

# I AM THIRD

## Life Group Leaders Guide

### Directions

This packet contains the background information, series information, and weekly curriculum you will need to lead a life group during our *I Am Third* series. Everything on this page is to help you stay connected to the series as a whole. Behind this page is the individual curriculum to help you point people to Jesus. The *Purpose and Move* sections of the curriculum are for the leader to read or paraphrase to the group. The *Notes and Commentary* section is for the leader to get background information and go deeper into the passages before leading the life group. The curriculum was designed with your freedom in mind. Read through the curriculum and decide what will work best for your group. SOAP the passages with the group, use only certain questions, write your own questions, or use the curriculum verbatim. As the leader, you know what will point your people to Jesus.

### Series Overview

The Bible teaches that God is first, we must put others second, which means we must be willing to take third place. The idea of purposefully taking third does not seem like an effective technique for getting ahead which is probably why it is not seen commonly in our culture. The good news is that the bible promises that when we assume third we can truly be great, make an incredible impact, and help others find Jesus! In this series we will be studying the importance of serving by purposefully assuming third and how it is an integral part of following Jesus. Our hope is that all people at The Point will pursue greatness the way Jesus defined it, by being third.

### Life Group Overview

During the *I Am Third* series our life group curriculum will generally cover the same topic that was covered from stage but using a different passage or set of passages. Each curriculum will begin with an unpacking of the previous Sunday's service to help the leader open up the topic for the study and also see how people responded to the Sunday teaching.

### *I Am Third* Series Schedule

Week	Sermon Date	Topic of sermon	Topic of life group
Week 1	3/11	Great through serving - Matthew 20:20-28	Great through serving - Joshua 2:1-21
Week 2	3/18	Give God your lunch - John 6:1-15	Living Faith - James 2:14-26
Week 3	3/25	Roof Removal - Mark 2:1-12 & Luke 5:17-26	Barrier removal - 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

## The Point Church Life Group Curriculum

# **I Am Third - Week 2 - Living Faith**

## Purpose of Study

This Sunday we saw that God can do more with our availability than what our resources and talent suggest. There was a crowd that needed to be fed and a miracle occurred because one young boy was willing to give up his small lunch. Part of being third is serving with what we have, whenever it is needed. In this study, we will side step serving in general to discuss how our faith and our works intersect. In Christian circles, it can become easy to think of faith as an intrinsic, personal ideology. What we will uncover in this study is that faith can only be possible if it has complementary works (including acts of love and service). Faith without the works is dead.

## Flow of Study

**Icebreaker:** Many people say “actions speak louder than words.” Do you find this true in your own life?

**Move #1:** Since the sermon series and life groups are covering similar topics, it might be a good idea (both for content and time) to begin the discussion with some unpacking questions from this Sunday’s sermon.

1. Did anything stand out to you from the message this weekend?
2. Is there anything from the message this weekend that you want to apply?
3. This weekend we studied John 6. Let’s go back and read a small piece of the passage (John 6:5-9. Posted below) and apply it to our lives to open up tonight.

### Read John 6:5-9 (NIV)

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” <sup>6</sup> He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

<sup>7</sup> Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

<sup>8</sup> Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, <sup>9</sup> “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

4. Look at the response of Philip and Andrew to the problem. What is different about the two responses?
5. In the passage, Philip, Andrew, and the young boy are all presented with the same problem. The difference is how they respond to it. Imagine yourself in this situation, which one of the characters do you think you would most resemble? Why?

**Move #2:** In the book of James, James gives clear insight into a common topic surrounding good works. He proves through this passage that faith is proved by works. Let’s spend some time working through this passage

and then we will consider what that means for our lives at The Point. In the first section he will introduce the question and describe what dead faith looks like. This is something all Christians should remain mindful of.

### Read James 2:14-17 (NIV)

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> 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? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

1. What stands out to you from this passage?
2. James makes a clear and bold statement, faith without actions is a dead faith. What do you think the phrase “dead faith” means? What would a person with “dead faith” look like?
  - a. **Possible Answer:** “People with dead faith substitute words for deeds. They know the correct vocabulary for prayer and testimony, and can even quote the right verses from the bible, but their walk does not measure up to their talk. They think that their words are as good as works, and they are wrong.” (from *Be Mature: Growing Up In Christ* by Warren Wiersbe)
  - b. **Note to the leader:** Feel free to use **Titus 1:16** (pasted below) as a good supplemental verse for this idea of dead faith. This verse is about people in their community that has a dead faith.

<sup>16</sup> They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.

3. James answers Question #2 for us. He gives us a problem (a poor person in need) and a response from a person who has dead faith. What does this hypothetical example teach us about dead faith?
4. James could have easily written verses 15-16 to say “imagine a needy person is among you and you do not meet the need” but instead he gives possible verbal response to this hypothetical person. Why do you think he does this? Do you think speaking these empty religious phrases to people in need is a common issue for Christians?
5. Imagine being the needy person mentioned in verse 15. How would you feel if you had real needs and all you received from your brother/sister is *go in peace; keep warm and well fed*?
6. Reread verses 15-16. Would you still come to our church if this is how we handled meeting the physical needs of our community?
7. Now that we have a good idea of dead faith, let’s go backwards to verse 14 and look at James question. Can a person who has dead faith be saved?
  - a. **Possible answer:** “The answer is no! Any declaration of faith that does not result in a changed life and good works is a false declaration...The great theologian John Calvin wrote *It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone...*True saving faith can never be by itself: It always brings life, and life produces good works. (from *Be Mature: Growing Up In Christ* by Warren Wiersbe)
8. James will mention the phrase “faith without works is dead” three times (v. 17, 20, and 26) in a short passage. What do you think he is trying to show about a strictly intellectual or information based faith that does not result in works?

- a. **Possible answer:** James is showing that it is a real, even common, possibility for someone to have an intellectual knowledge of the story of Jesus without a real saving faith. It is something for all Christians to be seriously mindful of.
9. James doesn't mention it in these verses, but what do you think a "living faith" would look like?
- a. **Note to the leader:** Feel free to use **1 John 3:17-18** (pasted below) which describes living faith and/or the story of the good Samaritan (**Luke 10:25-37** → not pasted below because of length) which shows two religious people who didn't stop to assist a dying man as supplemental texts to distinguish living from dead faith.
  - b. **Note to the leader:** We will be addressing the topic of "living faith" at the end of the study so feel free to omit this question to save time.

<sup>17</sup> If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? <sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

**Move #3:** James says that faith and works go together. Before someone could respond to his idea, he presents a counter argument that someone could respond to him with and answers it. He also will bring in a 2nd type of faith (or another example of dead faith) which is demonic faith. Let's read that next and try to figure out what he is getting at.

### Read James 2:18-19 (NIV)

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

1. Reread verse 19. What point do you think James is trying to make to the reader?
  - a. **Possible answer:** James is showing that even demons have faith. They are not atheists or agnostics. They know who Jesus is. He is saying someone with dead faith has as much faith as a demon...which is obviously a pretty harsh, but true, statement.
2. Notice how James doesn't just say the demons believe. He says they believe and shudder. Why is that significant?
  - a. **Possible answer:** Even the demonic forces have an intellectual and emotional response to Jesus. Faith that is characterized by having only an intellectual and emotional response could very easily not be a living faith.
3. James is clear that faith and works go together. How would someone get in the habit of separating those two things?

**Move #4:** James will now continue his point but do so by proving that faith and works go together. James will now introduce what we talked about in Question 9 of Move 2...living faith. James was writing to a group of people who had a strong Jewish background so he will prove his argument by reminding them of some famous Old Testament characters that they would be well aware of. Old Testament characters who did not have a dead faith but instead a dynamic one. **One of these characters, Rahab, we talked about last week in life group so, for the sake of time, we will not cover her story.**

## Read James 2:20-26 (NIV)

<sup>20</sup> You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

<sup>25</sup> In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? <sup>26</sup> As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

1. What stands out to you from this passage?
2. Although it is not mentioned directly, James is illustrating with Old Testament stories what living faith looks like. By reading this passage, what would a person with living faith look like?
3. James purposefully uses two VERY different Old Testament characters. Abraham was a Jew, Rahab a gentile. Abraham a male. Rahab a female. Abraham was esteemed and godly. Rahab was a sinner and prostitute. What do you think James is trying to show by using such different characters?
4. Abraham’s salvation experience is recorded in Genesis 15. God gives him a promise and Abraham believes the Lord and at that point it says “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.” What does that tell us about salvation?
  - a. **Possible answer:** We are not saved by our works. We are saved only by God and him calling us righteous based on Christ’s perfect life, death, and resurrection.
5. James doesn’t just mention Abraham’s salvation experience, he also mentions another story in Genesis 22 that happened many years after his conversion. He references Abraham offering up his son as a sacrifice. How does James mentioning these two stories from Abraham’s life give a perfect example of living faith?
  - a. **Possible answer:** Works are not what Abraham completed for salvation. He demonstrated his faith by his works. Abraham’s obedience with Isaac proved that he was saved, his obedience did not actually save him; that happened years earlier in Genesis 15. To quote James, Abraham’s faith was made complete by his works (v. 22).

**Move #5:** Let’s close out our time by making this passage a little more personal.

1. Throughout this passage it was clear that James wanted the reader to know that there is such thing as a dead faith and we should examine ourselves to ensure that we possess a saving (living) faith. How would one go about examining their own faith to see if it is dead or living?
  - a. **Note to the leader:** Feel free to use **Psalm 139:23-24** (pasted below) as a great prayer for examining our own lives.

<sup>23</sup> Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. <sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

2. What are “good works” that you would expect a person with a living faith to complete?
3. At each of our churches it takes roughly 40 volunteers to run each of our services. We have churches that average 7x that number of people on any given Sunday. Yet, every single one of our churches is understaffed with volunteers. The truth is we don’t need more people...we need more people choosing third. Why do you think there is such a large disconnect between attending church and serving at church? In what ways does that relate to our study of James 2?
4. Imagine if every person at your church worked out their faith through serving, how would this change serving for everyone?
5. Besides making yourself third and helping our church thrive, what are the benefits of serving?

**Next Steps:** The following are things you could challenge your members to do in order to take what you studied in this curriculum farther.

1. Challenge people to help out their church by “erasing the red” on Sunday morning.
2. The following is a personal inventory a person could complete to examine their lives. These questions could illuminate if a person has a living or dead faith. This exercise was adapted from *Be Mature: Growing Up In Christ* by Warren Wiersbe.
  - a. Was there a time when I honestly realized I was a sinner and admitted this to myself and God?
  - b. Was there a time when my heart stirred me to flee from the wrath to come? Have I ever seriously been alarmed over my sins?
  - c. Do I truly understand the gospel, that Christ died for my sins and arose again? Do I understand and confess that I cannot save myself?
  - d. Did I seriously repent of my sins and turn from them? Or do I secretly love sin and want to enjoy it?
  - e. Have I trusted in Christ and Christ alone for my salvation? Do I enjoy a living relationship with Him through the Word and in the Spirit?
  - f. Has there been a change in my life? Do I maintain good works, or are my works occasional and weak? Do I seek to grow in the things of the Lord? Can others tell that I have been with Jesus?
  - g. Do I have a desire to share Christ with others? Or am I ashamed of Him?
  - h. Do I enjoy the fellowship of God’s people? Is worship a delight to me?
  - i. Am I ready for the Lord’s return? Or will I be ashamed when he comes for me?

**Prayer:** End your study with a time of prayer where people can share prayer requests and be prayed for before they leave. If possible, please steer some prayer towards what your group talked about during this study.

## Notes and Commentary

The following are pieces of commentary, facts, and links based on the passages of this study in order. Use them to help supplement your group time or for your personal preparation.

### James 2:14-26

- Many of the ideas in this study could be traced back to the book *Be Mature: Growing Up In Christ* by Warren Wiersbe.

- **On verse 17:** James goes on to say that faith without deeds is dead (nekra). By this he means, of course, that such a faith fails to accomplish the aim of true faith. That kind of faith may have a type of power, but it is not the power proper to faith. As Ropes notes, the contrast is not so much between faith and deeds (although this stands in the background) but between dead, useless faith and living faith. Faith alone without works is as dead as a body without breath. Deeds are not something extra to be added to faith; they are a necessary constituent part of faith. Without deeds faith is not really true faith—it is only a shadow, a shade, an impostor of true faith. (**Nystrom**)
- **On verse 17:** Indeed, such a faith is less than worthless; it is repulsive. James pulls no punches here: this faith devoid of deeds is not just sick or in danger of dying; is it dead, a corpse (an evaluation repeated in 2:26). Religious Jews, for whom contact with a dead body imparted ceremonial pollution would have regarded such an image as especially repugnant, but dead bodies are repulsive to Gentiles as well. (**McCartney**)
- **On using Rahab as an example:** This example is chosen because the church has refused to show hospitality to those whose outward appearance indicated that they had no ability to benefit the church. Yet both Abraham and Rahab showed hospitality to those whose outward appearance mirrored the poor in the church. (**Nystrom**)
- **On verse 26:** For James “deeds” are not the “deeds of the law,” but are those deeds of Christian love that fulfill the royal law. A word of encouragement when more is plainly needed is not Christian love. Action is the key, such as visiting widows and orphans (1:27) or standing against any show of favoritism. For James, “deeds” are the acts of charity that flow from a life lived in concert with God, for God is a God preeminently of mercy. Recalling 2:13, James says that any other “faith” will result in not mercy but judgment. That this is the correct interpretation is sealed by the statement of Paul in Galatians 5:6, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” (**Nystrom**)
- **On verse a christian and their deeds:** Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers an interesting view on the issue. In his book The Cost of Discipleship, this modern martyr draws a distinction between “cheap grace” and “costly grace.” “Cheap grace” is a type of faith that does not necessarily lead to actions, because it does not demand a changed heart. “Cheap grace,” he says, means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian conception of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins.... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline.... **Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.** In contrast to cheap grace, Bonhoeffer defines “costly grace” as “the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble.... Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.” Bonhoeffer makes the point that “cheap grace” convinces the sinner that only those who believe can obey, and thus the sinner is able to engage in the self-delusion of absolution. Since they do not believe, they cannot obey. This, Bonhoeffer claims, is one of the sadly twisted results of cheap grace. Christians must remember and live by both sides of the proposition, **“Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.”** When Jesus called his disciples, it meant that faith “can no longer mean sitting still and waiting—they must rise and follow him. The call frees them from all earthly ties, and binds them to Jesus Christ alone. They must burn their boats and

plunge into absolute insecurity in order to learn the demand and the gift of Christ.” Obedience both precedes faith and is the consequence of faith. (**Nystrom**)