



DIGGING
DEEPER
SERIES

HEAR AND DO

An Inductive Study in James

Formerly titled *Small Group Studies: James*

**Barry
Shafer**



James 2

- 1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.
- 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.
- 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"
- 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?
- 5 Listen, my dear brothers: 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?
- 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?
- 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?
- 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.
- 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.
- 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.
- 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.
- 12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,
- 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!
- 14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?
- 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.
- 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?
- 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
- 18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.
- 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.
- 20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?
- 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?
- 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.
- 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

- 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.
- 25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?
- 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Teach It Descriptions

These descriptions will help you know which Teach It guide is best suited for your group.

- **Middle School:** This session is intended for grades six through eight and is appropriate for a small-group setting or Sunday school.
- **High School 1:** Of the two high school guides, High School 1 is more casual in its approach and is appropriate for high school Sunday school or students who aren't sure how committed they want to be to Bible study and discipleship. It's intended for grades nine through 12, but with a nod toward nine and 10. This guide is also appropriate for the larger teaching settings.

LARGE-GROUP OPTION:

In the High School 1 Teach It guides, look for sidebars with the label **Large-Group Option** for ideas on how to lead the session in a large group.

- **High School 2:** This session is intended for the high school student who is looking for depth and has perhaps “signed up” for a deeper experience. It's intended for grades nine through 12, but with a nod toward 11 and 12.
- **College Age:** This session is geared for young adults, whether in college or working a job. The content does assume some spiritual initiative or curiosity on the part of the students.
- **Coffeehouse:** Just what it says—a lighter approach for the coffeehouse or café setting, high school or college age. A couple of suggestions: napkins can make great journal pages, and your servers will appreciate a good tip.



1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

- the James 2 Scripture sheet
- the student journal page for Session 4
- his or her own Bible, pen, and notebook

You'll also need—

- a whiteboard and markers
- a pack of colored pencils (at least three colors per student)

2. Session Intro

GOALS OF SESSION 4

As students experience this session, they will—

- discover how much God despises favoritism.
- evaluate whether favoritism of any kind has crept into their lives.
- put specific steps in motion that will help your student ministry not only avoid favoritism but be a place of affirmation for all.

PRAYER

After students have gathered, open by praying that through this session they will get a sense of the things that break the heart of God, and that their hearts will begin to break for those things as well.

OPEN

Personal Faves

After praying, distribute materials and jump in with these questions:

What's your favorite color?

What's your favorite cartoon?

What's your favorite fast food?

What's your favorite candy?

Who's your favorite superhero?

What's your favorite ice cream flavor?

What's your favorite holiday?

What's your favorite day of the week?

What's your favorite music style?

What's your favorite song?

Who's your favorite parent?

Who's your favorite person in this group?

The last two questions may catch your students off guard. Whether you have them give answers to those two questions or not, use the following questions to transition into the subject of the session: favoritism.

Why are the last two questions dangerous?

In most cases it's not appropriate to have a favorite in these categories. To choose a favorite parent or person in this group could bring on a bad set of consequences and hurt feelings.

How could answering those questions get you into trouble?

What does it mean to play favorites or show favoritism?

If you need to define favoritism, it is "the act of giving special attention or treatment or unfair advantages to a person or group."

When is it good to have favorites and when is it bad?

3. Digging In

Favoritism 101

James hits head-on the subject of playing favorites in James 2. Give students these instructions:

- 1. Read James 2:1-13 using your Scripture sheets.**
- 2. Use colored pencil to mark every mention of favoritism, the poor, and the rich.**
- 3. Use another color to mark every reference to the readers of James' letter. Look for the keyword *you*.**
- 4. Use a third color to mark every mention of God.**

In addition to using different colors, you may want your students to mark each with a symbol. Ask students to suggest symbols they could use. The plan may be as simple as underlining references to favoritism, circling references to James' readers, and drawing a cloud for God.

After about five minutes, ask students to look back at what they marked.

What instructions to the readers do you see?

Don't show favoritism (2:1).

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom (2:12).

What did you learn about favoritism?

We sin if we show favoritism (2:9).

What did you learn about God?

He has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom (2:5).

He has promised the kingdom to those who love him (2:5).

What conclusions can you draw about what's going on among James' readers?

They've insulted the poor (2:6).

They must be overlooking the poor and catering to the rich and influential—the very people who are apparently exploiting them (2:6).

James makes some strong statements about favoritism. Out of all these verses, which ones pack the most punch in motivating his readers—including us—to stop playing favorites?

Let the discussion be open-ended, but see if you can guide your group to agree on these two statements:

“As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism” (2:1).

“But if you show favoritism, you sin” (2:9).

4. Taking It Inward

Of Course You Don't Discriminate...or Do You?

Process the info you just uncovered with this question:

In our ministry, how are we showing favoritism?

Let students discuss the question for a couple of minutes before saying—

If James were writing this letter with our group in mind, how might he have worded verses 2-4? Take a minute to paraphrase these verses so they apply specifically to our group. Write your paraphrase in the space provided on your journal pages. For example, instead of saying, “a man wearing fine clothes,” you might say, “a very popular eighth-grader.”

After a few minutes, ask for volunteers to share their versions of James 2:2-4. Then ask—

For us, who might *the poor man in shabby clothes* be?

If students already mentioned examples as they read their versions of James 2:2-4, list these on the whiteboard. Brainstorm other poor-man examples and add them to the list.

5. Digging Deeper



The Poor—Near and Dear to God's Heart

Share with your students that the subject of the poor is addressed in nearly every book of the Bible. For the next few minutes your students will look at a few of these passages during a personal retreat with God's Word. Encourage them to keep in mind the examples they just discussed as they read about the poor in these passages. Explain—

- 1. Find places of solitude where you can have a mini-retreat with God. You'll be reading what other passages in the Bible have to say about the poor.**
- 2. Take your Bibles, journal pages, and pens.**
- 3. You'll be doing the Digging Deeper exercise on your journal page, “The Poor—Near and Dear to God's Heart.”**

6. Taking It Inward

The Futility of Favoritism

After about 15 minutes, regroup and discuss questions like these:

What insights or conclusions did you come up with regarding ministering to the poor?

How have you been personally guilty of showing favoritism against the poor?

Of course, people can be poor in areas other than money. How have you shown favoritism against people who are poor in personality, popularity, or athletic ability?

Without naming names, give us an idea of how you've shown favoritism.

How have we as a group been guilty of showing favoritism? How should we describe our actions? What's the best way to change this in our group?

Point out that it would be easy to dismiss favoritism as a minor oversight (corrected by trying not to do it again) or a mistake (corrected by apologizing and fixing the mistake). But James calls it a sin (2:9), which suggests it's best corrected through repentance and forgiveness.

7. Wrapping It Up

Thus Saith the Lord: "No Cliques!"

Ask—

As a group, what steps do we need to take to repent (confess and then do a 180-degree turn) of the favoritism we've shown?

What are some ongoing steps we can take to avoid favoritism and accept as God's favorite everyone who has contact with our student ministry?

Here are some suggestions:

- Implement a follow-up effort for all first-time guests. The program might include home visits, personal invitations to activities, free Bibles, CDs or candy bars, or other innovative ideas.*
- Train students to be aware of others who are quiet, introverted, or alone. Help them develop skills to initiate conversations, to be inclusive, and to introduce kids to new friends.*
- Teens who are blessed with leadership skills, extroverted personalities, and enthusiasm can form a team dedicated to helping newcomers and guests be accepted and integrated into the larger group.*
- Eat lunch with someone you know from the group but don't regularly hang out with at school.*

Before closing in prayer, remind your students that these activities are not only for the sake of the group; they're for the sake of the gospel. Close the session by encouraging students to continue thinking of ways in which they—individually or as a group—have shown favoritism. Challenge them to repent of their sins and ask forgiveness from those they've slighted.



JOURNAL PAGE MIDDLE SCHOOL SESSION 4

TAKING IT INWARD

Of Course You Don't Discriminate...or Do You?

Rewrite the following passage in your own words so it applies specifically to your group:

"Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (James 2:2-4)

DIGGING DEEPER



The Poor—Near and Dear to God's Heart

As you read the following passages, write down everything you learn—using as much detail as possible—about ministering to the poor.

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Leviticus 19:15

Zechariah 7:8-12

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Luke 4:18-19

Luke 12:29-34

WHAT THE FIRST CHRISTIANS SAY ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Acts 10:1-2

Galatians 2:9-10

WHAT YOU SAY ABOUT THE SUBJECT

What conclusions can you make about how important ministering to the poor is to God?

How do your priorities compare with God's priorities?



1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

- the James 2 Scripture sheet
- the student journal page for Session 4
- his or her own Bible, pen, and notebook

You'll also need—

- a whiteboard and markers
- colored pencils (at least three colors per student)
- optional: video interviews of students sharing their favorite things

2. Session Intro

GOALS OF SESSION 4

As students experience this session, they will—

- discover how much God despises favoritism.
- evaluate whether favoritism of any kind has crept into their lives.
- put specific steps in motion to help your student ministry not only avoid favoritism, but be a place of affirmation for all.

PRAYER

After students have gathered, open by praying that through this session they will get a sense of the things that break the heart of God, and that their hearts will begin to break for those things as well.

OPEN

Personal Faves

Jump into the session with these questions:

What's your favorite current TV show?

What's your favorite old show (rerun or off-the-air)?

What's your favorite snack food?

Who's your favorite person in this group?

The last question may catch your students off guard. Whether you have them answer that one or not, use the following question to transition into the subject of the session: favoritism.

When is it good to have favorites and when is it bad?

VIDEO/LARGE-GROUP OPTION:

Before your session, create a video asking students the questions above, and open the session by showing the video. Feel free to add more questions. A variation: interview school teachers, principals, pastoral staff. Make the last question inappropriate for each person being interviewed (e.g., ask a principal to name her favorite teacher, a teacher to name his favorite student, etc.) In all situations, cut or edit the video so no one goes on record actually naming a favorite from that question. Just record the dumbfounded looks from their being asked to name a favorite student or person.

3. Digging In

Favoritism 101

James hits head-on the subject of playing favorites in James 2. Give students these instructions:

1. **Read James 2:1-13 using your Scripture sheets.**
2. **Use colored pencil to mark every mention of favoritism, the poor, and the rich.**
3. **Use another color to mark every reference to the readers of James' letter. Look for the keyword you.**
4. **Use a third color to mark every mention of God.**

In addition to using different colors, you may want your students to mark each with a symbol. Ask students to suggest symbols they could use. The plan may be as simple as underlining references to favoritism, circling references to James' readers, and drawing a cloud for God.

After about five minutes, ask the students to look back at what they marked.

What instructions to the readers do you see?

Don't show favoritism (2:1).

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom (2:12).

What did you learn about favoritism?

We sin if we show favoritism (2:9).

What did you learn about God?

He has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom (2:5).

He has promised the kingdom to those who love him (2:5).

What conclusions can you draw about what's going on among James' readers?

They've insulted the poor (2:6).

They must be overlooking the poor and catering to the rich and influential—the very people who are apparently exploiting them (2:6).

James makes some strong statements about favoritism. Out of all these verses, which ones pack the most punch in motivating his readers—including us—to stop playing favorites?

Let the discussion be open-ended, but see if you can guide your group to agree on these two statements:

“As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism” (2:1).

“But if you show favoritism, you sin” (2:9).

4. Taking It Inward

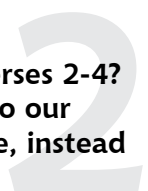
Of Course You Don't Discriminate...or Do You?

Help the group process the info they just uncovered with these questions:

In our student ministry, how are we showing favoritism?

Let students discuss the question for a couple of minutes before saying—

If James were writing this letter with our group in mind, how might he have worded verses 2-4? Take a minute to write your own paraphrase of these verses so they apply specifically to our group. Write your paraphrase in the space provided on your journal pages. For example, instead of saying, “a man wearing fine clothes,” you might say, “a senior everybody likes.”



After a few minutes, ask for volunteers to share their versions of James 2:2-4. Then ask—

For us, who might *the poor man in shabby clothes* be?

If students already mentioned examples as they read their versions of James 2:2-4, list these on the whiteboard. Brainstorm other poor-man examples and add them to the list.

5. Digging Deeper

The Poor—Near and Dear to God’s Heart

Share with your students that the subject of the poor is addressed in nearly every book of the Bible. For the next few minutes your students will look at a few of these passages. Encourage them to keep in mind the examples they just discussed as they read about the poor in these passages.

Divide your group into three smaller groups and give each group one of the following three sets of Bible passages. All the passages are printed on the journal pages, so you’ll need to let students know which set they’ll be reading. Ask each group to read their assigned passages in solitude and then work as a group to build a profile of what their source (God, Jesus, early Christians) said about the subject of the poor.

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT—

Leviticus 19:15
Zechariah 7:8-12
Deuteronomy 15:7-11

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT—

Luke 4:18-19
Luke 12:29-34
Luke 14:12-14

WHAT THE FIRST CHRISTIANS SAY ABOUT THE SUBJECT—

Acts 10:1-2
Acts 24:17
Romans 15:25-26
Galatians 2:9-10

6. Taking It Inward

The Futility of Favoritism

After about 15 minutes, call the groups back together and ask each group to tell the larger group what they found. Ask—

What insights or conclusions did you come up with regarding ministering to the poor?

Then ask for a few volunteers to respond to these questions:

How have you been personally guilty of showing favoritism against the poor?

Of course, people can be poor in areas other than money. How have you shown favoritism against people who are poor in personality, popularity, or athletic ability?

Without naming names, give us an idea of how you've shown favoritism.

How have we as a group been guilty of showing favoritism? How should we describe our actions? What are some good ways to correct our course?

Point out that it would be easy to dismiss favoritism as a minor oversight (corrected by trying not to do it again) or a mistake (corrected by apologizing and fixing the mistake). But James calls it a sin (2:9), which suggests it's best corrected through repentance and forgiveness.

7. Wrapping It Up

Thus Saith the Lord: "No Cliques!"

Ask—

As a group, what steps do we need to take to repent of the favoritism we've shown?

What are some ongoing steps we can take to avoid favoritism and accept as God's favorite everyone who has contact with our student ministry?

Here are some suggestions:

- Identify a poor church or student ministry in your community that could benefit from your support. (Remember poverty isn't limited to finances.) Work with them to develop a way of supporting their ministry, perhaps by raising funds, tithing 10 percent of your group's regular fundraising efforts, giving time or other resources to enable them to offer an event or pursue a project.*
- Implement a follow-up effort for all first-time guests to your student ministry. The program might include home visits, personal invitations to activities, free Bibles, CDs or candy bars, or other innovative ideas.*
- Train students to be aware of others who are quiet, introverted, or alone. Help them develop skills to initiate conversations, to be inclusive, and to introduce kids to new friends.*
- Teens who are blessed with leadership skills, extroverted personalities, and enthusiasm can form a team dedicated to helping newcomers and guests be accepted and integrated into the larger group.*

Before closing in prayer, remind your students that these activities are not only for the sake of the group; they're for the sake of the gospel. Close your session by encouraging students to continue thinking of ways in which they—individually or as a group—have shown favoritism. Challenge them to repent of their sins and ask forgiveness from those they've slighted.



TAKING IT INWARD

Of Course You Don't Discriminate...or Do You?

Rewrite James 2:2-4 (see Scripture sheets) in your own words so it applies specifically to your group.

DIGGING DEEPER

The Poor—Near and Dear to God's Heart

As you read the following passages (the set you're given by your leader), write down everything you learn—using as much detail as possible—about ministering to the poor.

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Leviticus 19:15

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Deuteronomy 15:7-11

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT

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2. Session Intro

GOALS OF SESSION 4

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- evaluate whether favoritism of any kind has crept into their lives.
- put specific steps in motion to help your student ministry not only avoid favoritism, but be a place of affirmation for all.

PRAYER

After students have gathered, open by praying that through this session they will get a sense of the things that break the heart of God, and that their hearts will begin to break for those things as well.

OPEN

Personal Faves

Check in with group members on their applications from last week. Then jump into the session with these questions:

What's your favorite current TV show?

What's your favorite old show (rerun or off-the-air)?

What's your favorite snack food?

Who's your favorite person in this group?

The last question may catch them off guard. Whether you have them answer that one or not, use the following question to transition into the subject of the session: favoritism.

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What conclusions can you draw about what's going on among James' readers?

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Let the discussion be open-ended, but see if you can guide your group to agree on these two statements:

“As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism” (2:1).

“But if you show favoritism, you sin” (2:9).

4. Taking It Inward

Of Course You Don't Discriminate...or Do You?

Help the group process the info they just uncovered with these questions:

What are different ways believers might show favoritism?

Look down on those who practice the Christian faith differently.

Look down on those who don't follow the Christian faith.

What are ways a student ministry might show favoritism?

Cater to popular students in order to attract others.

Offer activities that appeal to athletes (basketball, Ultimate Frisbee, etc.).

2

How are we showing favoritism in our student ministry?

Let students discuss the question for a couple of minutes before saying—

If James were writing this letter with our group in mind, how might he have worded verses 2-4? Take a minute to paraphrase these verses so they apply specifically to our group. Write your paraphrase in the space provided on your journal pages. For example, instead of saying, “a man wearing fine clothes,” you might say, “a senior everybody likes.”

After a few minutes, ask for volunteers to share their versions of James 2:2-4. Then ask—

For us, who might *the poor man in shabby clothes* be?

If students already mentioned examples as they read their versions of James 2:2-4, list these on the whiteboard. Brainstorm other poor-man examples and add them to the list.

5. Digging Deeper



The Poor—Near and Dear to God’s Heart

Share with your students that the subject of the poor is addressed in nearly every book of the Bible. For the next few minutes, your students will look at a few of these passages during a personal retreat with God’s Word. Encourage them to keep in mind the examples they just discussed as they read about the poor in these passages. Explain—

- 1. Find places of solitude where you can have a mini-retreat with God. You’ll be reading what other passages in the Bible have to say about the poor.**
- 2. Take your Bibles, journal pages, and pens.**
- 3. You’ll be doing the Digging Deeper exercise on your journal pages, “The Poor—Near and Dear to God’s Heart.”**

6. Taking It Inward

The Futility of Favoritism

After about 15 minutes, call the group back together and discuss questions like these:

What insights or conclusions did you come up with regarding ministering to the poor?

How have you been personally guilty of showing favoritism against the poor?

In what ways, other than money, can people be poor?

People can have poverty of personality, popularity, athletic ability, positive life outlook, self-esteem, confidence, intelligence, and work ethic.

How have you shown favoritism against someone who is poor in an area besides money? For example, have you shown favoritism toward someone who has a positive personality versus someone who is constantly negative or has low self-esteem?

Without naming names, give us an idea of how you’ve shown favoritism.

How have we as a group been guilty of showing favoritism? What are some good ways to correct our course?

Point out that it would be easy to dismiss favoritism as a minor oversight (corrected by trying not to do it again) or a mistake (corrected by apologizing and fixing the mistake). But James calls it a sin (2:9), which suggests that it's best corrected through repentance and forgiveness.

7. Wrapping It Up

Thus Saith the Lord: "No Cliques!"

Ask:

As a group, what steps do we need to take to repent of the favoritism we've shown?

What are some ongoing steps we can take to avoid favoritism and accept as God's favorite everyone who has contact with our student ministry?

Here are some suggestions:

- Identify a poor church or student ministry in your community that could benefit from your support. (Remember poor isn't limited to finances.) Work with them to develop a way of supporting their ministry, perhaps by raising funds, tithing 10 percent of your group's regular fundraising efforts, or giving time or other resources to enable them to offer an event or pursue a project.*
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TAKING IT INWARD

Of Course You Don't Discriminate...or Do You?

Rewrite James 2:2-4 (see Scripture sheets) in your own words so it applies specifically to your group.

DIGGING DEEPER



The Poor—Near and Dear to God's Heart

As you read the following passages, write down everything you learn—using as much detail as possible—about ministering to the poor.

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Romans 15:25-26

Galatians 2:9-10

WHAT YOU SAY ABOUT THE SUBJECT

What conclusions are you coming to concerning the priority of ministering to the poor?

How do your priorities compare with God's priorities?



1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

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You'll also need—

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- put specific steps in motion to help your student ministry not only avoid favoritism, but be a place of affirmation for all.

PRAYER

After students have gathered, open by praying that through this session they will get a sense of the things that break the heart of God, and that their hearts will begin to break for those things as well.

OPEN

Personal Faves

Gather your students together, distribute materials, and open the session with prayer. Then jump into the session with these questions:

What's your favorite current TV show?

What's your favorite old show (rerun or off-the-air)?

What's your favorite snack food?

What's your favorite free-time activity?

What's your favorite quick-break (game, Web site) when you're working on the computer?

Who's your favorite person in this group?

The last question may catch students off guard. Whether you have them answer that one or not, use the following question to transition into the subject of the session: favoritism.

When is it good to have favorites and when is it bad?

3. DIGGING IN

Favoritism 101

James hits head-on the subject of playing favorites in James 2. Give students these instructions:

1. **Read James 2:1-13 using your Scripture sheets.**
2. **Use colored pencil to mark every mention of favoritism, the poor, and the rich.**
3. **Use another color to mark every reference to the readers of James' letter. Look for the keyword *you*.**
4. **Use a third color to mark every mention of God.**

In addition to using different colors, you may want your students to mark each with a symbol. Ask students to suggest symbols they could use. The plan may be as simple as underlining references to favoritism, circling references to James' readers, and drawing a cloud for God.

After about five minutes, ask the students to look back at what they marked.

What instructions to the readers do you see?

Don't show favoritism (2:1).

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom (2:12).

What did you learn about favoritism?

We sin if we show favoritism (2:9).

What conclusions can you draw about what's going on among James' readers?

They've insulted the poor (2:6).

They must be overlooking the poor and catering to the rich and influential—the very people who are apparently exploiting them (2:6).

James makes some strong statements about favoritism. Out of all these verses, which ones pack the most punch in motivating his readers—including us—to stop playing favorites?

Let the discussion be open-ended, but be sure to draw out these observations, and write them on the whiteboard:

“As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism” (2:1).

We've become judges with evil thoughts (2:4).

“But if you show favoritism, you sin” (2:9).

What's James saying when he says that showing favoritism makes us “judges with evil thoughts”?

When we play favorites we have elevated ourselves to judge and jury, and have determined one thing to be better than another. In most cases, that's God's job.

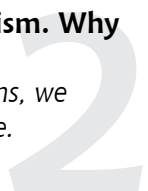
4. Taking It Inward

Of Course You Don't Discriminate...or Do You?

Help the group process the info they just uncovered with these questions:

James strongly states that because we're believers in Christ, we are not to show favoritism. Why do you think his plea to Christians is so strong?

James makes the point that God's view of the poor is very different from our earthly view. As Christians, we should recognize he has commanded us to love our neighbor, regardless of who that neighbor may be.



What are different ways believers might show favoritism?

Look down on those who practice the Christian faith differently.

Look down on those who don't follow the Christian faith.

Think less of those who have a different worship style or music preference.

Who in your life might be the man “wearing a gold ring and fine clothes” (James 2:2)? Whom do you tend to please and flatter for possible personal gain?

Who in your life might be “the poor man in shabby clothes” (James 2:2)? Whom do you tend to dismiss?

If students already mentioned examples as they read their versions of James 2:2-4, list these on the whiteboard. Brainstorm other poor-man examples and add them to the list.

5. Digging Deeper



The Poor—Near and Dear to God's Heart

Share with your students that the subject of the poor is addressed in nearly every book of the Bible. For the next few minutes, your students will look at a few of these passages during a personal retreat with God's Word. Encourage them to keep in mind the examples they just discussed as they read about the poor in these passages. Explain—

- 1. Find places of solitude where you can have a mini-retreat with God. You'll be reading what other passages in the Bible have to say about the poor.**
- 2. Take your Bibles, journal pages, and pens.**
- 3. Choose one of the three sets of Scripture listed in the Digging Deeper exercise on your journal page and follow the instructions.** (Note to leader: Make sure each set is chosen by at least one student.)

6. Taking It Inward

The Futility of Favoritism

After about 15 minutes, call the group back together and discuss questions like these:

What insights or conclusions did you come up with regarding ministering to the poor?

How have you been personally guilty of showing favoritism against the poor?

In what ways other than money can people be poor?

People can have poverty of personality, popularity, athletic ability, positive life outlook, self-esteem, confidence, intelligence, and work ethic.

How have you shown favoritism against someone who is poor in an area besides money? For example, have you shown favoritism to someone who has a positive personality over someone who is constantly negative or has low self-esteem?

Describe a time when you've been a victim of favoritism—a time when you felt someone was given an advantage over you.

Do Christians ever show favoritism in the political candidates they support?

What are some ways we subtly show favoritism?

Give students a couple of minutes to think about this question. Challenge them to let God's Spirit search their hearts and bring anything to mind.

Have you ever been personally guilty of showing favoritism? Without naming names, give us an idea of how you've shown favoritism.

How have we as a group been guilty of showing favoritism? How should we describe our actions? What are some good ways to correct our course?

Point out that it would be easy to dismiss favoritism as a minor oversight (corrected by trying not to do it again) or a mistake (corrected by apologizing and fixing the mistake). But James calls it a sin (2:9), which means it can only be corrected through repentance and forgiveness.

7. Wrapping It Up

Thus Saith the Lord: "No Favoritism!"

Ask—

What steps do we need to take to repent of the favoritism we've shown?

What are some ongoing steps we can take to avoid favoritism and accept as God's favorite everyone who has contact with our student ministry?

Here are some suggestions:

-Implement a follow-up effort for all first-time guests to your student ministry or church. The program might include home visits, personal invitations to activities, free Bibles, CDs or candy bars, or other innovative ideas.

-Train students to be aware of others who are quiet, introverted, or alone. Help them develop skills to initiate conversations, to be inclusive, and to introduce guests to new friends.

-Students who are blessed with leadership skills, extroverted personalities, and enthusiasm can form a team dedicated to helping newcomers and guests be accepted and integrated into your church or student ministry.

Before closing in prayer, remind your students that these activities are not only for the sake of the group; they're for the sake of the gospel. Close your session by encouraging students to continue thinking of ways in which they—individually or as a group—have shown favoritism. Challenge them to repent of their sins and ask forgiveness from those they've slighted.



DIGGING DEEPER



The Poor—Near and Dear to God's Heart

Choose one set of Bible verses below. As you read the passages, write down everything you learn, using as much detail as possible, about ministering to the poor.

1. WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Leviticus 19:15

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

Zechariah 7:8-12

2. WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Luke 4:18-19

Luke 12:29-34

Luke 14:12-14

3. WHAT THE FIRST CHRISTIANS SAY ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Acts 10:1-2

Acts 24:17

Romans 15:25-26

Galatians 2:9-10

WHAT YOU SAY ABOUT THE SUBJECT

What conclusions can you draw about the priority of ministering to the poor?

How do your priorities compare with God's priorities?



TEACH IT COFFEEHOUSE SESSION 4

1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

- his or her own Bible and pen
- optional: journal page for Session 4 (Using the student journal page is optional in the coffeehouse setting because table space may be limited.)

You'll also need—

- a pack of pencils with erasers
- optional: a few spare Bibles for students who've forgotten theirs

2. Session Intro

GOALS OF SESSION 4

As students experience this session, they will—

- discover how much God despises favoritism.
- evaluate whether favoritism of any kind has crept into their lives.
- put specific steps in motion to help your student ministry not only avoid favoritism, but be a place of affirmation for all.

PRAYER

After students have gathered, open by praying that through this session they will get a sense of the things that break the heart of God, and that their hearts will begin to break for those things as well.

OPEN

Personal Faves

Tell your students you are going to read the following questions. Ask them to choose one to respond to after you've read off the list.

What's your favorite TV show?

What's your favorite snack food?

What's your favorite color?

What's your favorite cartoon?

What's your favorite coffeehouse drink?

What's your favorite candy?

Who's your favorite superhero?

What's your favorite ice cream flavor?

What's your favorite day of the week?

What's your favorite music style?

What's your favorite song?

After each student has shared about one of their favorites, ask them to pick one of these questions to answer:

Who's your favorite parent?

Who's your favorite person in this group?


These last questions may catch students off guard. Whether you have them answer one or not, use the following question to transition into the subject of the session: favoritism

When is it good to have favorites and when is it bad?

3. Digging In

Favoritism 101

James hits head-on the subject of playing favorites in James 2. Give students these instructions:

1. **Read James 2:1-13 from your Bibles.**
2. **In pencil, underline references to favoritism, circle references to James' readers, and draw a cloud for God.** 
3. **If you are hesitant to mark in your Bibles, just write lightly so that the markings can be erased. If you're still not comfortable with it, that's okay. Just eyeball and remember any info about James' readers and God.**

After about five minutes, ask students to look back at what they marked.

What instructions to the readers do you see?

Don't show favoritism (2:1).

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom (2:12).

What did you learn about favoritism?

We sin if we show favoritism (2:9).

What did you learn about God?

He has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom (2:5).

He has promised the kingdom to those who love him (2:5).

What conclusions can you draw about what's going on among James' readers?

They've insulted the poor (2:6).

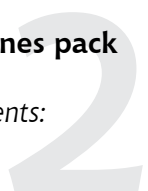
They must be overlooking the poor and catering to the rich and influential—the very people who are apparently exploiting them (2:6).

James makes some strong statements about favoritism. Out of all these verses, which ones pack the most punch in motivating his readers—including us—to stop playing favorites?

Let the discussion be open-ended, but see if you can guide your group to agree on these two statements:

"As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism" (2:1).

"But if you show favoritism, you sin" (2:9).



4. Taking It Inward

Of Course You Don't Discriminate...or Do You?

Help the group process the info they just uncovered with these questions:

In our student ministry, how are we showing favoritism?

Let students discuss the question for a couple of minutes before saying—

If James were writing this letter with our group in mind, how might he have worded verses 2-4? Take a minute to paraphrase these verses so they apply specifically to our group. Write your paraphrase in the space provided on your journal pages. For example, instead of saying, “a man wearing fine clothes,” you might say, “a senior everybody likes” or “someone who just bought a sweet car.”

Note: If you aren't using the optional journal pages, have them write their paraphrase on a napkin or other paper.

After a few minutes, ask for volunteers to share their versions of James 2:2-4. Then ask—

For us, who might the *poor man in shabby clothes* be?

5. Digging Deeper



The Poor—Near and Dear to God's Heart

Share with your students that the subject of the poor is addressed in nearly every book of the Bible. For the next few minutes, they're going to look at a few of these passages during a personal retreat with God's Word. Encourage them to keep in mind the examples they just discussed as they read about the poor in these passages.

Give your students a 10-minute retreat right there in the coffeehouse. Invite them to create some *virtual* solitude right where they're seated—blocking out noises, people, and other distractions as much as possible. Then ask them to read and meditate on the following Bible passages:

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Leviticus 19:15
Zechariah 7:8-12

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Luke 4:18-19
Luke 12:29-34

WHAT THE FIRST CHRISTIANS SAY ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Acts 10:1-2
Galatians 2:9-10

If you're using the optional journal pages, call your students' attention to the passages listed under Digging Deeper. Ask them to read the passages and write down everything they learn—using as much detail as possible—about ministering to the poor.

6. Taking It Inward

The Futility of Favoritism

After about 10 minutes, discuss questions like these:

What insights or conclusions did you come up with regarding ministering to the poor?

How do your priorities compare with God's priorities?

How have you been personally guilty of showing favoritism against the poor?

Of course, people can be poor in areas other than money. How have you shown favoritism against people who are poor in personality, popularity, or athletic ability?

Have you ever been personally guilty of showing favoritism? Without naming names, give us an idea of how you've shown favoritism.

Have you ever been a victim of favoritism—a time when you felt someone was given an advantage over you?

What are some ways we subtly show favoritism?

How have we as a group been guilty of showing favoritism? How should we describe our actions? What are some good ways to correct our course?

Point out that it would be easy to dismiss favoritism as a minor oversight (corrected by trying not to do it again) or a mistake (corrected by apologizing and fixing the mistake). But James calls it a sin (2:9), which means it can only be corrected through repentance and forgiveness.

7. Wrapping It Up

Thus Saith the Lord: "No Cliques!"

Ask—

As a group, what steps do we need to take to repent of the favoritism we've shown?

What are some ongoing steps we can take to avoid favoritism and accept as God's favorite everyone who has contact with our student ministry?

Here are some suggestions:

- Identify a poor church or student ministry in your community that could benefit from your support. (Remember poverty isn't limited to finances.) Work with them to develop a way of supporting their ministry, perhaps by raising funds, tithing 10 percent of your group's regular fundraising efforts, or giving time or other resources to enable them to offer an event or pursue a project.*
- Implement a follow-up effort for all first-time guests to your student ministry or church. The program might include home visits, personal invitations to activities, free Bibles, CDs or candy bars, or other innovative ideas.*
- Train students to be aware of others who are quiet, introverted, or alone. Help them develop skills to initiate conversations, to be inclusive, and to introduce guests to new friends.*
- Students who are blessed with leadership skills, extroverted personalities, and enthusiasm can form a team dedicated to helping newcomers and guests be accepted and integrated into your church or student ministry.*

If you meet in a coffeehouse or restaurant, offer this example as a way to change attitudes toward favoritism:

Do you tend to tip the bubbly server who might do an average job more than the introverted server who does an excellent job?

Discuss this question for a couple of minutes before you close. Then, whether or not you've been well-served at the place you're meeting, pull some money together and leave an extravagant tip. This may not necessarily illustrate favoritism, but is a great thing to do. Close your session by encouraging students to continue thinking of ways in which they—individually or as a group—have shown favoritism.

TAKING IT INWARD

Of Course You Don't Discriminate...or Do You?

Rewrite James 2:2-4 in your own words so it applies specifically to your group.

DIGGING DEEPER

The Poor—Near and Dear to God's Heart

As you read the following passages, write down everything you learn—using as much detail as possible—about ministering to the poor.

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Leviticus 19:15

Zechariah 7:8-12

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Luke 4:18-19

Luke 12:29-34

WHAT THE FIRST CHRISTIANS SAY ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Acts 10:1-2

Galatians 2:9-10

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TAKING IT INWARD

Of Course You Don't Discriminate...or Do You?

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