

Icebreaker: Now that Memorial Day is almost here, what is the thing you are most excited about this summer?

From last week: What are things in your life that cause you to be more envious or less; more slanderous or less? Examples might be Instagram, Facebook, a favorite television show, or a friend who likes to gossip. Challenge yourself to take a Sabbath from the thing that causes you to be envious or talk about others negatively. How did that go?

Read this week's scripture and discuss:

1. At the end of James 4, is James saying we should not plan for the future? If not, what is he trying to say? In making plans, what problem surfaces theologically?
2. James compares us to a mist that vanishes. What does this say about our lives? How does that make you feel? How does that reality shape how you live?
3. Take a silent moment to reflect on James 4:17. Do you remember a time when you knew what you ought to do and didn't do it?
4. James also says those who are rich will "weep and wail" and experience "miseries." How will this be a response to those who have lived their lives in luxury and pleasure? If we don't want to weep and wail over luxuries, what can we do instead?
5. How does the way you spend your time and/or money serve as a witness to a watching world?
6. Read James 5:4 again. How does the company, business, or profession you work for do with being fair and just to its employees?
7. We've all probably had individuals write letters of reference for us for jobs. It has been said, "nobody gets into heaven without a letter of reference from the poor." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Do you think this type of letter would be easier or more difficult to request than a regular reference letter?

Working out your faith: During our series on James we've talked about our desire to go to bed looking more like Jesus than when we woke up and about the sun setting with our community looking more like the Kingdom of God than when the sun rose. What is one thing that you can take from our studies on James that will help us to do those things?

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

- > Prayers of comfort for the Sumner family in the death of Cheryl's father and the Polley family in the death of Valerie's father.
- > Prayers of healing for Robie Strickland.

Requests from ZPC's May Prayer Calendar:

- > Pray for all students that God help with the stress and worry especially during this time of year.
- > Pray for Bill and Kwai Lin Stephens, ZPC missionaries to Mongolia.

This study of James has been challenging and encouraging. James tells us faith without works (or deeds) is dead. We are called to work out our faith, the title of the sermon series. Our faith is not an intellectual exercise, but a heart commitment and calls us to use our heart, mind, soul, and strength to honor God. As we move on from the study of James, may we work out our faith and use our deeds to honor God. Do we go to bed looking more like Jesus than when we woke up?

[Question 1] The future is in God's hands, not ours. It is good to set goals and make plans, if God is in them. The problem that surfaces is we may believe we can control the future or if we believe if we plan enough or save enough, we don't need God.

[Question 2] Life is short. No matter who we are, life can end quickly. That is a sobering reality. We are reminded of it when we go to a funeral of someone who died suddenly. That truth can shape us if we decide to live with intention each day and to really live the life that God has given us.

[Question 3] Some call our mistakes sins of commission and sins of omission. Sins of commission are when we do something wrong or against God's will. Sins of omission are when we don't do the right thing. We might know the truth but not say it. We might avoid someone when we know they need help. If God directs us to do something, we need to do it.

[Question 4] Many scholars believe James was speaking to the rich of the culture around them and not to the people of the Church in this passage. It is said, "You can't take it with you." Riches don't mean happiness, and when this life ends they are gone immediately. James says not to hoard wealth, it is better to be generous. When we give with a joyful heart, it is exciting and life-giving.

[Question 5] People are watching you, whether you know it or not. How you live and how you spend your money is seen. If you are consistently giving of your time and money, people know that and respect you. Your actions can speak well of you and of your faith in Jesus.

[Question 6] James 5:4 says for those in authority should pay their workers a fair wage. What does that fairness and justice look like in today's world? It is good to think how our companies, professions, or employers treat people. Is it fair and just?

[Question 7] Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us that we are saved by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ. However, Jesus reminds us in the story of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) that when we care for the poor or the least of these, we care for Jesus. Would the poor give you a letter of reference? It's a hard question, but a good one to prompt us to think about how we spend our time and money.