



# Adulting

Accept

Snooze

*Expositional study on the book of James.*

*The #1 catalyst for spiritual growth is reading and reflecting on the Bible.  
Use these questions for personal study or as part of a community group experience.*

**WEEK 3 OF 7**

**10/01/2017**

**Note to Leaders:** This week John discussed how a living faith leads the Christian to build a community of justice and mercy. God has created us for community. Consequently, this community must reflect the heart and purposes of God.

**Caution:** Given the climate of recent events this conversation could become increasingly political. In your discussion, it may be helpful to remind your group members that we want to speak with respect, grace and love; not assuming everyone is on the same political, cultural, or experiential page. Keep bringing it back to the Bible, and keep people focused on how their life aligns with this text. While there are systemic challenges, it will be safest to look personally at what God calls our individual lives to reflect. In all things, we need to be kind, gracious, gentle, and self-controlled (think of James' command to control the tongue).

## **Sermon Questions**

1. What is something you learned from Sunday's message?
2. What is one thing you feel led to do after this message?
3. Re-read James 2:1-13. What do you discover about God's character or concerns from this passage?

## **Discussion Questions**

1. According to James, why is showing partiality or favoritism incompatible with faith?
2. How does favoritism and discrimination within the church reflect upon God?
3. Was the early church primarily composed of rich people or poor? On what do you base your answer?
4. Verse 5 says God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. Is God guilty of showing favoritism? Explain. (Consider 1 Timothy 6:17-19.)
5. What is at the root of favoritism (Jude 1:16; Proverbs 28:21; Romans 2:6-11)?

6. How does Jesus' reinterpretation of the law (v. 8; cf. Matthew 22:36-40) address what seems like a human tendency toward favoritism?
7. How does this message lead to a desire for justice and mercy? In what ways does it change how we view God and others?
8. In what ways do you struggle with showing preferential treatment to some and prejudice against others?
9. What are two specific ways you can begin loving people as God does this week in your home? In the workplace? At church?

### Background Comments

In these verses, James demonstrates the outworking of hearing and doing the word of God: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1:27) This faith-filled expression results in a new community of justice and mercy, which no longer judges and evaluates its members on the basis of the world's standards. The materially poor and socially outcast—by Roman standards—likely comprised a significant portion of the first century church (James 5; Acts 2:45). Generally speaking, class was divided into two main categories with the latter being the majority. A small group of wealthy landowners and merchants accumulated more and more power, while large numbers of people were forced from their land and grew even poorer. Most of James' readers probably belonged to this class of poor agricultural laborers.

James proceeds by giving three reasons why favoritism toward the rich does not reflect God's character nor upholds justice and mercy. First, the action contradicts God's own evaluation of the poor, whom he honors (Leviticus 19:15; 25:35-37; Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Psalm 113:7). Second, on a practical note, the heart of the rich does not reflect the heart of God since they are causing division and bringing lawsuits against the church. James' third and primary point comes from the command to love which stems from Jesus' reinterpretation of the law of God (Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:13-14).

Favoritism, in James' community and culture, was normal. It was a means of climbing the social ladder, increasing wealth, and gaining favor. However, their attempts to secure these things for their congregation from the rich reflected a wavering trust in God (James 1:5-8) and a false representation of the Gospel. Jesus welcomes the materially, physically, and socially rich and poor; however, the common denominator that he calls for in both is to be poor in spirit—humble and meek, recognizing utter dependence upon the Lord and trust him for deliverance. Acceptance of and mercy toward all people who respond to God in trust and dependence shows our desire to obey the law of God and therefore reflects a heart made right by the work of God's grace. In other words, our experience of grace and trust in God causes us to extend grace to all people by means of justice and mercy that omits favoritism and discrimination.

### **Prayer Requests**

Take a few minutes to go around the room and ask if anyone has something they would like prayer for. Write these down as they are being shared.

Additionally, challenge people to begin praying about the step of maturity God may be calling them to during this series.

Finally, pray together. You can pray the prayer below or your own prayer that incorporates the requests represented in the group.

**Closing Prayer**

Father, thank you that you are a God who upholds the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner with justice, mercy, and love. I am grateful that you have a deep desire to be in relationship with all people. In this letter by James, you call the church to a standard of unity and equality. Help me grow in my understanding of my own dependence upon you and the grace, though I am underserving, that you give me. Transform my heart to reflect your love for others and teach me to obey your commands. Where I have shown favoritism and prejudice, forgive me. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.