

A. Don't Show _____ (1-4)

B. _____ Favors the _____ (5-7)

C. Be _____ to All (8-13)

Homework

- **Read James 2:14-26.**
- **Read Max Lucado's "Lesson 5: How Faith Works" (pp 47-57).**
- **Reflect on these questions posed by Lucado.**
 1. Why is faith "dead" if it is not accompanied by works?
 2. How do believers demonstrate their living faith in Christ?
 3. How do some people rationalize inactive faith?
 4. Why is it not enough to merely *believe* there is one God?
 5. Read Genesis 22:1-12. How did Abraham demonstrate his faith in this story?
 6. Read Joshua 2:1-14. How did Rahab demonstrate her faith in this story?
 7. What are some ways to "show up" and practice your faith through your words and actions?
 8. What are some ways you can better "listen up" to show you support another person?
 9. What are some situation in which you need to "speak up" to encourage a friend?
 10. Why do you think the Bible stresses the importance of helping others?
 11. How is helping others part of a disciplined spiritual life?
 12. Who specifically will you reach out to help today to show your faith in action?
- **Bonus Journaling Question:** How do faith and works go together in your life?

Introduction

1. *Patch Adams* is a classic movie from 1998 starring Robin Williams in a dramatized version of the quest of Hunter “Patch” Adams to become a doctor offering free health care to the needy.
 - a. The movie begins with Patch committing himself into a mental institution where he ultimately realizes that he has a gift of connecting with people and helping them heal through humor.
 - b. He sets his mind on becoming a medical doctor, but he didn’t look like a doctor—He wore wild, colorful clothes—or act like a doctor—He called patients by their names, got to know them, and made them laugh.
 - c. The dean of the Medical College of Virginia (VCU) and some of his peers judged Patch on externals: his appearance; his “excessive happiness;” his wanting to make contact with patients as human beings.
 - d. In spite of the obstacles placed in his path, Patch not only succeed in becoming a doctor but graduated near the top of his class.
 - e. Patch started the Gesundheit Institute in Pocahontas County, near my home in WV, to offer free health care to people in need.
 - f. Patch has dedicated himself and his institute to revolutionizing health care delivery by replacing greed and competition with generosity, compassion and interdependence.
 - g. Funding such a dream has always been an issue, but Patch continues to build his dream hospital, to teach, to heal, and to do it all while laughing.
2. We must not judge others on external appearances, and we must treat everyone with grace.
3. **Read James 2:1-13.**
4. Warren Wiersbe writes, “Not only is the mature Christian patient in testing (James 1), but he also practices the truth. This is the theme of James 2. Immature people talk about their beliefs, but the mature person lives his faith. Hearing God’s Word (James 1:22-25) and talking about God’s Word can never substitute for doing God’s Word.” (*Be Mature*, 71)
5. “One of the tests of the reality of our faith is how we treat other people. Can we pass the test? (*Be Mature*, 80).

A. Don’t Show Favoritism (1-4)

1. What is “Favoritism” (NIV) or “respect of persons” (KJV)?
 - a. The Greek word *prosopolemphia* means literally “to receive by face.”
 - b. We are tempted to judge the worth of others based on externals: clothing, cars, wealth, color, beauty.
 - c. In my Father’s Day devotional book today, I read an illustration about a quartz geode. “Geodes are peculiar rocks. On the outside, they appear drab, ugly, unremarkable. The outer shell of a geode looks like the most boring rock you have ever seen. Crack one open, however, and you will soon realize that the outside is totally unlike the inside. Hidden within the nondescript shell of a geode is a stunning display of sparkling crystals. The inside twinkles and radiates with wonder” (*The Lord Is My Rock*, 44).
 - d. People sometimes are like geodes. They may not look like much on the outside but have great beauty inside. As the old saying goes, “You can’t judge a book by its cover.” But we often do.
2. We make a mistake when we judge based on externals.
 - a. This is how the world judged Jesus.
 - b. Isaiah said of the suffering servant, whom we identify as Jesus, “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isa 53:2b-3).
3. James gave an illustration of a man wearing “fine/goodly” (Gk., *lampra*) clothes who was treated with honor by the congregation and, in contrast, of a man wearing “shabby/vile” (Gk., *rupara*) clothes who was treated with disdain.

- a. We judge poorly when we base our judgments on external appearance alone.
- b. King Saul was described as “. . . an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others” (1 Sa 9:2b).
 - 1) “But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’” (1 Sa 16:7).
 - 2) Based on what they saw on the outside, the Israelites joyfully received Saul as their king.
 - 3) However, Saul lacked godly character; his internal faults were soon revealed; and he was rejected by God as king over Israel.
- c. God sent Samuel to find the new king among the sons of Jesse.
 - 1) When Samuel saw Eliab, an impressive looking young man, he thought he was the new king.
 - 2) “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but he Lord looks at the heart’” (1 Sa 16:7).
 - 3) And so the Lord led Samuel to anoint David, the youngest son of Jesse, as king.
- d. Sometimes good things do come in good packages: David was described as “ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features” (1 Sa 16:12b).
- e. But again, what is on the outside is not as important as what is on the inside.

B. God Favors the Poor (5-7)

1. James’ focus verses 5-7 is treating the poor with compassion.
2. James interrogates those who have shown partiality in their treatment of others.
 - a. He asks a series of questions all of which anticipate a positive answer.
 - b. His questions lead to conclusions that mistreatment of the poor is inconsistent with faith in Christ.
3. God shows grace to all people, but he gives special attention to the poor.
 - a. God loves an underdog, especially one who depends on him.
 - 1) “we [Israel in Egypt] cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression” (Dt 26:7).
 - 2) “But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you’ you have been the helper of the orphan” (Ps 10:14).
 - 3) Jesus’ first sermon in Lk 4:16-21, which is based on Isaiah 61:1-2, focused on the poor and lowly.
 - b. The rich and powerful face God’s judgment, if their walk is evil.
 - 1) “He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked” (Isa 11:3-4).
 - 2) Mary’s Song in Lk 1:52-53 states, “He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.”
 - c. There is a reversal of fortunes in God’s kingdom. Read Lk 6:20-26.
 - d. God exalts in working in and through those who are weak, poor, and helpless to do mighty things which bring glory to himself and mercy to His people.
4. How interesting that the implication of James’ teaching here is that the ones who are mistreating the Diaspora Jews (i.e., exploiting, dragging into court, blaspheming the name) are the ones to whom they show favor.
 - a. Verse 2:6a, “But you have dishonored the poor,” goes with end of verse 2:5
 - b. The Messianic community has it wrong. They honor the rich and overlook the poor.
 - c. The rich (Gk., *plousioi*) are not members of the community but instead
 - 1) “exploiting” (Gk., *katadynasteuousin*)– taking a strong stand against them, overpower them physically, economically, socially, and legally.
 - 2) “dragging you into court” (Gk., *elkousin*)
 - 3) “blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong” (Gk., *blasphemousin*)
 - d. Is it not still the same in our world? Often, we honor and lift up those who are rich, powerful, in the “in crowd,” in places of fame simply because of who they are or what they have. We don’t look at who they are or what they really stand for. We only look at the outside and fail to see the evil core. We again judge the book wrongly by its cover.

5. When it comes down to it, everyone is weak and poor before the God of the universe.
 - a. No matter who we are in the world or what we have, we are nothing before God.
 - b. We cannot save ourselves from sin and death.
6. As we humble ourselves before the Lord and realize our own weaknesses and inadequacies, we are on the verge of seeing God work mightily within and through us.
7. As James concludes, “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him” (Jm 2:5)?

C. Be Gracious to All (8-13)

1. So, how can we avoid discriminating against and judging others that causes us to sin?
2. James says we must keep the “royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (8)
 - a. For James, the “royal law” refers to the Ten Commandments as reinterpreted by Jesus in Mt 22:37-40.
 - b. The key word in the royal law is love—love for God and love for others.
3. How does showing favoritism indicate you are not keeping the royal law found in Scripture to “love your neighbor as yourself”?
 - a. Showing favoritism makes us “lawbreakers” (Gk., *harmatia* = “missing the mark, sin”).
 - b. In verses 10-11, James defines this term, lawbreaker.
4. James picks two sins from the Ten Commandments to illustrate lawbreaking.
 - a. “You shall not commit adultery . . . You shall not murder.”
 - b. Why does he pick these two?
 - c. He may use these sins figuratively. The Messianic community is not guilty of adultery, turning away from God, but is guilty of murdering the poor by their lack of attention to them.
 - d. We break the law of love when we show favoritism or partiality.
5. His point here is that when we break the command when we break one law, we break them all. We have ruptured the love relationship with God and others, and we face judgment except for God’s grace.
6. We must “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom . . .” (12).
 - a. Law normally brings rules, limitations, restrictions, and burdens.
 - b. Why does James refer to it as “the law that gives freedom” or “the law of liberty”? (12)
 - c. Wiersbe responds, “For one thing, when we obey God’s law, it frees us from sin and enables us to walk in liberty (Ps 119:45). Also, *law prepares us for liberty*. A child must be under rules and regulations because he is not mature enough to handle the decisions and demands of life. He is give *outward discipline* so that he might develop *inward discipline*, and one day be free of rules. Liberty does not mean license. License (doing whatever I want to do_ is the worst kind of bondage. Liberty means the freedom to be all that I can be in Jesus Christ. License is confinement; liberty is fulfillment” (Be Mature, 79)
 - d. We are free to obey God’s law from an inward compulsion and not from an outward obligation.
 - e. We love others because God loves us not because we must love them in order to be righteous or saved but because we want to love them in response to the grace and love of God for us in Christ Jesus.
 - f. We don’t deserve it, but God brought us freedom through the love He lavished on us at the cross.
7. Here is the law/rule that gives freedom: “Mercy (Gk., *eleos* = unmerited favor) triumphs over judgment (Gk., *kriseos*)” (Jm 2:13b)!
 - a. This is the law under which we are to speak and to act—show mercy not judgment to others.
 - b. Instead of judging on externals, we must show mercy to all even as God has shown mercy to us.
 - c. In turn we must grow in godly character on the inside by showing mercy to others—those who are different than we are, even those whom the world says don’t deserve it.
 - d. We must give them a break; seek to love them rather than shun them; remember that it is in weakness that God’s power and love are perfected.
8. Thank God that His mercy to us in Jesus triumphs over the judgment we all deserve.
9. What are some of the ways a believer in Christ can show mercy to others?
10. How does remembering that you and other believers are all part of the same family—and all serve the same Lord—help you to deal with favoritism or prejudice?