

DG Guide: James 2:1-13

Opening Prayer

Father, as we gather around your word, help us kill our sinful instinct to judge the people around us. Remind us again that we now see differently to the world. Open our hearts to be shaped by what we read in your word. Amen.

Ice Breaker (5 mins)

Think back to a time you walked into a room and immediately felt sized up - or a time you caught yourself sizing someone else up. What cues were you using?

(Keep it light - the point is just to surface the fact that we all do this. No right answers.)

Key Takeaways (10 mins)

Use these to recap the sermon before diving into discussion. Read them aloud or summarise in your own words.

1. **Favouritism is a diagnostic, not just a behaviour.** James calls partiality "judges with evil thoughts" - the Greek word for evil (poneros) points to something rotten at the root, not just a lapse in manners. The problem runs deeper than our surface thoughts.
2. **God's economy is inverted.** James says God chose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. The people the world overlooks are the very people God has positioned at the centre of his story.
3. **The royal law forbids partiality.** "Love your neighbour as yourself" is not a general encouragement - it's a law that covers every neighbour. You can't honour it for some people and suspend it for others.
4. **Law is a whole cloth.** Break it at one point and you've broken it. Showing partiality isn't a minor exception to an otherwise good life - it puts you on the wrong side of the law entirely.
5. **Mercy triumphs over judgment - and that's the gospel.** The warning is real: those who show no mercy receive no mercy. But underneath it is the good news that we are a community of people who have received favour we didn't deserve. That's the foundation for how we treat everyone else.

Discussion Questions (20 mins)

1. Understanding the diagnosis

James calls the judgement in verses 2-4 "evil" - not just unfortunate, not just socially awkward, but evil. What does that word do to how you think about favouritism? Does it feel like an overstatement, or does it land differently when you sit with it?

2. God's economy

In verses 5-7, James points out that God has specifically chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. Why do you think God's priorities run so differently to ours? What does it tell us about what God values - and what does it say about us when our instincts go in the opposite direction?

3. The royal law

The "royal law" is simply: love your neighbour as yourself. James argues that if you're showing partiality, you're breaking that law; even if you'd describe yourself as a basically good person. How does that logic land for you? Why can't love be applied selectively and still count as love?

4. In our room

Don's question was essentially: what does "being a doer of the word" look like on a Sunday morning in the room where we all gather? Where do you think our own community might be doing this without noticing - the subtle ways we warm to some people and cool toward others?

5. The gospel underneath

The Big Idea from the sermon was this: "The church that plays favourites has forgotten what it is - a community of people saved by a God who showed us favour we didn't deserve." How does remembering your own undeserved welcome change how you treat the person next to you; whether they feel like a natural fit or not?

Personal Reflection (10 mins)

Give people 3-4 minutes of quiet before sharing.

Think honestly about the people you tend to move toward in a room - and the people you tend to overlook. It doesn't have to be dramatic. It might be about how someone's dressed, how they speak, what job they have, what suburb they're from, whether they seem put-together or struggling.

Ask yourself: who in my life am I most likely to treat as background? And what would it look like to actually see them the way God does?

After a few minutes, invite anyone who wants to share one honest observation - not a confession session, just a gentle naming.

Group Commitments (5 mins)

Read this together as a group, or invite each person to complete the sentence aloud:

"Because God showed me favour I didn't deserve, this week I will pay attention to ___ and treat them the way I'd want to be treated."

Closing Prayer

Lord, you chose what the world considers weak and lowly, and you did it on purpose. Forgive us for the moments we've sorted people by the world's categories instead of yours. Give us eyes to see every person we encounter this week as someone you love, someone you may have chosen, someone worth our attention. Amen.

Leader Notes

Key themes to hold in discussion:

The sermon has two layers running simultaneously - a diagnostic (this is evil, this is lawbreaking) and a pastoral foundation (you are recipients of mercy). Make sure discussion doesn't collapse into either pure self-criticism or comfortable reassurance. Both tensions are real and productive.

On class and status conversations:

If the discussion surfaces honest observations about class, wealth, or appearance, receive them without embarrassment. James is explicitly talking about a rich person and a poor person walking in the same door. That's not abstract. If someone in your group has felt overlooked at church - or has been the one doing the overlooking - that's exactly the conversation James wants you to have. Hold it gently, but don't deflect it.

Connection to the Attributes of God series (March 2026):

Don mentioned this sermon goes deeper than the treatment of the same passage in the March Attributes series. If someone raises that connection, it's worth noting: the March sermon established who God is; this sermon asks what that means for how we live in community. Same passage, different angle - and intentionally so.

Pastoral situations that may surface:

- People who have genuinely felt overlooked or unwelcome at church (or in a previous church)
- People carrying guilt about their own class-based or appearance-based instincts
- Anyone who has been on the receiving end of being treated as lesser

Receive all of this as the word doing its work. Don't rush past uncomfortable moments.

Alternative Discussion Prompts

A. James says the poor person has been "dishonoured" (v.6). What's the difference between not giving someone attention and actively dishonoring them? Where do you think that line sits in everyday life?

B. The passage ends with "mercy triumphs over judgment." If you were the person walking in off the street - underdressed, uncertain, not sure if they belong - what would mercy actually look and feel like from the people already in the room?

C. Don opened by asking if anyone has a favourite child. The joke lands because we know it's not supposed to be true. What do you think makes favouritism feel more acceptable in a church context than in a family one & should it?