

# JAMES

MARK IT UP

## James 2:1-13 **LEADER** Discussion Guide

Week of 3/27/22

**Icebreaker:** Have you ever been in a place where favoritism was occurring? What was going on, and how did it make you feel?

**Getting Started:** Read James 2:1-13 as a group.

Select 2-3 questions that you think will be most helpful for your discussion.

**1.** Based on the passage, what do you think James means as he uses the word “partiality” or “favoritism”?

The Greek word literally means “to accept (or receiving) the face.” In other words, it has to do with a surface-level judgment or distinction. It might be helpful to consider the differences between making a judgment about the surface rather than the substance of someone or something. Partiality as it is used here is all about the surface.

*Application:* Why do you think we show favoritism in the first place? What motivates it?

Usually, we seek some kind of advantage for ourselves. For example, we feel better about ourselves when we’re around someone who’s attractive, wealthy, or accomplished.

**2.** James says that partiality has led to “distinctions among yourselves” and that they’ve “become judges with evil thoughts.” How does partiality or favoritism lead to these problems?

As a surface-level judgment, partiality judges on an incredibly shallow basis. God never calls us to make these kind of superficial distinctions, so partiality divides what God has united in Christ (see e.g., Galatians 3:28). Favoritism works against the gospel! How tragic to find it within the church!

*Application:* If you have seen favoritism in the church, what kind of damage did it do?

By “the church,” we’re not thinking only of Calvary. We should be careful here to not turn this question into a rant or a careless assessment of others’ motives (which would lead to a different kind of problem). We should not simply look the other way, though, when favoritism is clearly occurring.

**3.** James points out the folly of partiality in verses 5-7. How would you summarize his argument in these verses?

*Building Christ-centered communities of people  
fully devoted to loving God and loving others.*

First, their favoritism is contradicting God's heart for the very people they are mistreating—the poor. Think of what James has just said prior to this passage about visiting the widows and orphans in their affliction. Second, James points out the insanity of giving preferential treatment to the same people (or same category of people, at least) who are opposing them and the “honorable name by which you were called”—most likely a reference to the name of Christ (Christian).

Application: Verse 5 points us to God's heart for the poor and marginalized of our world. How would you assess your own concern for those that society tends to ignore?

It's probably worth pointing out that James is not claiming that the poor are automatically saved simply because of their poverty. If this were true, we would never want to help lift them out of their poverty! They're saved on the same basis as anyone—by faith—but commentators point out how the poor tend to have far less in this world to set their hope on than those who are wealthy.

**4.** James singles out the “royal law” and the call to “love your neighbor as yourself” in verse 8. In what way is this command relevant to the issue of favoritism?

There's uncertainty over what the “royal law” means—whether it's the command stated here or whether it includes all of Jesus' teaching. Either way, favoritism is a failure to love our neighbor. See Matt 22:40 for Jesus' teaching on the centrality of this command to “all the law and prophets.”

*Application:* This command is at the core of Calvary's mission (see the “footer” on each page of these notes). What happens when a church fully embraces this command to love our neighbor as ourselves? What happens when it fails to do so?

We could say that this is the core DNA of the church across the centuries. See John 13:35. This love is what makes the church so appealing and attractive (in the best sense). Conversely, a failure to love this way is what inspires people to keep their distance.

**5.** Verses 12-13 are short but profound. What do you think it means that “judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy,” yet, “Mercy triumphs over judgment”?

Verse 12 stands both as a kind of warning and hope. Judgment causes us to think of our present-day words and actions with the future in mind. The law that we will be judged under is one of “liberty” as it shows us how to live according to God's design. It explains what righteousness means. Because of Christ, it offers us forgiveness of sin and victory over death. The “For” of verse 13 means that this verse is explaining or expanding on v. 12. The “law of liberty” has given us God's mercy through Christ in the face of judgment. Partiality, though, demonstrates a lack of mercy toward another person. How

can we who claim God's mercy for ourselves not extend mercy to another person (see Matt 5:7 and 18:21-35)? Favoritism happens when one human judges another human for a superficial/surface-level reason. How could we who have been rescued from God's judgment (which we deserve) by Christ turn around and judge another human being? Finally, because of Christ, we have a mercy that "triumphs over judgment." Hallelujah to "our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" (v. 1)!

*Application:* Let's not move on without considering how we may be participating in showing favoritism. Perhaps there's room here to admit how we have been judging others based on some surface-level reason. If so, take time to confess it to God and consider how you might confess and ask for forgiveness from those who have been mistreated.

If this feels like a sensitive topic, it is! Use your best judgment about how to roll this out if you decide to cover it. It could be good to handle in even smaller groups than your entire LifeGroup or it could be one that you use to introduce a time of silent prayer.