

Icebreaker: For what event would you buy the best seats in the house?

From last week: Be quick to listen and slow to speak. How did you do this past week at active listening? How did you do at practicing making eye contact, listening first, not chiming in too quickly? Share with your group.

Read this week's scripture and discuss:

1. In general, what are some ways people show favoritism? Do you think God shows favoritism?
2. James compares those who wear fine clothes and those who wear shabby clothes. Do you find yourself having a reaction to the clothes people wear, or their appearance?
3. What is the theological issue associated with favoring certain people over others?
4. Bible commentator Ralph Martin says that in Biblical times, the rich offered security, favor, and benefits to their community. With whom are you in relationship that you don't receive any benefits? What does that teach you?
5. In the middle of this passage, we encounter James' view of those who are poor and those who are wealthy. What is that view? Does James seem too harsh to you?
6. James repeats Jesus' command, his "royal law" which is, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." How can loving your neighbor overcome favoritism?

This sermon series is called "Working Out Our Faith." Each week, we will recommend a practice to work out your faith.

Working out your faith: This week, love your neighbor as yourself. Try to connect with a neighbor you don't normally connect with or have a reason to connect with. Or connect with someone who doesn't offer you anything in return.

Prayer: As your group closes in prayer, please remember the following requests from our church family.

> Prayers of healing for Phil Isenbarger, Ken Miller, and Daniel Qua.

Requests from ZPC's April's Prayer Calendar:

- > Prayers for our brothers and sisters who are receiving assistance through Habitat for Humanity. Prayers also for each volunteer who is serving in this ministry.
- > Touch the hearts of individuals participating in the ZPC Inquirers Class on Friday and Saturday.

James is a challenging writer. It is good to study this book together as a church and in community in home groups where we can discuss it and learn from it. We are called not to show favoritism, but instead to show love and mercy, loving our neighbors as ourselves.

[Question 1] It is human nature to like to be with people who are like you. Or to desire to be with people who are popular or powerful. Favoritism can be shown to those we like, those who our kids' go to school with, those who have influence. God loves all and wants all to know Him. However, Jesus often showed interest and love to those who were sick, poor, outcast or "sinners."

[Question 2] Yes, again it is human nature to be drawn to appearances – whether we think that appearance is good or bad. People who dress like us or people who we think dress very nicely may get "favor" from us – even without us realizing it.

[Question 3] God is supposed to love everyone. "For God so loved the world..." John 3:16. So if God loves everyone, we should love them too. While we should love all of God's children, it is easy to treat people differently based on what we know about them or how well we know them. Additionally, in Romans 8 Paul makes this allusion: the greatest indicator of our sin is our seeking to be judge, but there is only one rightful judge — only one who has the absolute wherewithal to judge justly and that is God our Father and his Son.

[Question 4] If we love or care for someone who doesn't offer anything in return, it draw us closer to how God loved us. While we were yet sinners God loved us, when we could offer nothing in return. Loving others in this way helps us to know God better.

[Question 5] The poor are blessed with faith and with inheriting the kingdom. The rich in James' letter oppressed others and dragged them into court. Those who have wealth and are generous can bless others greatly in ways that are unique. Being wealthy can be a great blessing, not just something to be wary of.

[Question 6] We can show love and mercy as James says. Mercy triumphs over judgment. We can see people the way Jesus sees them – as children of God – to be loved and cared for. When we see them differently, we will treat them differently – loving our neighbor.