

# 2

## Faith on Display in Your Relationships

WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN SOMEONE BEING TREATED UNFAIRLY?

### The POINT >

Don't play favorites.

### > JAMES 2:1-13

<sup>1</sup>My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>For if someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor person dressed in filthy clothes also comes in, <sup>3</sup>if you look with favor on the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," <sup>4</sup>haven't you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

<sup>5</sup>Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Didn't God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup>Yet you have dishonored the poor. Don't the rich oppress you and drag you into court? <sup>7</sup>Don't they blaspheme the good name that was invoked over you?

<sup>8</sup>Indeed, if you fulfill the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. <sup>9</sup>If, however, you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup>For whoever keeps the entire law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all. <sup>11</sup>For he who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. So if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you are a lawbreaker.

<sup>12</sup>Speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom. <sup>13</sup>For judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.



# FOR LEADERS (15 minutes)

THE POINT // DON'T PLAY FAVORITES.

## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // COMMUNITY & WORLD

God values all people—born and unborn, young and old, male and female, all ethnicities, those of opposing faiths—and calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost across the street and around the world through prayer, giving resources, loving actions, and sharing the gospel.

## Message to Leaders

All people are created in God's image and have immeasurable value. Further, God sent Jesus to pay the price for our sins because of His love for all people. We must never discriminate, and further, must work diligently to show the love of Christ and share the gospel with all people so that they would know God's blessings.

## > Engage Option 1

Give each student a card with a list of favorites for them to fill in (e.g. favorite soda, favorite food, favorite activity). Students then have three minutes to find a person who shares one of their favorites. At the end of three minutes, see who can find the most matches. Say, **"Even though we're different, we can still be united and work together for God's kingdom."**

## > Engage Option 2

Place charts around the room with rankings of favorite foods, sports, music, and so on. Say, **"We all have unique perspectives and characteristics, but we are all valuable to God and we should see that same value in others."**

## > Engage Option 3

Search the internet for "Don't Put People in Boxes." Play the video as you begin the session. Say, **"Despite all of our differences, all people are made in the image of God and we should treat them with love."**

**NOTE:** Always make sure you preview any video clip you show students and ensure it is appropriate for your church and ministry.

## LEADER PACK ELEMENTS

If you have the optional Leader Pack, consider the following:

**ITEM 2:** Engage students in the session and introduce the main idea by displaying the **No Favoritism Poster**.



# THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

THE POINT // DON'T PLAY FAVORITES.



## THE SETTING

Having laid the groundwork for practicing true religion (James 1), James addressed the first aspect of the pure faith in the Lord Jesus. He clearly wanted his readers to grasp that the Christian life does not consist only of religious practices and rituals. For James, the believer's love for Jesus translates into love for neighbors in real ways. He wrote about faith because he wanted readers to display true faith as an expression of their love for God and others.

### FACT:

In the US, we still live in a society that is highly segregated. Thirteen percent of white students attend schools where the majority are students of color, but almost seventy percent of black students attend schools where the majority of students are white.<sup>2</sup>

Stephen A. Smith, a sports commentator, recently came under fire for his insensitive remarks about Shohei Ohtani, a designated hitter and pitcher with the Los Angeles Angels. People were outraged because Smith's comments had nothing to do with baseball, but with Ohtani's being Japanese. In response to the outcry, Stephen did not make excuses. Instead, he said, "I was wrong, period."

As a Black man, Smith has been on the other side of racism, and he's an outspoken critic of racist thought and behavior. However, this time, he was the offending party. Smith said that his words were inexcusable, and acknowledged that he "contributed to the ongoing hate against the Asian and Asian American community."<sup>1</sup>

Here's the thing: We live in a culture that has taken great strides in regard to issues of racism and equality. However, Smith is not alone, and racism and prejudice are far more common than they should be among those who agree that all people are created equal. Whether the distinctions we make are racial, socio-economic, religious, or political, we often treat people differently because they are different from us. James pointed to a better way. He taught that we should treat everyone equally.



# IMPART (30 minutes)

THE POINT // DON'T PLAY FAVORITES.

## JAMES 2:1-4

*My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor person dressed in filthy clothes also comes in, if you look with favor on the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," haven't you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?* **JAMES 2:1-4**

It's natural to be drawn to people who we perceive as similar to us—similar interests, similar age, similar level of attractiveness, and more. Within balance, this is appropriate and healthy. However, it is not uncommon for people to give preferential treatment to others based on wealth or ethnicity. And, let's be clear, this is never appropriate!

If our faith is central to our lives, then we will never discriminate based on outward appearances or any other reason. Racism and every other kind of discrimination are sinful. When we might be tempted to show favoritism, we need to cling tightly to our faith, letting it drive the ways we relate to others. Living without showing favoritism requires that we continually look to God, who loves all people.

James gave an example that his initial readers could easily relate to, and it's an example that translates very well into our own church culture. Believers were gathering for a meeting, perhaps a church gathering, and they'd treated two very different people in very different ways. These visitors were apparently new to the meeting because they needed help knowing where to sit. They stood out not only because of their newness, but also because of their socio-economic status—one was extraordinarily rich and the other was desperately poor.

The gold ring on the rich man's finger could have been a sign of great authority, like a signet ring that officials used to seal important documents, and his nice clothes stood out as being clearly lavish. In contrast, the poor man was needy, and his clothes drew attention for exactly the opposite reason as the rich man's clothes. They were filthy, likely because he didn't have a change of clothes or a way to wash the ones he did have, and he probably hadn't bathed in quite a while and was very smelly.

The distinctions between these two men may have been obvious, but it is not our place to shine a light on those distinctions. When we do, do we not "become judges with evil thoughts?" Instead, we should show kindness and grace to everyone, treating all people as if they are incredibly valuable. After all, it's true that all people are made in God's image, possess inherent dignity, and are loved by God. God does not show partiality (see Deut. 10:17), and it's our job to reflect God's love to all.

### DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 14)

- 1** Where do you see favoritism or discrimination today?
- 2** What are some consequences of showing favoritism in the church?



# IMPART

THE POINT // DON'T PLAY FAVORITES.

## JAMES 2:5-7

*Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Didn't God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? Yet you have dishonored the poor. Don't the rich oppress you and drag you into court? Don't they blaspheme the good name that was invoked over you? **JAMES 2:5-7***

When we discriminate, we are making judgment calls we have no right to make. By discounting some in favor of others, we are also discounting God, His view of them, and how He is able to work through them. This is what the people were doing in James's example. By escorting the wealthy man to a preferred place and refusing the poor man this same honor, the people were dismissing the value of the poor man.

Discrimination based on outward appearances is not just applied toward individuals. Tragically, some practice this kind of bigotry toward whole classes of people, and it's not uncommon for people in our culture to discriminate based on wealth, race, gender, popularity, and much more. We need to understand that money, race, and social standing are immaterial to God. God loves all people. Further, God desires to use all people for His purposes, and He will supply anyone willing to follow Jesus with the gifts necessary to do so.

One way God uses the poor in the world is to be examples of what it means "to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him" (v. 5). Jesus pointed out one such example to His disciples in Luke 21:1-4. As Jesus watched people bring their gifts into the temple, He paid special attention to a woman who gave two small coins, and He remarked that her gift was greater than the huge sums of the wealthy because she gave everything she had. Her gift left her with nothing but her faith and trust in God—and in that she was rich. Because they have little in a material sense, the faith of the poor is often put on display in ways that aren't seen in the lives of rich people.

It is impossible to know people's hearts merely by glancing at their outward appearances. When we marginalize the poor just because they might be dirty or smelly, we may be ignoring the strength of their character or the richness of their faith. On the other hand, when we honor someone because they are well-dressed and successful, we might be elevating people of poor character—perhaps even mistreating others—to a place of honor. In James's example, the believers had in fact honored those who oppressed them. They were rich in an earthly sense. However, what matters much more is faith in God and love for others.

*When we show favoritism, prejudice, or discrimination, we offend God's standards in the worst ways. #BSFLFaithLivedOut*

### DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 15)

- 3** Why is the heart of God so close to the poor and the excluded?
- 4** List some ways we overlook the poor in the church today.
- 5** What are some examples of showing honor versus playing favorites?



## JAMES 2:8-13

*Indeed, if you fulfill the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. If, however, you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the entire law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all. For he who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. So if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you are a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. **JAMES 2:8-13***

James was not discouraging the believers from treating the rich well. He simply wanted the church to treat all people with love and honor. When a law expert asked Jesus about the greatest commandment, Jesus mentioned two (Matt. 22:35-40):

- **Love God above all else and with all we are.**
- **And love our neighbors as ourselves.**

In the Old Testament law, the Jews were required to love their neighbors, refusing to hold grudges or seek revenge against someone in the community (see Lev. 19:18). Unfortunately, the Jews had limited this to applying only to other Jews. However, Jesus communicated that this standard is to be applied to all people—people who are like us and we're naturally drawn to, and people who are different or who are poor or struggle to fit in.

We typically refer to the two-part command to love God and others as the Great Commandment. James called this “the royal law.” Because “God is love” (1 John 4:8), it makes sense that His royal law is centered on love. Love is to reign supreme, and it applies to everyone all the time. If love is not rightly given to all people, then the law is not kept at all.

When we show favoritism toward one person, discriminating against another, we offend the standard of God's law. Some people might seek to justify favoritism: *OK, I may have a wrong attitude toward some people, but it's not like I committed adultery or killed someone.* However, we must recognize that all sin is a terrible offense against God. When we fail to keep the royal law, that makes us lawbreakers, and those who show prejudice and favoritism deserve God's punishment.

The purpose of James's argument was not to heap condemnation on us, but to call us to repentance. God wants us to take the sin of favoritism seriously, to turn from it, and to choose to show love to all people. This means that we must treat all people who come into our church gatherings, rich and poor alike, with equal honor.

None of us have loved perfectly, and no one can live up to the standard of God's law. However, Jesus kept that law for us, and through faith in Him, we are forgiven of our offenses against God and others. Jesus's love has set us free, and we have been made free to love others. Let us choose every day to love others—those who are like us and those who are different—in the same ways that Jesus has loved us.

### DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 15)

- 6** How does harmful judging impact others? In contrast, how does showing love and mercy impact others?
- 7** Why is God opposed to favoritism? How does favoritism keep us from loving others like God wants us to?
- 8** How can we go beyond passively avoiding favoritism to actively demonstrating God's love?





# LIVE IT OUT (10 minutes)

THE POINT // DON'T PLAY FAVORITES.



GOD  
JESUS  
HOLY SPIRIT  
BIBLE  
SALVATION  
CREATION  
CHURCH  
PEOPLE  
FAMILY

**COMMUNITY  
& WORLD**

## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // COMMUNITY & WORLD

*God values all people—born and unborn, young and old, male and female, all ethnicities, those of opposing faiths—and calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost across the street and around the world through prayer, giving resources, loving actions, and sharing the gospel.*

All people are created in God's image and have immeasurable value. Further, God sent Jesus to pay the price for our sins because of His love for all people. We must never discriminate, and further, must work diligently to show the love of Christ and share the gospel with all people so that they would know God's blessings.

## >CHRIST

Jesus lived out the Great Commandment—love God and love others—perfectly. This included His seeing all people as having equal value, and He never showed discrimination—against the poor or sick, against women, against those despised by society. He never discriminated against anyone.

**9** Every day this week, pray that God would help you to be more like Jesus, particularly in the area of treating, in real ways, all people as having equal value.

**10** Briefly journal the things you learn and the commitments you might make.



# LIVE IT OUT

THE POINT // DON'T PLAY FAVORITES.



## > COMMUNITY

Visiting a church can be a bit of an awkward experience. Visitors might not know many people (or anyone at all), they might not understand what's expected of them, and they aren't familiar with your church's traditions and practices.

**11** The next time someone new visits, go above and beyond to make sure they feel welcome. Introduce yourself and others and invite them to sit with you. Practice the five-minute rule—five minutes before and after a church gathering, seek out people you do not know very well and spend a few minutes chatting with them.

## > CULTURE

There are people all around us who don't feel like they fit in. Many people feel, for all kinds of reasons, rejected and isolated, and it's our responsibility to help them feel valued and loved.

**12** This week, make it a point to show kindness to someone who might not be treated equally. Make sure it's not a one-time event, but choose to make it a lifestyle. Invite them to your church and make sure they feel welcome. Look for opportunities to share the reason—when we were left out, Jesus came to us in order to reconcile us to God.