



Dear LifeGroup Leader,

This week I invite your LifeGroup to act as "Loving Your Neighbor Consultants". Maybe that's a funny term, but I like it because it's practical. A consultant comes into a business and takes stock. They look at the minutia of the daily behaviors and structure of a company, and find the quickest changes that result in the most growth.

James was like that. He looked for the practical behaviors that pulled the most weight, and helped the church shift into a different behavior so they could grow in Christ.

Good Bible study means not just understanding what James says, but also DOING what he did in our context.

That's why I want you to take stock together as a LifeGroup. What behaviors throughout the pattern of your weekly meeting might you change or adjust in order to be more loving, more equatable, more respectful, more empathetic, more compassionate? I'm guessing this might be tricky at first. It might be helpful for you to walk through different chunks of your time step-by-step, or to have some ideas to start the conversation with.

I pray as you do, God forms you more and more into His likeness, so that your life together might be a light in the world.

-Connor



(in)Formation

Forming our Attitudes

In our complicated lives, it's hard to find solutions. We often turn to something "new" in hopes that this will give us the clarity to move forward. Yet instead we can get mired in a sea of equal and frustrating paths. For James, the way forward is in raw practicality forged from Biblical idealism. Loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves comes down to practical changes in our attitudes: Don't show favoritism, don't value others based on appearances, get to know the character of those around you, and view others with mercy.

FOCAL POINT: Living by a Biblical idealism means making practical, nitty-gritty changes in our attitudes, so that we live from a communal, rather than individualistic narrative.



Getting Started

Catch up together about how your week has been, possibly also revisit last week's meeting.

- ▶ We live in an individualistic culture - when this week did you encounter individualism? What other words come to mind when you think of "individualism"?



Exploring Scripture

Read the following passage together.

James 2:1-13

- ▶ What words stick out to you?
- ▶ Where do you hear God's heart in this passage?



Reflection

Take time to reflect together about the passage.

- ▶ Picture the early church: a subculture within the Roman world. What was so important about not showing favoritism but instead honoring the poor?
- ▶ Whether in large or small attitudes, all of us tend to place people on a hierarchy not according to God's vision of the world, but according to individualism. Where do you see this present in your life?



Praxis

With the understanding that we gathered here are the body of Christ, let's allow the truth from today's scripture to impact us as a LifeGroup.

- ▶ While it's not likely that our group has displayed the kind of behavior that James condemns in this passage (saving places for rich people and excluding the less fortunate), it's good for us to think about the ways we could do better at making our group radically equalizing. Loving our neighbor often means hyper-practical behaviors with the people closest to us. Let's think creatively about the way we do LifeGroup, and what we might adjust in order to love each other as James instructs.
- ▶ Let's picture each aspect of our meeting time, from the way we enter this space, to the things we do together, to the way we close our time. Take mental stock of the times we might be able to capitalize on providing a loving and equal space for each person. What ideas come up for you?
- ▶ Write down some ideas that we could try next week during our time together.



Moving Outward

Challenge each other to live out God's truth this week.

- ▶ Be aware of the social hierarchy you carry in your mind throughout the week. What shift might you need to make to see others through God's eyes?

James 2:1-13

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old 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?

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: 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? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.