



## ***FAITH AND ACTION STUDY BOOKLET***

**In preparation for the Asia West Pacific Section Gathering in Manila from 1-7 April 2011.**

**James 2: 14-17** *My brothers, what good is it for someone to say that he has faith if his actions do not prove it? Can that faith save him? Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat. What good is there in saying to them, "God Bless You! Keep warm and eat well!" – if you don't give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead.*

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## **Introduction to Study Booklet “Faith and Action” James 2: 14-17**

This booklet is intended for Friends everywhere, especially in the Asia West Pacific, in the lead up to the Section Gathering in Manila from 1-7 April 2011. Accordingly, Friends from each Yearly Meeting and Worshipping Group were invited to contribute a short reflective piece, with questions for discussion at each conclusion.

For each group that meets, we ask that you appoint a leader and a scribe for each session, and begin and end each period with worship or prayer. When you have finished these reflections, a summary of the notes can then be forwarded to the Secretary for collation and presentation to the Friends actually at the Gathering.

The Theme explores the perennial question on where does one put one's emphasis, on Faith (prayer, meditation, reflection etc) or Action (good works, human rights, aid, development etc)- or are they deeply related? Living our Faith", or "Faith and Action" inspired by James 2: 14-17, is a powerful message for Quakers today

This passage shows the two sides of the one coin, and we can explore what we mean by both.

**Faith** is described as belief in things unseen. It is a confidence and a trust in a God that none of us have seen, but who lives in our hearts. Friends have discovered through silent waiting that the Presence of God draws nearer, sometimes giving clarity, at other times warning, or encouraging a certain path or action to be taken.

**Action** is a lot less clear. Right action is one that springs from a heart truly centred in the living Christ. We can spend our lives in busyness, never stopping to wonder if actions are arising from our egos, from anxiety, or even springing from evil lusts or other ills.

Faith and Action are strong channels, through which the Holy Spirit brings us closer to God. Parker J. Palmer in "The Active Life"<sup>1</sup> cautions against allowing our action to become "reaction", blindly and anxiously carrying out activities, in a state of high tension. Action, he argues, needs to come from a source of who we are and what we have discerned we are meant to do.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Active Life*, Palmer, Jossey-Bass, 1990

Action comes from a place of exuberance and vitality, inner freedom. The opposite of Action is not Faith. Here we have the paradox of a both/and situation.

The story of Mary and Martha, Luke 10:42, where Jesus expresses a bias towards Mary, sitting at his feet, as opposed to her sister Martha who is immersed in mundane housework, gives more pause for thought.

Our Faith is a counterbalance in this busy life, where we need to be grounded, to spend time in prayer, study, reflection, in awe of the beauties of creation- to slow down and just allow ourselves to BE. When we have got these aspects into a healthy balance, our lives will be guided into serving God through works of justice, peace and love.

*Valerie Joy*, Executive Secretary AWPS

**FAITH IN PRACTICE**, *Bhaskar Sonkamble* General Conference of Friends in India.

The Epistle of James strongly emphasises that faith, if it does not have works, is dead being alone (2:17), and that a man is justified by works and not by faith only (2:24). For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also (2:26). Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (1:22).

We must not be among those who only listen to God's word, but must practice what we learn in our lives. Calling ourselves Quakers is not enough. What we do with our lives is what matters. We declare our faith through our actions. If there are no actions our faith is incomplete or weak.

The proof of life is mobility and James is speaking about the mobility of spiritual life, of showing our faith in action and deeds. In Christianity faith is always related to work; the two go together and cannot be separated from each other. Luther said "If you are saved only by faith then it is not faith".

Let us look at two examples of faith in action from the Bible. Daniel was put into the den of lions as a result of the conspiracy of those opposed to him. Before Daniel entered, King Darius said to him "Your God whom you serve continuously, He will deliver you". The conspirators were happy at the action taken against Daniel. But Darius went to his palace, spent the night fasting and could not sleep. He arose early and went in haste to the den of lions. In a lamenting voice he cried out "Daniel servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve continually been able to deliver you from the lions " ? The answer came in the affirmative. Here we see both faith and action.

Mark 5: 25-34 tells us about a woman who had suffered from bleeding for 12 years. She believed that if she touched the robe of Jesus she would be cured. With some difficulty because of the crowd around Jesus she managed to touch it and was cured because of her belief. And Jesus knew that some power had gone out from him. "Your faith has cured you", he told her.

We can't just petition God to solve every problem and leave it to Him. We must do our part. We must test our faith, like we test magnetism with a magnet. 'That of God in every man ' must be tested in practice.

We are God's fellow workers. We are God's field (1Cor. 3:9) and there must be a harvest as a result of our deeds. We must use the seed and strength given to us if we are to be faithful to God.

We are ambassadors of God. We must know the Bible and what God wants us to do. When he could sacrifice his son for us, we have a high value and must practice our faith. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples"(John 15:8). We are the branches. If we are in tune with the tree and the gardener, we will give fruit.

## **Questions**

1. Which is important, Faith or Action? Which will you put in first place?
2. In John 20:29 Jesus said "Thomas because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed ". Could you identify the Action in this statement?

**Are our Actions prompted by our Faith?  
Do We Have the Courage to Change?**

*David Johnson, Australia Yearly Meeting*

The first part of George Fox's renowned passage containing 'answering that of God in everyone' begins:

*"Bring all into the worship of God. Plough up the fallow ground ... and none are ploughed up but he who comes to the principle of God in him which he hath transgressed. Then he does service to God; then the planting and watering and the increase from God cometh. (QF&P, 1999, # 19.32; Nickalls, 1975, p.263)*

This is a very explicit statement. It says none progress until each of us faces the part of us which is contrary to God, faces it, allows it to be ploughed up, and then waits for the divine planting and watering.

The early Quakers were called changed men and women for good reason. They had allowed the Spirit to overhaul them completely. Those parts of themselves, those dear habits, those learned ways, those cherished opinions of themselves, that precious Self image – these were all discarded.

Early Friends were careful to maintain the means of earning a living so as not to be a burden to others. However they also placed careful limits on their activity so they were free to move

into whatever ministry God called them. John Woolman agreed with the Lord to trim his business interests, to live ‘more free from outward cumpers’, and so to follow what truth required of him. However it is not sufficient to read and understand his marvellous simplicity, and to be warmed by his spiritual sincerity. The spiritual journey is not so much about understanding, as about doing. We are not just to understand what Woolman did, but to do what Woolman did.

Is it sufficient to feel moral outrage at the actions of oppressive wealth and business, and compassion for those in trouble? The response of Jesus and of James and of the early Quakers is ‘No, not sufficient’. Those parts of our old Self – the comfort at home, the worry what others might think, the fear of uncertainty – these weeds have to be ploughed in, or pruned like the unproductive branches and thrown onto the fire.

This Friends, is a courageous task, and can only be undertaken with trust and faith and hope, and many tears. There is grief in leaving all this old self behind.

For those apprehensive about this step of giving away part of yourself, some of your established life and security, many of your habits, and perhaps even your present purpose– fear not.

*In thee O lord do I put my trust.*

Exercise: Lord show me the branches within me that you would prune.

**Faith VERSUS Good Works: The Premise Is Wrong:** *Boni Quirog*, Unprogrammed Friend, Bohol, Philippines

The way I look at it, the whole debate about Faith and Action is misplaced. It is based on a misunderstanding of the pertinent biblical passages which are made the subject of the debate.

For instance, those who argue among themselves regarding this topic are really arguing about *Faith versus Good Works*. I have heard debates about this many times, especially between the so-called Roman Catholic faith defenders and Evangelical ministers. The premise of the debate is wrong.

There is actually no debate about “faith VERSUS good works” because the message is really about “faith AND good works”. In fact, the message (as I understand it) is, both are two sides of the same coin.

This is also similar to the debate about Martha and Mary. There are those who also argue among themselves as to who is righteous, Martha or Mary. They let Martha represent social action, and Mary, contemplation. The truth of the matter is, we are both Marthas and Marys within ourselves.

There are times when we are predominantly “Marthaistic” and at other times we have to be “Maryistic”; that is to say, we need to do more social action or more contemplation according to the need of the hour. But really, we must do both. One without the other is inadequate. There should be no debate on this.

This brings me to my final point. There is also a gross misunderstanding of another important biblical passage related to this entire debate: “Man does not live by bread alone”. Those who tend to insist that faith is more important than good works, instead of emphasizing the importance of both, usually utilize this passage by saying that bread is not important, and miss the point altogether.

The message of the passage of course is that bread is important but bread alone is not sufficient. Do we need to be biblical scholars to understand this? Obviously not. We just have to look at ourselves. We have to eat, or die without eating. But if we do not nourish our souls spiritually, we also die. Let us

come together then and “break bread”...the material and the spiritual.

Ponder on this:

1. What do you usually eat everyday?
2. How do you nourish your spiritual Self each day?

### **Living our Faith, Nick Bagnall, Aotearoa NZ**

Probably the most significant difference that anybody, not involved with Quakers who are in the habit of meeting in silence, is just that. That we do meet in silence.

The experience that we get from it varies from person to person. To those of us who do so on a regular and frequent basis, it may be of much more effect than for those who only do so perhaps only once a month. It is also particularly useful if one can manage to also stay physically as still as possible during this time.

I used to work at Claridge House, a Quaker establishment that had two shared Quiet Times of 15 minutes each, every day, as well as an hour long meeting each Sunday. I found the time I spent there, although busy, to be made much more fruitful because of this routine. The time taken up by those Quiet Times was easily made up for by the improved effectiveness, in whatever I was doing for the rest of the day.

Likewise on many other occasions, I have found that a daily period of personal meditation, maybe two, of perhaps 15 or twenty minutes, can be a wonderful breathing space in a busy life. Whether it be time to think, contemplate, or simply to let the mind go completely quiet and rest, it is always refreshing reinvigorating and rewarding, often in unexpected ways.

It seems to me that meeting together in such silence, as Friends have been doing for over 350 years, is a practice which we should be sharing more with the rest of humanity. Meditation has been used for thousands of years, either individually or in

groups. Quakers added in the possibility, if lead by the spirit, to share any particularly deep insight in ministry. When done sparingly, this can bring an added depth to the experience. It all gets better with practice.

It has been shown that when a group (2 or 3 will do, but in this case, more seems to be better) do this with intention, their brain waves quieten more quickly.

It is rather like giving the brain it's own period of sleep while the body remains awake. It returns to normal when the silence is over.

Better still is to endeavour to retain the inner feeling of stillness and silence as one goes about the rest of the day.

So you have two questions to discuss:-

- 1) Could I incorporate more periods of sitting silently, into my own life, and would it perhaps be of benefit to me?
- 2) Could I introduce such a practice to other people, inviting them to join me, and would it perhaps be of benefit to them?

### **Reflection on James 2 14....*Topsy Evans*, Australia YM**

I am grateful to my Mother for her healthy skepticism about people who say a lot about their beliefs. So often, they could be seen to be talking to themselves in an effort to convince themselves that they really do have a whole of life experience of the Being many would call God.

For me the important thing is to live mindful of whether or not my actions bring me peace inside. If they don't, then I need to change what I am doing. If I see something which needs doing and it is within my capability to do it, then I find inner happiness by meeting that need. I regard this as faith in action. It doesn't need to be talked about or described.

Questions for consideration:

1. What experiences have shaped and directed my life?
2. Are there other actions I may consider that would deepen my thinking?

**“Living our Faith”,** *Paul Anderson*, Professor of Biblical and Quaker Studies, George Fox University

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” (James 2:14-17)

Friends have always understood *faith* and *action* to go hand in hand. One without the other is incomplete. Faith is not only to be believed; it is also to be *lived*, but how do we do that as Friends? With early Friends in their understanding of the Everlasting Gospel, we are called to be partners with God in addressing the human needs of those around us. This is our spiritual calling and service.

In finding a way forward as Friends, the context of the biblical text above points us forward. I invite you to sit down and read the entire book of James. It’s not very long—only five chapters. Take note of several things: First, the author invites us to find God’s wisdom in the midst of our trials and struggles; these produce strength of character and perseverance if we allow it. Second, James warns against showing favouritism to those who have means or influence. Third, we should discipline our language and not speak ill of one another, allowing our tongues to be instruments of praise and goodness. Fourth, God gives grace to the humble and opportunities to be humbled for the proud. It is within this context that James reminds us that faith without works is dead.

The larger context, however, extends beyond the letter from James, involving Paul’s letters to Galatians and Romans. I invite you also to read the book of Galatians. It’s not very long either—only six chapters. Some wonder if James was writing a

corrective to Paul; what do you think? Might the issue of faith versus works and works versus faith reflect a dialogue *within* the early church? More on that later! For now, note some highlights of Galatians: First, after declaring his calling to preach the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike, Paul describes how he confronted Peter to his face for not associating with new believers. Second, Paul argues that grace is received by faith rather than the works of the Law. Third, Paul emphasizes the unity we have in Christ—freeing us from all worldly divisions. Fourth, the fruit of the Spirit is the true measure of our faith, and against such there is no law.

Questions to consider:

1. How does the Everlasting Gospel release us from works of the Law in order to receive God's love and grace through faith?
2. How does the Everlasting Gospel stimulate our faith into action—becoming partners with God in transforming the world with God's love and our works?

**A Living Faith: A Reflection on James 2:14-17**, *Gerry Guiton*, Australia Yearly Meeting

OPPRESSED AT HOME and school, in their bleak environment, as well as by the poverty of mind, spirit and pocket that their social class had locked them into, these children carried many crosses.

I was supposed to teach 'religion'. So, rather than the out-of-touch 'churchianity' expected of me, I focused on the Kingdom of God (what I now call the Rule or Presence of Love) and in particular the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) where it is

written, ‘Let your light shine before everybody, that they may see your good works and give glory to God’ (Mt. 5:14). I wanted to make the Kingdom and Sermon real through the subjects I would teach and to work Sermon ethics into sport, playground and classroom conduct.

As the weeks went by I could see how the children were enjoying our activities and also—a real surprise this—how their violence, competitiveness and recriminations began to diminish, how they co-operated much more with each other. Our ‘religion time’ was having a big effect it seemed as they came to see Jesus as someone near to them, a reliable and loving parent or best friend, as a healing, peaceful and empowering presence. They saw how he died for Love and inspired people to do amazing acts of justice and peace, to make Love the Rule. Through him they came to know a different God—neither old nor judgmental but full of compassion and trust, a God who cared, who helped us free our inward Light to be partners in forging a unity and wholeness together.

In our increasingly joyous discoveries and responses lay the power and beauty of a faith that always reflects the things that are eternal, the things of God which, of their very nature, rise above time and place and speak to our condition. In setting us free this God gave us hope, encouragement and life-giving purpose. We learned from each other and I cherish their memory.

In my experience with the children mirrors my understanding of James’ Letter which struck hard for unity and co-operation within the primitive Christian communities. It bespoke a living rather than dead faith in which people’s ‘good works’ reflected their Inward Light just as today the same Light of Christ can propel *us* to bring justice, peace and compassion to others in need. Faith alone is never enough. This was certainly true for ‘James’ who depended more than any other Christian Testament author on the teaching of Jesus and the Sermon on

the Mount, that *doing* manifesto of the Kingdom. It was also true for the early Quakers who were inspired by James as they gave birth to their Testimonies of Truth, Equality, Simplicity and Peace.

Like the children, James reminds us what a transforming faith and good works can do to rescue us from our destructive egos and individualistic beliefs so that the Presence of Love, our common language of the Spirit, can continue to be spread throughout our fractured world.

Questions to consider:

1. What is faith? What is discipleship?
2. What is your own story of faithful action against injustice?
3. What 'good deed' would you like to do in the future?

## **REFLECTIONS ON JAMES 2:** *Anne Price*, Australia Yearly Meeting.

In the early 1980's, as a young enthusiastic evangelical Christian, I read Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. Sider challenges Christians to take Jesus' Sermon on the Mount seriously, to live out lives of social justice and peacemaking through their lifestyle choices, and through positive social action within their own communities.

For me, this was revolutionary thinking. It enthused me with a vision, of what it really meant to be a Christian. It also led me inevitably into conflict with my church and evangelical circles within which I had my spiritual identity.

I was always taught that the famous James quotation "faith without works is dead" meant that if one had faith in Jesus, in God, in the work of the Cross etc. that is, if you believed in

those things necessary for salvation, then the evidence of that faith would be seen in one's good works.

The emphasis was indeed always on "faith" – on "having the right beliefs". I remember hearing the good works of those of other faiths or of no particular faith, being devalued as evidence of people "trying to buy their way into heaven". However, our individualistic approach to faith (working on being personally "right with God") and the intensive Bible study we practiced, along with our feverish evangelical activities, gave little scope for reflecting on the desperate plight of the poor and marginalised people of the world, and on the forces that create their situation.

I realise with sadness that this kind of thinking, which separates faith and works, also separates people, thus sowing the seeds of needless conflict and even war.

Reading the James passage with fresh eyes, it seems to me that the writer is trying to explain to a Jewish audience how, in practice, faith and works are actually one. In our experience of God working in our lives, faith *is* surely about clothing and feeding the poor, not being blinded by the influence of money and power as well as actively living lives of justice for all. We cannot separate faith from the work of liberation.

Nor can we do this work as individuals only. James 2 carries a political message. It calls upon communities of faith to live justly, to attend to the real life needs of their fellow human beings. Opportunities abound in our homes, workplaces, in our communities and in the world at large to open our hands and hearts to others in need and to speak truth to the powers that oppress and devalue human lives.

What would the world look like if we all took this to heart, if we actually practiced Jesus' good news of liberation? Surely it is time we put aside the "beliefs" that divide and walk in the

faith that builds a world of love, truth and justice in the here and now.

### Questions to Ponder or Discuss

1. What actions of social justice and peacemaking do you see around you, in your homes, workplaces and communities?
2. To what extent do you see these actions supported and empowered, or opposed and devalued by prevailing forces in society? Do you see any opportunities to speak truth to these forces?

### **Living our Faith, Mamoru Hitomi, Japan Yearly Meeting**

James 2:17 says; “So with Faith, if it does not lead to action, it is in itself a lifeless thing”. In Quaker history there were many brilliant Friends who worked for the suffering or neglected and for peacemaking, etc. Nowadays there are so many urgent issues in the world. We need to work for that, but we also have a lot to do around us at same time. Big issues are not always only what we should do. We are all in different situations. Suppose that if anyone says that we will not be Quakers unless we join the action, some will hesitate with it. The same thing happened years ago. Quaker traditions should not be dogmas. Each one of us has our own way however it is big or small.

Our Friends Meeting is nearly a hundred years old, but present attendants on Sunday are only 8 to 20 including some attenders. Last year we started to read a Japanese edition of *Faith to Live By* written by Elfrida Vipont after meeting for worship once a month. We find the lively work of the Quakers who lived their faith in various ways. Their energetic testimonies encourage us a lot. It reminds me of many active overseas Friends who worked in Japan soon after the WWII. And now we often receive emails from various Quaker organizations working for the hard issues in the world.

We also have exciting lectures by the only emeritus professor in our meeting who lives far away. He lectures on his approach to Old and New Testaments once a month. I think his view on the Bible is largely common to Gerard Guiton's *The Revolutionary Politics of the Kingdom of God (Covenant of Love)*. He has continued his lectures for two years. I think this is his own way of Living his Faith.

I have once read an interesting article written by a British Friend in which I felt sympathy. She says she prefers to call her a Friend but not a Quaker. I don't clearly remember why, but I guess being a Friend becomes a pool to lead to action. I also feel 'Quaker' sounds like a bit more 'activist.'

Queries:

1. Could you tell us what you do or did to live in Faith?
2. What do you think we should concentrate our strength on now?

**Faithful Action, Janet Scott, Britain YM**

I first went to meeting for worship in the 1950s as a teenager with a friend from school. With my Methodist background I found the quiet worship strange but realised that I could worship this way if I chose to learn it. What happened at the end of the meeting made me realise that this was the place I was meant to be. The meeting was discussing how to help individual people in the camps for displaced people in Germany. We heard about the case of a woman who was earning her living by taking in laundry. If she had a washing machine she would be able to do more laundry and earn more money and make her way out of the camp. A Friend called Marty Bagnall (I wonder if she was related to Nick) stood up with a look on her face which I have come to recognise as of one who was listening to the inner voice. She said, 'I have a

washing machine. Would it be cheaper to send it than to buy one there?'

At the time washing machines were new and fairly rare – my mother had only just acquired one – and this willingness to give away a valued possession was something I had not met in a religious context before. I do not know what happened about the washing machine but I do know that Marty Bagnall convinced me that day that my place was to be with Quakers. Because I was young and within a few years left that meeting to go to university I never told Marty of the impact her offer had on me and my faith. But over the years I have come across other Quaker stories of faithful actions which have borne fruit even though the person who was faithful did not know of the effect. Perhaps you know the story of Stephen Grellet the eighteenth century Quaker missionary who by 'preaching to nobody' converted many men from a lumberjack camp in North America. I have sometimes myself been told of something which I said or did years earlier which helped another person come to faith or make sense of their life. What is the secret? I think it comes in listening to that inward voice and then in following the promptings of love and truth which flow from our turning to God. It is our faith - not in the sense of what we say we believe but in the sense of where we put our trust – which both impels us to faithful action and enables us to undertake it. God has a calling to faithful action for each of us. Are we listening?

1. Do you have an experience to share of someone else's faithful action which made a difference to you?
2. How do you recognise God's call to you? How do you put it into action?

**FAITH IN ACTION** - *Dayal Gour*, General Conference of Friends in India

Faith and works are as necessary to our spiritual life as Christians as soul and body are to our life as Men; for faith is the soul of religion, and works are the body (Colton).

Faith is to believe, on the word of God, what we do not see, and its reward is to see and enjoy what we believe (Augustine).

Quakerism is not just a set of beliefs for a statement of faith; it is a practical, ethical and functional approach to life. It is a religious faith to be lived out and not just to suggest that Friends do not regard faith commitment as primary and a pre-requisite to action.

The inward Journey of faith can never be separated from the outward journey of practice. Friends believe the two are integral and indispensable to each other.

St. Paul says, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you."

There is a blood relationship between God and Man. God is the source of our beings, close to our hearts, in whom we live, move and have our beings.

Be ye therefore perfect even as your heavenly father is perfect. It is God who works in you; both to will and to do his good pleasure.

The vital thing for us is not to hold the creed but to enter into the experience out of which it was developed.

John says; "If a man says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar." Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin because His seed abideth in him and he can not sin.

**God's elect is by Faith, which gives victory and access to God**

Faith is the gift of God and is held in a pure conscience. Put on therefore the shield of faith. Examples are of Abraham who forsook his father's house and native country. Moses conquered all the magicians, comprehended all the sorcerers, soothsayers and Pharaoh's religion and their worship. Enoch....was translated, he pleased God.

Noah built the Ark. Elijah was taken up to heaven. And so, do as Christ did. Faith by which we have access to God and know our election, pleases God, translated from death to life, from darkness to light, power of the Satan into the power of God, corruption to incorruption, mortal to immortal, natural to spiritual. So by this faith you come to know the partition wall broken down that has been between you and God. Jesus, who is the first and the last, to be both the author and finisher of our faith says, "Faith saves and makes whole",

In faith be joyful, and just live by it .....

Questions to consider

1. What does it mean for you to walk in the faith? Do you agree that action is the fruits of our faith?
2. What is your attitude to creeds, are you prepared to state your personal creed? Do you agree that our faith is permanent or changing from time to time as words change their meaning and new light is given?