

**JAMES****Faith on Display in Your Relationships // James 2:1-13****THE POINT:** Don't play favorites.**THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE**

We live in a culture that has taken great strides in regard to issues of racism and equality. However, 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, wealth, 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.

► **When have you seen someone being treated unfairly?**

**JAMES 2:1-4**

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 wealth—one was extraordinarily rich and the other was desperately poor. The distinctions between these two men may have been obvious, but it is not our place to shine a light on those distinctions. 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 (Deut. 10:17), and it's our job to reflect God's love to all.

► **Where do you see favoritism or discrimination today?**

► **What are some consequences of showing favoritism in the church?**

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**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 economics, 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.

► **Why is the heart of God so close to the poor and the excluded?**

► **List some ways we overlook the poor in the church today.**

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**JAMES 2:8-13**

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.

► **How is favoritism contrary to loving others in ways that reflect God?**

► **How can we go beyond passively avoiding favoritism to actively demonstrating God's love?**

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# LIVE IT OUT

Unit 1 // Session 2

## > CHRIST

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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.

➤ **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.**

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

## > COMMUNITY

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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.

➤ **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

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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.

➤ **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.**