

Group discussion *Each number below includes questions that relate to the scripture. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for “the big question.”*

Read James 2:1-13 aloud.

1. Before James discusses favoritism he talks about justice and holiness (1:27).

Remember Kevin’s sermon from the week before. Some people tend to emphasize doing good to others (justice) while other focus on being good believers (holiness).

What does showing favoritism have to do with justice?

What does showing favoritism have to do with holiness?

2. James follows his instruction (1) with an illustration (2-4).

Describe the scene in your own words.

Has anyone ever witnessed another illustration of favoritism (both inside or outside the church)? What happened?

Has anyone here ever been a victim of favoritism or judgment? How did it make you feel?

Why do you think people show preference to one person over another? What kinds of standards are often used?

What is the difference between having favorite things and showing favoritism?

3. James spends almost half of this text discussing the neglect of the poor in regards to favoritism (2-7). Why do you think the poor are easily neglected? Do James’ words give any hints as to why?

Why is it important for Christians to be kind and generous to the poor?

What might those who are poor teach us about God?

What does our church do that shows kindness to the poor? What else might we do to be more welcoming to the poor?

You may want to take this opportunity to discuss about an Overflow activity your Life Group might do.

4. What is the “royal law” of Scripture according to James (8)?

Why do you think he calls it the “royal law?”

Jesus quotes this commandment (8) in his life and ministry (See *Bible Notes*). Where else in this passage do you find echoes of the life and teaching of Jesus?

What about the life and teaching of Jesus might help Christians fight against a spirit of favoritism? Are there other teachings or stories from the Gospels that might be helpful?

5. James closes his discussion of favoritism by talking about freedom and mercy (12-13). What does freedom and mercy have to do with not showing favoritism?

What do you think James means when he says that mercy triumphs over judgment (13)?

Do you have any experiences or illustrations where mercy triumphed over judgment?

How might Christians be more merciful in their actions?

How might Christians be more merciful in their speech?

† **The million-dollar question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It’s okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

In what practical ways might we show genuine love to people regardless of title, appearance, wealth, race, or culture?

Resources

Bible notes

James' emphasis on not showing favoritism is nothing new in Scripture. Some other passages with this emphasis are Lev 19:15; Ps 82:2; Job 34:17-19; Acts 10:34. These texts may be good reference points as you think through James' words. Also, think about how these texts might be helpful to your group's discussion as it develops.

This passage, like the book of James as a whole, carries many subtle allusions to the life and teachings of Jesus. Some worth considering as your discussion develops are: verse 5 (see also Matt 5:3; Lk 6:20) and verse 8 (see also Matt 22:39; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27).

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Playing the "Treat-ing Everyone the Same" Game

Preparation: Gather some kind of candy treat.

Delivery: Have the kids get in a circle. Let one of the adults enter and hand out a treat to only one group of kids (Pick a standard like those who are wearing shorts or glasses or white shoes). Explain to the kids that you are choosing only some of them to get candy because they are your favorites.

Discussion: Ask the kids who did not get a treat to tell you how it makes them feel to get left out. Does any one have another experience of when they were left out?

Is it wrong to have favorite things? Then what is the difference between having favorite things and showing favoritism?

Read James 2:1-8. Explain to the kids that James does not want Christians to show favoritism and neither should we.

Who do you think you can show the love of God to this week? What might you do for them?

Pray for the kids.



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LIFE Group Guide

James 2:1-13 – Playing Favorites

By Wilson McCoy (wilson.mccoy@gmail.com)

The theme: To play favorites is often thought to be a normal part of life in the world around us. However, James tells us that such behavior is not a game that Christians should play. Instead, attitudes of love and mercy should determine our words and deeds. James promises that when these traits dictate our behavior then everybody wins.

This week Kevin talked about the common experience of showing favoritism. Preferential treatment can happen in obvious and not so obvious ways. Giving one person more attention than another can happen in and outside the church. Yet, it is the church that is to be a place where God's love is reflected to all people regardless of title, appearance, or wealth. Christians are to be those who give freedom to all by reflecting the mercy of God to all.

Leadership tip: Favoritism is always a temptation. Even in small groups people can get left out in subtle ways. As a leader make sure you are intentional in including everyone—through listening to everyone's comments, by showing grace when people speak with an attitude of confession, and by promoting a spirit of unity by letting everyone participate in the group's activities. Modeling inclusive behaviors is a helpful way to lay the foundation before discussing these useful words of James.

Relate *Use a few to introduce the theme, check everyone's spiritual pulse, and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage through these questions.*

- ❖ Tonight we are talking about favorites. So let's ask some "favorite" questions. What is your favorite food?
- ❖ What is your favorite season of the year? Why?
- ❖ Do you have a favorite bible verse or passage of Scripture? Why is that your favorite?