

QUARTER AT A GLANCE

by Douglas Redford

MANY COMMON expressions consist of noun pairs that seem to go together naturally. Think of *salt and pepper*, *cause and effect*, and *macaroni and cheese*. In the Bible, *faith and works* form just such a pair. The lessons for this quarter emphasize how important this combination is for any follower of the Lord. Faith and works go hand in hand in both Old and New Testaments.

Committed Faith

Within the first unit of study is the Christmas story ([lesson 4](#)). There we consider anew the account of the wise men, whose faith prompted them to leave home and follow a star to a distant land. Faith in action is also evident in the healing of a man who couldn't walk ([lesson 1](#)), in the sending forth of Barnabas and Saul on the first missionary journey ([lesson 2](#)), and in the devotion of those same two men in proclaiming the gospel in spite of hardship ([lesson 3](#)).

The final lesson of the unit challenges Christians to “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” ([Ephesians 4:3](#)). Only in an atmosphere of unity can faith result in the action that the head of the church desires.

Courageous Faith

The four lessons of the second unit, all from the book of Daniel, depict bold exercise of faith in the one true God while in a culture hostile to that faith. Whether the issue was objecting to certain food ([lesson 6](#)) or refusing to bow down to an idol ([lesson 7](#)), the steadfast faith demonstrated by Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is timeless, relevant for Christians of every place and century. Since our real home is in Heaven, we too are in exile until we arrive there ([Philippians 3:20](#); [1 Peter 1:1](#); [2:11](#)).

While in exile, we pray. And [lesson 8](#) provides something of a model in that regard. Disciplined, earnest prayer is foundational to a faith that works. Daniel's confession of sin and plea for mercy speak powerfully to our own situation of exile.

Lesson 9 concludes the unit by examining a rather mysterious vision experienced by Daniel. While some of the vision's details may spark questions, the message is plain: Daniel was to draw strength and hope from believing that God remained in control. So must we.

Consistent Faith

The final unit of studies takes us back to the New Testament. [Lessons 10](#) and [11](#) are drawn from the especially convicting book of James. This book is small but mighty, an observation that James makes regarding the tongue. The studies from James also call attention to the close link between faith and faithfulness. The author's illustrations undergird his affirmation that "faith without deeds is dead" ([James 2:26](#)). This affirmation also involves a study in contrasts between Abraham (father of the Israelite nation) and Rahab (the prostitute from Jericho).

Also included is the example of Dorcas, who was renowned for her acts of selfless service ([lesson 12](#)). The exhortation of Paul to fight the good fight of faith ([lesson 13](#)) is pointed at one particular church leader (Timothy), but it also has something to say to all Christians. Cultural animosity has the potential of silencing the church into inaction, but followers of Jesus must resolve to put their faith *in action*. As we affirm that we are justified by faith and not by works ([Galatians 2:16](#)), we also acknowledge in the same breath that a faith that does not result in deeds is a dead faith ([James 2:26](#)). So it was and is!

Only in an atmosphere of unity can faith result in the action that the head of the church desires.