

Who's next?



ORIGINAL STUDY GUIDE:
Use this tool to not only accelerate your own spiritual growth but also to make an impact in someone else's life! Take two; pass one on or start a small group within your community of friends by setting a weekly time and place to meet for a Bible study.

WEEK 4:
Act Like It

The...

room was filled with a predictable cross-section of teenage stereotypes. In one corner, the jocks and cheerleaders huddled in social superiority. Another corner was claimed by the skeptics and rebels. The front of the room was smattered with freaks, geeks, and nerds. But the young pastor seemed oblivious to the unspoken hierarchy before him as he poured out his heart. Finally, in one climactic moment, he looked out over his young audience, picked out one of the "good" kids, and asked a question that was destined to resonate in the consciousness of these students for years to come. *"Tom, do you really believe that Jesus is coming back soon?"*

Be Honest.

1. How often do you think about eternity? What role does the reality of eternity play in the way you live your life today?

Say What?

Our perception of tomorrow plays a huge role in the decisions we make today. The Apostle Peter understood this when he penned these words in 1 Peter 3:15: "...if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it." At the core of what it means to be a Christian is the hope of life after this life is over, a hope predicated neither on merit nor on happenstance. Peter and his fellow apostles were passionate about communicating what it truly means to be a follower of Jesus, conducting church meetings (Acts 15), commissioning missionaries, and writing letters to help better explain the mystery of this hope to the world! The Apostle James, Jesus' half-brother, penned one such letter, explaining how the hope of eternal life should impact our lives and the lives of those around us today.

Read James 2:14-24: [NLT]

14 What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? 15 Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, 16 and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? 17 So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. 18 Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds." 19 You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. 20 How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless? 21 Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. 23 And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. 24 So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

Say What?

2. According to James, what kind of faith is powerless to save people?

3. Who trembles in terror because of their belief in God?

4. What two things worked together to make Abraham righteous?

5. How does Scripture define the relationship between Abraham and God?

So What?

6. Paul wrote, "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it" (Ephesians 2:8-9). James wrote, "So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone" (James 2:24). How can both of them be right?

7. Abraham was called a friend of God because of his faith. Why do you think action-producing faith opens the door to greater intimacy with God?

8. What impact should the reality of eternity have on our faith?

9. What impact should action-producing faith have on the way we relate to others?

WEEK 4: Act Like It

Now What?

"Tom, do you really believe that Jesus is coming back soon?" That was the question the young pastor asked. Everyone perked up. This was unexpected. Tom seemed surprised, too, taken aback by the inquisition. "Yes, of course," Tom replied, slightly defensive. Everyone waited. Where was this going? What was the point? The young pastor looked at Tom, and with all the love of a father, all the fire of a coach, and all the admonition of a judge, spoke three words that changed everything: **"Act like it!"**

God is calling us to put legs to our faith! He's calling us to live what we say we believe! He's calling us to believe that hell is hot and heaven is real! And He's calling us to act like it!

T Transparency Time:

Sunday school answers are for sissies!

Be honest! We ALL have struggles. Honor your small group partners by sharing openly and honestly about yourself and by keeping everything that is shared by others in complete confidence.

Remember: "What's SAID in small group, STAYS in small group!"

Now What?

10. If someone were to guess what the most important thing in your life is based solely on your actions, what would they say?

11. What is the hardest thing about living what you believe?

12. What practical step will you take this week to put legs to your faith?

Further Reading:

Day 1:
James 1-2

Day 2:
James 3-5

Day 3:
Acts 15

Day 4:
Matthew 5

Day 5:
Ephesians 1-2

Day 6:
Ephesians 3-4

Day 7:
Ephesians 5-6

WEEK 4: Act Like It

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Notes:

2. James says that faith that isn't demonstrated through actions is dead and useless (vv. 14-17).
3. The demons tremble in terror because they believe in God but fail to obey Him (v. 19).
4. Abraham's faith and his actions worked together to make him right before God (vv. 21-22).
5. Scripture defines Abraham's relationship with God as a friendship (v. 23).
6. The writings of Paul and James are in harmony, despite the apparent contradiction. Paul insists that salvation can't be earned, but rather that it is the bi-product of God's grace fused with our faith (Ephesians 2:8). James explains the concept even more thoroughly, noting that only action-producing faith can lead to righteousness before God. Rather than discounting faith in the process, James simply elevates the importance of **genuine** faith, faith that leads to **life change!**
7. Jesus said, "Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them." (John 14:21 NLT) We may never fully understand how it works, but faithful obedience to God enables us to experience greater intimacy with Him!
8. Our perception of eternity, no matter how real or how abstract, plays a huge role in the decisions we make each day. The onus is on us to keep the reality of eternity in the forefront of our minds so that we *live out* our faith in practical, tangible ways each day!
9. James says that genuine faith is demonstrated when we identify with the needs of those around us and then do something about them (vv. 15-17). Jesus said, "...let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." (Matthew 5:16 NLT) Our faith-provoked "good deeds" will benefit the people in our lives, will bring praise to God, and will point others to Him!