

JAMES

MARK IT UP

James 5:1-7 **LEADER** Discussion Guide

Week of 5/15/22

Icebreaker: Fill in the blank: When I hear a sermon about money, I often feel _____. Why? Options might include *thankful, challenged, annoyed, angry, convicted, heartburn, nauseous*.

Getting Started: Read James 5:1-7 as a group.

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

1. What is James accusing the rich of doing that brings this stinging rebuke? There's a two-fold rebuke. First, they've stockpiled riches for themselves, and, second, they haven't paid their workers what they're owed. These wealthy people have "lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence" and "fattened [their] hearts in a day of slaughter." Moreover, they "have condemned and murdered the righteous"—perhaps a reference to how they've taken legal action against the poor and/or shown such disregard for them that some have died prematurely. Altogether, then, the rich are being accused of stockpiling wealth while committing a great injustice against the poor—the same people who have worked for them as laborers and allowed them to maintain or even increase their wealth.

Application: Do you think this is a problem that persists today? If so, how? Yes, but this can be a complex issue because it takes place at multiple levels—between individuals, at a local level, within nations, and internationally. Our global economy creates large-scale opportunities for exploitation of the poor, and with the "benefit" of thousands of miles of separation between wealthy consumers and poor "laborers." We can participate in unjust systems in our day without even realizing it! Ideally, it would be helpful for your group to think through specific examples where the poor are exploited today.

2. James says to the rich that they should "weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you." What do you think James means? James is looking ahead to the future judgment where there will be a great reversal of fortunes. Those among the poor who are trusting Christ will experience great reward while those who are exploiting them will face the judgment of God. This judgment should cause the rich to come to their senses and repent! Another related aspect is that the material things of this

life are temporary—they will rot and fade (see Matthew 6). Those who put all their hope and satisfaction in material things will ultimately suffer great loss.

Application: What is it about wealth that can make people think more about the present than the future? How should wealth be used in the present if we keep God's future judgment in view?

We know that none of us can take it with us! Wealth that's accumulated for our own pleasure or advantage makes us place our hope in this lifetime. Why store up treasures in heaven when we can have them on earth (sarcasm intended)? If we keep God's judgment in view, we consider more carefully how our use of worldly wealth can be pleasing to God. As James puts it, think of the folly of storing up treasure "in the last days" (v. 3).

3. What do you think James means in verse 4 that, "the wages of the laborers" and "cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts"?

This is likely a deliberate echo of Genesis 4:10 when the blood of Abel was said to cry out to God. In that case, we could think that Cain's action would go unnoticed. Here in James 5, we might also think that the actions of the rich would go unnoticed. But God is aware! There's no injustice that escapes God's watch. Also, the title, *Lord of hosts* is meaningful as "hosts" can point to the heavenly armies of God. This one who hears the cries of injustice has all the forces of heaven to do His bidding! The rich may be powerful on earth in their oppressive schemes but they're nothing in comparison to the Lord of hosts.

Application: What kind of response stirs up in you if you consider there's no injustice that God is unaware of?

People in the group may have been victimized in some way by another's actions. Maybe no one else even knows, but God and the people directly involved. We can also be shaken by the injustices we see happening around the world that seem to have no immediate resolution or answer. In any case, these verses should be a hope to those who wonder whether God knows or cares about the injustices of life. Ultimately, no one escapes God's justice.

4. What do you think it looks like for people to "live on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence" and to have "fattened [their] hearts in a day of slaughter" as verse 5 describes?

This vivid imagery reveals the foolishness of the rich. They have stockpiled wealth all for themselves and at the expense of others. Meanwhile, their apparent gain is not unlike that of a blissful animal gorging itself at a feed trough...all in preparation for the dinner table! The rest of this passage gives us clues that the success of the rich has come at the expense of the poor. They've employed the poor, who are most likely day-laborers (people who earn only enough for a single day's needs...so they need to be paid each day) but haven't given them their wages in a timely fashion. These rich have

become so self-consumed that they have no problem with their actions against the poor.

Application: Do you see this happening in our day? If so, how or where? We certainly live in a society and in communities where we have opportunity to live in luxury and self-indulgence. This question invites people to think about where we see it in our lives.

5. Look up the following verses: Matthew 6:24, 1 Timothy 6:10, and Hebrews 13:5. What common theme or instruction do you see across these verses? This should be self-explanatory about the danger of loving money or material possessions (mammon).

Application: What kind of steps have you taken or should you begin to take to encourage a healthy relationship between material possessions and your heart?

We've seen a lot in this passage from James about the negative side of money, but we can have a healthy practice of using our resources to honor God!! One time-tested approach is to practice Calvary's shaping value of faithful stewardship: *We give generously and faithfully of our financial resources*. Our attitude toward money changes when we see ourselves as we truly are: stewards rather than owners of all that we have.