

Back to Basics
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I picked up a basketball after years of not having taken a shot. (As an aside it is amazing how fast “a few days” can turn into “a few years”!) Anyway, I took a few shots and hit everything! That is, I hit the backboard, hit the rim, hit air, over and over again. I couldn’t make a basket to save my life.

I let it get to me. I got frustrated and angry. What was happening?!? Why can’t I make a simple basketball shot?

I stopped to think for a minute. That helped. I realized it had been a long time since I had practiced shooting, and I had started with the most difficult shots in basketball: three-pointers. I decided I should get back to basics. I took a few layups, then short shots, then free throws. I wasn’t perfect, but I slowly got my shot back.

I’m curious: how long you have been “out of the game.” When was the last time you prayed, read scripture, participated in a Bible study, tithed a full tithe, attended worship weekly, or invested in the spiritual growth of another person far from Jesus?

It is amazing how the day-to-day struggles in life can take up our time and energy, and leave little left for spiritual practices. James is a clearly written book that has as its central premise: “Faith without works is dead.” This is roughly equivalent to saying my basketball shot, without practice, is dead!

In my 20 years of ministry, the number of people who have told me their faith life is dry or stale or struggling have been immense. Do you know what all of them had in common? Every single one of them had stopped reading scripture and stopped participating in Bible-based conversations with fellow believers. The saddest part for me is that these were often strong leaders at Cross or other congregations. Over the years my faith life has struggled. The same symptoms were true. Trying to shoot three-pointers without practicing the basics leads to ineffectiveness.

Good Works are NOT a requirement for faith, or a sign to prove your salvation. Good Works ARE a faithful response to the Gospel in your life, and allow us to keep strengthening that faith. As we put our faith into action, it grows and refines, strengthens and shines! It becomes attractive to others and a blessing in our lives.

James is 108 verses long. Half of those verses call us back to the basics of the faith. Putting our faith into action through the word, prayer, giving, weekly worship, serving, speaking, and humility. James calls us to put our faith into action in many ways and in all different types and walks of life; not to do them all at once, but to start with the basics and keep practicing.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”
James 4:7