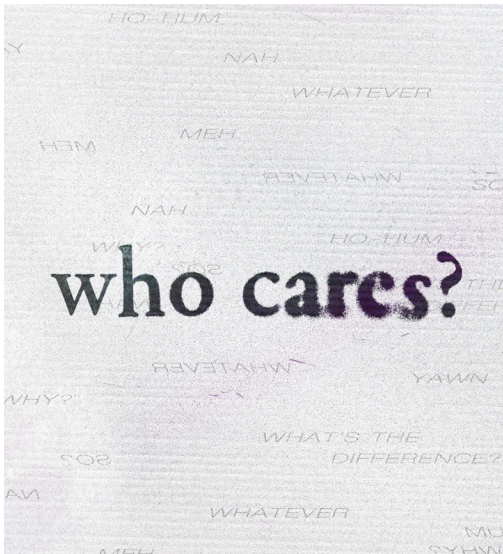




# Sermon Growth Guide

**October 27, 2024**

**Who Cares?**



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**Who Cares? – “Whatever”**

**James 2:24-26**

**Key Verse:** “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:17)

**Big Idea:** Everything we do should reflect our faith in Christ.

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## Foundations

The Reformation is often summarized by the slogan, “Scripture alone, Christ alone, Faith alone, Grace alone, to the glory of God alone.” While each phrase holds deep truth, it’s essential to recognize that our actions matter. In this passage, James addresses those who misuse salvation by grace as an excuse for unchanged lives or for resisting transformation through the Holy Spirit.

Scripture clearly shows that faith in Christ involves giving our entire lives, including our actions, to God. “Faith” is not just accepting facts, but trusting the one who truly saves and frees us.

C.S. Lewis said, “To trust Him means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice...But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because he has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you.” (Mere Christianity, Book III. Ch. 12.)

Trusting Christ means having a living faith—one that transforms our lives. Everything we do should reflect our faith in Christ.

## Understanding God’s Word

Read James 2:14-24 together.

How do Abraham and Rahab’s actions reflect their faith? (See Genesis 22:1-19 and Joshua 2:1-16.) Discuss the relationship between faith and works. What actions reflect becoming more like Christ? You might also read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) or Galatians 5:13-26 for more insights.

## Applying God’s Word

Are you currently doing anything that doesn’t reflect your faith in Christ? If the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take a step toward obedience, what would that step be?

Life Groups and Sunday Communities aim to foster accountability to God’s Word. Do you support each other in this? How could your group grow in accountability?

## Witnessing God’s Word

Showing God’s love and compassion to others is often the best witness we have.

Pray that God would reveal one thing you can do to show God’s love and compassion to someone this week.

Jesus told a story about a man who got mugged and beat up. Lying there helpless he saw a priest coming, but the priest just kept walking. Then another religious leader came along, but just kept walking. Then a Samaritan, a foreigner, not someone the man would usually hang out with, came and helped. Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.” Sometimes we just don’t want to get involved. We suffer disengagement apathy. We are tempted to be disengaged even when a problem presents itself to us. “God bless you,” we say, and then we go our way. People are disengaged with church, disengaged with civil discourse (they’ll maybe go to a rally or a protest to have an amped up experience, but then not get involved in real conversations, real civic engagement—they won’t even vote). We are disengaged at work. Articles say more than 50% of the workforce is “quiet quitting.” Staying in their positions but not engaged; doing the bare minimum not to get fired. The UK just pegged it at 90%. We are so disengaged, I’m not sure we would walk across the street to help ourselves, let alone a neighbor in need. Disengagement doesn’t protect you; it leaves you passionless.

Uche Anizor writes in his book *Overcoming Apathy* that life has to be more than pain avoidance and comfort seeking. We have to risk engagement, get involved. “Those who want to be self-protecting and self-preserving will find themselves feeling more and more dead inside. Abundant life comes from stepping into the fray rather than stepping out of it.” We can’t go on saying Who Cares? We need to risk engagement. My generation is called Generation X. We were famously the “Whatever” generation. Something about that word still resonates with me! I can remember my parents trying to teach me something or correct something or help with something and the conversation ended with me saying, “whatever.” If I didn’t say it out loud, I said it under my breath. That’s not the life God has for you. Don’t give in to a life of grey and colorless apathy.

James says faith gets involved. True faith risks engagement. Faith leads to action. Here’s a letter written by Jesus’ brother, James. It’s convicting, isn’t it? “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:14-17) Faith has to become action. Words have to become deeds. Our mission statement is Light and Life for the City. Not just shedding light, not just insight, but action, life, deeds, behaviors. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve said, “Hey, be well, man! Praying for ya!” not knowing what else to do. This is the passage that rings in my conscience. This is about groceries not good wishes; donuts not doctrines; lasagna not liturgy; a taco not a talk; a sandwich not a salutation. Get it? This is about a meal not a meeting. Sometimes the gospel shows up as groceries. A friend of mine named Humphrey Kanga runs a feeding and childcare ministry in Kenya. We were doing a monthly food distribution together about ten years ago. Families had walked for 50 miles. Humphrey said, “We start with the groceries, then we give the gospel. They hear the gospel better when their tummies are not rumbling.”

What about our fight with apathy? You need to live out your faith, try and test and use your faith, put faith into action to know its real, to feel it in a new way. James is not saying your works can save you, but that faith that saves is faith that works. John Calvin said, “It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone.” James is not saying you have to perform good works to be saved. What he is saying is that true faith changes a person into someone who risks engagement, who, if he or she determines to use their faith, a person who jumps in. We don’t earn our way into heaven by our behavior. Behavior

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follows belief. If you believe something, you will act on it. James is saying here that if you believe the gospel you will act out the gospel. "But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds." (James 2:18) You don't have one or the other, but both. Belief works. Faith that saves is faith that acts.

Following Jesus is not just about believing the right things. Faith is supposed to change you. It comes alive in you. Warren Wiersbe wrote, "Beware of a mere intellectual faith. No man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same any more than he can come into contact with a 220-volt wire and remain the same." It's not just about intellectual assent to a set of beliefs. The demons know the truth as well as we do. "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." (James 2:19) They know there is a God. They know Jesus is the Lord. They know there is a place of eternal judgment. They know all these things, and they even feel it. They shudder. We can have all our doctrine lined up and act on nothing, stay disengaged, to protect ourselves. Do you know what happens? The faith grows cold, the colors drain out. James says look at Abraham and Rahab. Abraham and Rahab. Two more different people you could not find. One the revered father of nations, the other a gentile woman who's only known occupation was "harlot." What do they have in common? They each acted on what they believed. They put their faith into action. "You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend." (James 2:22-23) Notice, it is not his salvation that is completed but his faith; his faith is realized by acting upon it. The same with Rahab. Faith comes to life when ideas become engagement.

Do you ever feel disengaged from your own life? David Brooks writes in *The Second Mountain*, "Centuries ago there was a common word for what these people are going through: acedia. This word is used much less frequently today, which is peculiar since the state it describes is so common. Acedia is the quieting of passion. It is a lack of care. It is living a life that doesn't arouse your strong passions and therefore instills a sluggishness of the soul, like an oven set on warm. The person living in acedia may have a job and a family, but he is not entirely grabbed by his own life. His heart is over there, but his life is over here." Acedia is what the ancients called apathy. More than just a feeling, or absence of feeling, acedia is the sin of not caring when something deserves your care; the sin of resisting the demands of love. Love for God; love for neighbor. I don't care. Whatever. No, that's not life. That's death. It's time to step up and put skin in the game. Faith that saves is faith that works. Don't give in to the temptation to say, "whatever, someone else will do it." I want to give you another whatever. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." (Ecclesiastes 9:10) "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord." (Colossians 3:23) Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your strength. Jump in. Engage. What difference do you want to make?

Together at First Pres we are giving to make a difference. We don't run a pledge drive. We teach that giving is faith in action, it is belief becoming behavior. Martin Luther said, "There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, mind, and the purse." We get baptized and hold our wallets out of the water. One way you know you are not stuck in a dead, merely intellectual faith is that it changes how you look at your finances. You are not disengaged. You give until you feel it. C. S. Lewis wrote, "I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.

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In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc, is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.” Giving should be something we feel, because when it is something we feel it becomes more real. It wakes us up from the slumber of comfort, pain-avoidant, listless, apathetic, whatever life. You might say, “Well, if I had a million dollars I would give more to the Lord.” But that’s not really true. The more you have the harder it is to feel giving in this pinch and prick way that wakes up your slumbering soul.

people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace. May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain to joy. And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in the world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor. Amen.”

Let’s not be indifferent as we make our commitments this year. Last year we set a budget for 2024 at \$8,162,525. (And 34 cents). That was planning for a 2.8% increase. We have not quite kept up with that increase in giving, so we are trying to plan a flat budget for 2025. Meanwhile, inflation. Meanwhile, housing costs. Meanwhile, air conditioners. More than half of our annual budget goes to salary and benefits for our staff. We are falling behind inflation in our salaries. The facilities need upkeep and care. And we continue to keep our commitments to our mission partners around the world and in our city as a first priority. Please consider prayerfully raising your pledge for next year. Apathy creeps in when we stay disengaged. James says faith that saves is faith that works. Comfort is not the goal. Step out in one way or another in faith, in a way that pinches, in a way that challenges, in a way that wakes you up.

I end with this prayer, a Franciscan Prayer for Discomfort: “MAY GOD BLESS YOU with discomfort, at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within your heart. May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of

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