LIFE GROUP LESSON

THE BOOK OF JAMES - FAITH WORKS - WEEK OF OCT. 25

Goal: To understand that Justifying Grace qualifies us for heaven but Sanctifying Grace makes us fit for heaven.

Opening Discussion:

- Think about the people you enjoy hanging out with and spending time with. Most likely it is people who make you feel good or add value to you. Why does it take grace to step out of our comfort zones and obey God by serving others who may not be like us?
- We're all wired differently and have our preferences. The things we like to do often cause us to guard our schedules so as not to interfere with our favorite things and people. But as with Abraham, the Lord may call us to leave and go to the land he will show us. In other words, leave the familiar and embrace the new. What are you willing to offer on the altar for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom?

Introduction

Faith and favoritism are not synonymous. Faith may mean giving up what we would otherwise gravitate toward. Though we have our preferences, our favorite people, activities that engage us, and the Lord understands that, faith moves us to step out and love and serve others who are different … individuals who may at times be difficult to love. Faith moves us to walk across the road and lend a helping hand to someone in trouble. Scripture says God has no favorites (Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25). However, James does say the Lord favors the humble (James 4:6; also 1 Peter 5:5). Pride distances us from God, and it is prideful to favor the wealthy over the impoverished. James says stop, assess your motives, and be wary of looking down on anyone.

Read James 2:1-13

It's interesting that in these verses, James refers twice to the Beatitudes, bedrock truths from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. He says, "There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you" (v13) reminds us of: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7 NKJV).

James says, "Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him?" (v5) reminding us of: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3 NKJV).

Discussion:

Note James' closing remarks in ch 1 and his opening words in ch 2, tie together:

"Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you" (James 1:27).

"My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?" (James 2:1).

- We want to be associated with wealth and status. And our tendency is to gravitate toward those we think 'can do something for me'. Why do we tend to shy away from people 'who have nothing to offer'? Why is wrong in the sight of God? How can we guard against this?

James draws the image of fancy clothes, expensive jewelry vs the dirty clothes of the poor as he speaks to socioeconomic status. He reminded the rich in chapter one that they "will fade away with all of their achievements" (James 1:10-11) and now he says '…Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court?' (v6). Perhaps you have experienced wealth, poverty, repentance, humility. Why is it wrong to rank one another according to our so-called socioeconomic status? Refer to the following Scriptures and note what Jesus says about demonstrating genuine faith:

Matthew 9:9-13 Luke 14:12-14 Luke 19:1-10 Matthew 25:31-46

Faith and action go together. You can't have one without the other. Once we come to faith in Christ, our faith is then sustained as we live into what we say we beleive. "Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works" (James 2:26). Just as Abraham's faith and action worked together, and his faith was made complete by what he did, our faith is made complete (mature) by what we do ... our actions and deeds (Revelation 22:12). So if we see a brother or sister in need we must provide. If God calls us to leave our 'Ur of the Chaldeans' and 'depart as the Lord instructs' like Abraham, then we get moving.

Read James 2:14-26

- God may very well call us to offer our ‘Isaac’ on the mountain. When He does, like Abraham we must believe that the Lord will provide the ram in Isaac’s place (see Genesis 22:1-14; Hebrews 11:17-19). Have you experienced a time when the Lord called you to sacrifice your ‘Isaac’ on the altar? How did God show up?

In Closing

Having four children within a five-year time span, there were times I simply couldn’t keep up. One of our daughters would often call me out for not living into what I said. Even as a preschooler, she would remind me: “Mommy, you said …!” And in her defense, she was right. There were times I didn’t have the energy to follow through on discipline, or I would ‘forget’ to enforce a rule I had issued in haste. I recall one day as she challenged me yet again, and just about the time I was ready to lay into her, the Lord stopped me by showing me a glimpse of my little girl as a young adult. The Holy Spirit said: “Your daughter will soon be a young woman. Take care of how you respond. Respect her as my daughter now.” What a difference that revelation made with how I saw all my children.

The Lord wants us to see one another through heaven’s eyes. He sees each of us for who we are. But the Lord also sees who can become in Christ. And this goes for the difficult people in our lives, the ones who are hard to love or deal with. This goes for the rich. This goes for the poor. All people are valued by God our Father, and he sent his only Son into the world to save all people. All who call upon the Name of the Lord will be saved. We must believe that and live it! Perhaps one way we can ensure that we employ our faith through action and good works is by being humble and respecting all people. Jesus said:

> “Beware that you don’t look down on any of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father” (Matthew 18:10).

One Year Bible Readings

Oct. 25: Jer. 48:1-49:22, 2 Timothy 4:1-22, Psalm 95:1-96:13, Prov. 26:9-12
Oct. 26: Jer.49:23-50:46, Titus 1:1-16, Psalm 97:1-98:9, Proverbs 26:13-16
Oct. 27: Jer. 51:1-53, Titus 2:1-15, Psalm 99:1-9, Proverbs 26:17
Oct. 28: Jer. 51:54-52:34, Titus 3:1-15, Psalm 100:1-5, Proverbs 26:18-19
Oct. 29: Lam. 1:1-2:22, Philemon 1:1-25, Psalm 101:1-8, Proverbs 26:20
Oct. 30: Lam. 3:1-66, Hebrews 1:1-14, Psalm 102:1-28, Proverbs 26:21-22
Oct. 31: Lam. 4:1-5:22, Hebrews 2:1-18, Psalm 103:1-22, Proverbs 26:23

THE BOOK OF JAMES

faith WORKS

Text: James 2

Plain Truth:

_____ grace _____ us for heaven but _____ grace makes us _____ for heaven.

1. _____ Love
2. Active compassion over mere words
3. Faith is made _____ by fairh and _____ working _____!

How to develop a Faith that is Alive and not Dead:

1. Offer _____
2. Heal a _____ and meet a _____.
3. Renounce _____ grace and affirm _____ grace that goes the _____ mile.

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