

Playing Favorites

James 2:1-13



Preparation: *Pray before people arrive. Ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit in your conversation. Read the scripture for today, and study Stulac pg. 87-106. Circle or highlight the discussion prompts from this study guide that seem to fit your group best.*

Beginning the group study: Pray for the eyes to view everyone as God views them.

Read James 2:1-13

- What things stand out to you in the text from James?

From Stulac (pg. 87-89) printed here:

"I remember my son asking, 'Why do you let him do that when you don't allow me to do this?' It is one of the more humbling experiences of parenthood to be caught in an inconsistent treatment of one's children. They are so quick to notice the injustice! And many adults are still wounded by the feeling that they were (or still are) on the short end of their parents' favoritism. Our sensitivity to partiality is an evidence of our desire for justice to be real. It is no small matter to us.

Nor is it a small matter to God. Through Moses he charged the people of Israel to believe and to remember his divine purity on this issue: 'For the Lord your God is God of all gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes' (Deut 10:17). That is why the oppressed could trust him, for it follows immediately that he 'defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving food and clothing' (Deut 10:18).

The persistent, inescapable principle of being related to God as his people is that his character and ways are binding upon us as well. We are to be holy as he is holy. So God equally charged the people of Israel to care for the fatherless and the widow and the alien and to appoint judges who would 'judge the people fairly' and 'not pervert justice...show partiality...[or] accept a bribe' (Deut 16:18-19). Partiality is *an* issue for James because God's righteousness is *the* issue for James. God does not show partiality; therefore we must not show partiality...James says *Don't show favoritism* because that would be an instance of 'being polluted by the world.'

We will not grasp accurately the thrust of James's message if we fail to see that the continuing, underlying issue on his mind is to encourage the integrity of faith in the lives of his readers...

We can follow James's teaching on favoritism toward the rich in 2:1-13 in terms of two arguments related to faith. First, favoritism contradicts faith (2:1-7). Second, favoritism breaks the law that people of faith follow (2:8-13)."¹

¹ Stulac, George M. 2010. *James*. IVP Academic.

Getting started:

- Where have you seen favoritism this week?
- Where are you tempted to play favorites?

The structure of this passage implies a contradiction between faith and favoritism: “Do not hold faith in Christ with partiality toward persons.” This is a common problem for us; a prevalent form of “being polluted by the world.”

- This consistent love does not regard income bracket; it knows no race or nationality; it isn’t restricted by time (nor appearance, attractiveness, dress, abilities, or personality). Consistent love like this points to Christ. Share laments about how rarely this consistent love is experienced; or share an experience of receiving consistent love.

This passage calls us to consistent love, not just polite ushering people to their seats in church. People of low income are to be fully welcomed into the life of the church. People without great wealth are as worthy of our discipling and pastoral care and love as the person who has the means to rescue the church from its budget crisis.

- Talk about what “consistent love” from a community of believers might look like. What are some practical ideas?

Favoritism breaks the law that people of faith follow. This passage about breaking the law does not include the word *faith*, but the central violation of the law on James’s mind is still the sin of favoritism. If you practice favoritism instead of merciful love, you are denying the very foundation of our faith – which is belief in God’s mercy through Jesus.

- Discuss how racism and other forms of favoritism are self-serving and pollute the world.
- How might “loving your neighbor” make a difference in group projects, dorm life, work, or family relationships?
- Consider the parallels between James 2 and Matthew 7. See Stulac, page 92 for a careful study.
- Talk about how Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection are against favoritism.

Hopefully talking about subtle favoritism and obvious favoritism has helped to identify how we encounter this issue on a daily basis. It will be important to continue to identify favoritism after today, and do more than talk about it. Decide how you will fight favoritism in your own life, and how you can help each other.

What is one thing that your group members can do this week to challenge favoritism?