

GLENKIRK CHURCH



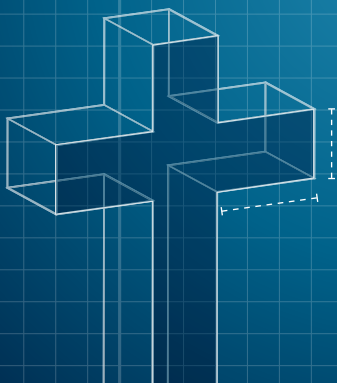
WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

SEPTEMBER 20 - 24, 2021

FAITH WORK

the book of
James



MONDAY

James 2:1

Brothers and sisters in the church will show no partiality.

When he was a student, the famous Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi, considered becoming a Christian. He read the Gospels and was moved by them. It seemed to him that Christianity offered a solution to the caste system that plagued the people of India.

One Sunday he went to a local church. He had decided to see the pastor and ask for instruction on the way of salvation. But when he entered the church, which consisted of white people, the users refused to give him a seat. They told him to go and worship with his own people. He left and never went back. "If Christians have caste differences also, I might as well remain a Hindu," Gandhi said. ("Our Daily Bread," February, 1979).

This story illustrates the sin that James writes against in our text. James's focus is on the sin of showing favoritism to the rich and despising the poor, but his words apply to all types of prejudice, whether based on economic status, race, education, or anything else. To favor some people and to disregard others based on outward factors is a terrible sin that plagued the church in James's day. It has plagued the church in every generation because it stems from pride, self-righteousness, and legalism. These are all endemic to our fallen hearts.

Most of us spend our lives trying to project an image of beauty and competence. Certainly, we want others to think highly of us, but one of the things I respect most about people is their ruthless honesty—about themselves and their situations. James’s words as a pastor and fellow believer should cause us to be ruthlessly honest about our personal biases and prejudices. It is this honesty, not minimizing or denying the problem, that will bring about the appropriate actions or changes Jesus already demonstrated in His ministry.

The Pharisees sent some of their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to meet with Him [Jesus]. *“Teacher,” they said, “we know how honest you are. You teach the way of God truthfully. You are impartial and don’t play favorites”* (Matthew 22:16).

Prejudice, partiality, bias, and favoritism are significant problems in our world. Why is it a sin to show partiality at church as a follower of Christ? Because it contradicts the nature and character of God. Deuteronomy 10:17 says: *“For the LORD your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality and cannot be bribed.”*

QUESTIONS

Would you consider your church to be open and inclusive to everyone? How can being honest about personal biases and prejudices become a springboard for change?

PRAY FOR FOR HIS CHILDREN (FHC) - ECUADOR

Believing that all children are created in God’s image, FHC exists as a Christ-centered ministry to homeless children, providing care in a loving and supportive environment, striving to unite them with their biological or adoptive family, and advocating on their behalf to others. Lord, bless FHC’s focus.

TUESDAY

James 2:5-7; Psalm 41:1

Believers will honor the poor in their attitudes and their actions.

It's theoretically called "the law of the harvest"; but we commonly say "What goes around comes around" to refer to the law of reaping what we sow. We see the effects of this "law" every day. When we're angry and snap at people, they tend to snap back. When we are kind and help someone, we often make a friend. Or sometimes the one we helped comes to our rescue when we are in need.

In our verse today (Psalm 41:1), the law of the harvest has a different twist. When we give to someone who is poor, that person cannot pay us back, but blessings seem to come our way from out of the blue. It's God. He's the One who sees what we've done and takes care of us in return. Jesus said that it's no big deal to give to those who can give back to us (Luke 14:12-14). The big, really important thing is to give to those who cannot repay us. Jesus loves like that, and He wants us to do the same—with rewards!

Who are the poor around us? Most of us spend a small fortune buying homes in neighborhoods that offer protection and safety from the very people Jesus wants us to spend time with and help. I am guilty of this. When we encounter the poor on drives through parts of town, we hardly notice them or, worse, we look the other way.

Martin Luther King Jr. said: “A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand, we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life’s roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life’s highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”

They’re there, and they’re real people with real needs and real hopes and dreams. God wants us to consider them, to imagine what their lives are like so that we can genuinely care. When we care, we’ll find a way to take action.

QUESTIONS

Consider the poor. Who are they? What are their lives like? What is one thing you can do to care for one of them?

PRAY FOR FOR HIS CHILDREN (FHC) - ECUADOR

A note from a FHC Supporter: “Not only do they participate in great work, caring for some of the most vulnerable, but the quality in which they do this is unmatched. I have interacted with many organizations throughout the world and can honestly say that FHC is one of the most impressive.” Lord, bless FHC’s quality of care.

WEDNESDAY

James 2:8; Matthew 22:39

Believers will know and love their neighbor as themselves.

Jesus had just named the “greatest commandment” in Scriptures, the single most important directive God has given us: Love God with everything you’ve got (Matthew 22:37-40). And then He adds an addendum to that directive. When we love God with all our hearts, soul, mind, and body, it affects our human relationships as well. The command also focuses on the power of love: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

“As yourself.” Jesus could have said, “Love people a lot” or something vague like, “Love people” leaving us to fill in the standards of love ourselves. But instead, Jesus specifically says that our love for others should compare favorably to the attention we give to our own needs. When we’re hungry, we find something in the cabinet or refrigerator. When we’re sleepy, we go to bed (or at least we should go to bed). We don’t spend a lot of time wondering if we “have” this need or that one. It’s obvious; we just meet it. Our love for our neighbor should have the same reflexive quality: When we see their needs, we simply meet those needs.

Too often we get so consumed in our own world we do not notice the needs of those around us. Or we are so exhausted at the end of each

day that we can't imagine giving out to anyone else, especially to demanding kids or a spouse who is at least as tired as we are.

We need to break this cycle, recognizing that a new perspective is necessary. God, when we love Him wholeheartedly, will give you fresh energy, strength, and compassion for the people we see each day, and especially for our brothers and sisters in the church. We can love them like we love ourselves.

In joining a small group for a discussion of the book of James, discuss the SALT Principle:

- SEE others as Jesus sees them.
- ACCEPT others as Jesus accepts them.
- LOVE others as Jesus loves them.
- TOUCH others as Jesus touches them. (Ike Reighard)

QUESTIONS

Describe what it means to love someone the way you love yourself. What are some practical things you can do to have more strength to devote to loving others?

PRAY FOR FOR HIS CHILDREN (FHC) - ECUADOR

A note from Adoptive Parents: "Their genuine affection and concern for the children is obvious. The impact of the warmth and love can be seen in each child living at FHC ... and those ... with forever families. ... They train staff and caregivers ... to understand and address the needs of all the children in their care." Lord, bless FHC's compassion for the children.

THURSDAY

James 2:8-11

Believers will treat every person with God's love!

The church is a society designed by the Lord to include everyone. James makes it clear that favoritism is not simply disrespectful of people; it is sin against God. *"If ... you show favoritism, you commit sin"* (James 2:9). It is a sin because it is contrary to the character and command of God. God is not a respecter of persons; He shows no partiality in the covenant of grace.

To prejudge someone is to determine his or her worth or worthlessness. Favoritism is partiality or bias. The Bible is clear that favoritism is incongruent with God's character: *"God does not show favoritism"* (Romans 2:11). All are equal before Him. Ephesians 6:9 says, *"There is no favoritism with Him."* Colossians 3:25 teaches God's fairness in judgment: *"Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism."*

Jesus' closest followers struggled with bias against people different from them. When Peter was first called to minister to non-Jewish people, he was reluctant. He later admitted, *"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right"* (Acts 10:34).

Favoritism is divisive and destructive and causes unjust treatment for those not favored. The Old Testament instructs God's people: *"Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great but judge your neighbor fairly"* (Leviticus 19:15). Exodus 23:3 commands, *"Do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit."* Justice should be blind, and both rich and poor should be treated equally before the law. The church must become a place of growing inclusion and diversity if we are to impact the world with God's love and truth. What steps will you take to invite or include "others" into your small group, friend group, or ministry at church?

QUESTIONS

Where has partiality or favoritism caused you to pull away from a ministry or service in your church? What changes do you need to make to show God's love to every person? Do you spend time meeting new people at church (despite masks and social distancing)?

PRAY FOR FOR HIS CHILDREN (FHC) - ECUADOR

Benjamin's story: "He was found alone, locked in his room, when he was rescued by the police. Benjamin was regularly abandoned for many hours with no food or access to a bathroom. His living situation was nauseating. Benjamin suffered from malnutrition, poor hygiene, and lice ... and delays in his development." Lord, bless FHC's nurturing of Benjamin.

FRIDAY

James 2:13; Matthew 5:7

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

Jesus could not have been clearer: If you want to be on the receiving end of kindness, you must show kindness to others first. It’s the law of sowing and reaping (law of the harvest). Mercy is responding compassionately to someone’s hurts, going the extra mile to help people in need, and being willing to listen when someone wants to talk. Some of us are naturally predisposed to be merciful; but for others, it is a tough task!

People who delight in justice want to see the guilty punished, wrongs righted, and boxes checked off so that they can move on to the more pleasant things in life. Micah 6:8 says there are three things God requires: *do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.* God never lets sin have a “pass.” We know this keenly because God sent His only Son, Jesus, to die for our sins (John 3:16). Therefore, God’s people are to balance doing justice with a love for mercy while walking humbly (teachable) with God. There are hurting people all around us. Some are hidden, some are obvious, and many are our brothers and sisters in church.

In God’s economy, grace is “getting what we do not deserve” (salvation, adoption, kingdom life, and so much more), and mercy is “not getting

what we do deserve” (condemnation and death). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, is teaching that there is a relationship between showing mercy and obtaining mercy. If our instant response to others in need is, “Well, they get what they deserve,” then we have not realized that, by God’s gracious mercy, we don’t get what we really deserve. If you have difficulty showing mercy, then you need to go to the Cross to realize the wealth of God’s grace, mercy, kindness, and forgiveness given to us. With this realization fresh in our hearts, we will be quicker to extend mercy to others in need around us.

We often have a tendency to wait for someone else to begin the reciprocity of mercy, but God has already started it. We are called to respond to Him and to people in need. Then the words of James 2:13 will be fully applied as *mercy triumphs over judgement*.

QUESTIONS

Describe a time when someone extended mercy to you. How did it affect you? How would it affect your most difficult relationship if you were merciful to that person?

PRAY FOR FOR HIS CHILDREN (FHC) – ECUADOR

Ecuadorian law allows orphanages to discharge children when they reach age 18. FHC, however, accepts all children it can care for and provides lifetime care for those who have such severe disabilities that they are not adoptable. Lord, bless FHC with the resources to provide life-long care for the unadopted.

Sources

- Information about Mahatma Gandhi can be found in the February 1979 issue of *Our Daily Bread*, published by Our Daily Bread Ministries in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Dr. Ike Reighard's SALT reference can be found at <https://truett.edu/news/archive/dr-ike-reighard-speaks-truth-to-real-leaders/>
- The quote by Martin Luther King Jr. can be found at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/80558-on-the-one-hand-we-are-called-to-play-the>

