of God's love. You don't have to be a doorbell-ringing-extroverted-leaflet-dropping-evangelist. Just show your love for others in how you treat them, and by doing so, they will see in you a reflection of Jesus. Remember Friendship Evangelism means to find them where **THEY** are and second to accept them **HOW** **THEY** are. Then make them your friend and share Jesus with them.

3. Growth. The third proof that our faith is real is that I have a strong desire to grow spiritually. This one's straightforward. I need to take time to read and study my Bible. This will of course be much easier to accomplish if we are here for Bible classes and worship services. It will also be much easier if we are sharing what we learn with others.

4. Fellowship. The fourth proof of our faith is being in community with other believers. Many people who are far from God, don't like the company of Christians. They often selectively choose not to associate with Christians. Sort of like this: A foursome is getting together for golf and, let's say, your name is mentioned as a team member. That's when the other guys roll their eyes and say something like, "*Oh, now this ought to be fun.*" Sad, but true. We are not always welcome.

As Christians, though, we have a common bond with each other that may not be present with non-believers. However, we should all try to communicate with non-believers, too. We can have fun. If Jesus can eat dinner with sinners, and love them, so can we. Jesus and His followers are under attack in our nation and around the world. It is not trendy to be a Christian and our faith is being tested at every turn. The best way to counter this is proactively be aggressive in living our faith.

5. Transformation. The fifth proof of faith is transformation. If we claim to be a Christian, people should see that we are different, there should be a change in us. It may not be overnight, but after a while we may find that people are referring to you as the “Old Mike” and the “New Mike”. There will be noticeable changes in our ability to be honest, in our integrity, and in how we treat others. *Those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone and a new life has begun.* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

I worked in an office on an Air Force Base many years ago. I tried to share Jesus with any of my co-workers that wanted to listen. I used lunch and breaks as evangelistic opportunities. I don't remember now how it came up, but my being a member of a Church of Christ was disclosed. The studies came to an abrupt halt and I ate lunch alone for a while. It seems that the person who preceded me in my job was a preacher with a local church of Christ. Unfortunately, he was fired for theft of government property. It took me months of careful living to overcome what this fella had supposedly done in just a moment of time. We must practice what we preach.

6. Authenticity. The sixth proof that our faith is authentic is in doing God's work. The book of Acts gives a good description of how life was for the early believers. Then, throughout the New Testament, it's very evident that at the center of their lives was Jesus and his mission for the world. We were all born into this life with a “me first” mindset. From the first time we snatched a toy away from a playmate to our need to be first in our everyday work lives.

We are constantly reinforcing this attitude. And unless there's an intervention of some kind, we can become nasty people to be around. The only intervention that can truly change a "me first" lifestyle is the love of God. After you've encountered his love and mercy, it's almost impossible to continue "being your own agenda." You'll find yourself asking God for guidance in most situations. You'll want to know what is important to God and how to be a part of it.

Let's use this simple list to see how we can improve our Christian life first. If we do that then our day to day life will improve also. The intervention of God in our life is the most important thing that can happen to any of us. It will change our life. And then we will find the satisfaction that comes from the one who saved us, by His incomparable act of love and sacrifice in dying while we were yet sinners.