

REAL FAITH IN THE REAL WORLD

Practical Wisdom From the Book of James

SMALL GROUP LESSON 3

James 2:1-13

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Read James 2:1-13 together

The theme of this section is favoritism. This is an area in which we are very capable of deceiving ourselves. Most of us think we don't play favorites. Yet, in our families, with our friends, even in our church, we tend to gravitate to those like us and spend time with those who please us! We need to pay attention to this area where we potentially lack self-awareness.

Question: When was a time when you were on the receiving end of favoritism? How did it make you feel and how do you think others who were not favored feel?

Read James 2:1-4

In verse 1-4, James talks about treating a rich, important person with special attention in your church meeting, and discriminating against the poor person.

Our denomination's founder, A.B. Simpson, was originally a Presbyterian minister and was the pastor of the prestigious Thirteenth Street Presbyterian Church in NYC in the late 1800's. This was an elegant, wealthy church, he was a great speaker, and the church was growing and growing. However, Simpson had a heart for the poor immigrants that were flooding into NYC at the time. The leadership at this church simply could not deal with the different, poor folks that Simpson was trying to bring into the church. He eventually resigned his comfortable job there and set out to establish the Gospel Tabernacle, a church where all – the poor, homeless, sick, and displaced – would be welcome.

Question: From verses 1-4, why does James oppose favoritism?

Question: Have you ever been part of a church that favored one kind of person over another?

Question: What do you think the reaction would be at Hillside if a lot of "different" looking people started coming to our services (poor people, people of color, people who speak other languages, people who dress differently, etc.)?

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Read James 2:5-7

The context of this passage is that most people were poor in the first-century Middle East. There were a small number of wealthy landowners and merchants who would have held a lot of power. These few, powerful, wealthy people most likely used their wealth and influence to wring even more money from the poor peasants who relied on them for their livelihood. The Old Testament prophets often spoke against this kind of behavior.

Read Zechariah 7:8-12, Amos 4:1-2 , Proverbs 22:22-23, and Ezekiel 22:6-7,12-13

Question: How does God feel about people who use their riches to extort or oppress others?

Question: Who are today's "rich?" Who are today's "poor?"

Question: How have we as a church or as the Christian community at large failed to obey God in practicing equality of treatment toward the rich and the poor?

Read James 2:8-13

God feels very strongly about us loving all, not playing favorites, and not judging a person based on their external features or characteristics. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Yet we all make assumptions about people based on the way they look, what they do, how they talk, how much money they have, and how educated they are.

Three ways to break down these stereotypes and assumptions are to:

- Become more self-aware of whom you are surrounding yourself with
- Become friends with people unlike you
- See people not for what they bring to us but for how we can love them more.

Write down here what describes you:

- Race/color _____
- First Language _____
- Socio-economic class _____
- Education _____
- Age _____
- Political leaning _____

Question: How many friends do you have who differ from you in more than 3 of these areas?

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Question: Are most of your friends similar to you in age, race, class, education, and political views or are most of them different? Why is that?

Question: How can you widen your pool of friends and get to know people different from you?

Question: How can we stop judging others and be more merciful?

FOR PRAYER

Possible areas to ask for prayer:

- Ask God for an opportunity to befriend someone who is not like you in some way
- Share where you most often find yourself judging others or playing favorites and ask God to help you love more and judge less.