

## Huddle Overview - James Study Week 3

### **Discipleship Definition:**

*Learning to love and follow Jesus—together—by His strength, in everyday life.*

### **What are huddles at Foundations?**

- Groups of 3-8 people (or 3-4 couples) that meet for one hour per week at a time and location of your choosing. Larger groups should plan for 75 minutes.
- Huddles last for 8 weeks. At the end of each 8-week session, you can stay with your group, add to your group or even change groups and topics.
- While gathering on Sunday is vital to spiritual growth, so is connecting with others to encourage one another, discussing what it means to follow Jesus and praying for one another. These practices are detailed in our **RHYTHMS** course (which is not necessary to take part in huddles, but highly recommended).

### ***Our Mission at Foundations is to bring the extraordinary lifechanging message of Jesus Christ to a lost and broken world.***

- Huddles are one way we prepare to do this very thing, and we can't do that unless our lives are being transformed by Him.
- Hence, the goal of every session is that you will grow more like Jesus in some small way.
- In order to do this, we will focus on God's Word, encourage one another and commit to praying for one another.
- Each week, there are *individual rhythms* we encourage that will help you "love and follow Jesus."
- Similarly, there are *corporate rhythms* that help us in our spiritual formation.
- Consistent practice of these rhythms is part of the holistic development of disciples, and this booklet is designed to touch on that development.

## Rhythms Overview

**The individual rhythms** (for those who haven't taken the Rhythms course):

Prayer: Talking to God and listening to Him via His Word, His Spirit-Filled people and His creation. If you don't know how to pray, a good place to start is the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 5.

Abide in the Word: Reading the Bible and prayerfully asking God to show you who He is and what He wants for you. A good practice is to read with a pen in hand, and write your thoughts in a journal as He leads them.

Silence: Choosing to avoid speaking in order to listen to what He might want to say to us.

Solitude: Avoidance of interaction with others in order to be alone with Him. Silence enhances solitude. Have you intentionally gotten away to be alone (including technology/social media)?

Reflection (especially effective at the end of the day, maybe before sleep): Take some time in stillness to experience His presence. Tell God things you're thankful for. Make note of where you experienced Him today—or where you didn't. Note instances of loving your "neighbor" well—or failure to do so. Ask God for what He may want for you in the day tomorrow.

Other individual rhythms that will likely be practiced less frequently:

Fasting (food; if there's an area you are seeking specific guidance), giving joyfully (financially as an act of worship) and rest (setting aside time to enjoy your life and choosing to refrain from work).

**The corporate rhythms** (for those who haven't taken the Rhythms course):

Worship gathering: A time for our family to be together to participate corporately in the rhythms of worshipping together.

Participation in community: A time to engage in huddle, as well as other forms of being together as a church family (such as concerts, conferences/classes, events, etc.).

Lord's Supper: An opportunity for our family to reflect on the person and work of Jesus and to look forward in hope to His coming again.

Baptism: A one-time action of a declaration of faith in Christ. It is our hope that everyone be baptized, and that they also celebrate others who are being baptized.

Using your gifts to serve the Body: We have been given a gift to help the body of Christ come to maturity in faith, and we benefit by your presence.

Having a ministry of love for neighbors: We choose to exemplify the abundant life in order to fulfill our mission of bringing the extraordinary life of Jesus Christ to a lost and broken world.

## Prayer, Day 1

- If you are comfortable praying as a conversation with God, find some focused time to do so.
- Find a place where you can have silence and solitude, and talk to God. Be attentive to how He leads your thoughts and emotions.
- You may find it helpful to write down in a journal what you talked with God about and how He answered.
- If you are new to prayer, or struggle with focus, you may want to pray for others and for yourself using Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (Ephesians 3:14-21): For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

## Time in the Word, Day 1, Read James 2:8

### Background and Insights on the Reading:

This law, originally summarized in Leviticus 19:18, is the basis for all the laws of how people should relate to one another. Jesus reinforced this truth in Matthew 22:37-40 (b).

This is a foremost command, and it is the royal law because of its preeminence and because it was sanctioned by the King, Lord Jesus (a). The word "royal" is important in understanding which body of law James is referring to. It is not the Old Testament law in itself, but rather the Old Testament law as interpreted and fulfilled by King Jesus. That's what makes the law royal; it belongs to the King! (h).

The New Covenant sets us free from the Old Covenant law and encourages us to serve the Lord with our whole hearts, not to earn merit, but as a loving response to His love. God's commands are no longer seen as painful restrictions to freedom, but rather a means to the most joyous freedom, freedom of sin and a way to express our gratitude for Christ's sacrifice for us (c).

### Questions for Reflection:

- Application: The course of action to many problems we face can be impacted greatly by asking two questions; 1) Is this loving God? and 2) is this loving my neighbor? Commit to asking these two questions of yourself regularly, before you speak or act, and then evaluate how it impacts you loving your neighbor.
- What Scripture is royal law? Why is it called the royal law?
- Can you think of some Scriptures where Jesus claims the right to interpret the Old Testament law—that is, to say what it actually means?

## Prayer, Day 2

- If you are comfortable praying as a conversation with God, find some focused time to do so.
- Find a place where you can have silence and solitude and talk to God. Be attentive to how He leads your thoughts and emotions.
- You may find it helpful to write down in a journal what you talked with God about and how He answered.
- If you are new to prayer, or struggle with focus, you may want to pray using the breath method. Simply read through a Psalm and breathe in as you read the first line, and then exhale on the second. Take deep, long, slow breaths. Good examples are Psalm 46 and 47, but almost every Psalm can be done this way. Try to focus on the ones that focus on God and/or resonate with where you are at the moment.

## Time in the Word, Day 2, Read James 2:9

### Background and Insights on the Reading:

The law of God is against favoritism from the time of the Old Testament. The Old Testament command to love one's neighbor (Lev 19:18) prohibited partiality, particularly against the poor (Lev 19:15) (a). James now declares that to show favoritism to someone because of their wealth or power in society is, simply put, a sin. In doing so, we break the command to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We become lawbreakers. James is clearly concerned that his readers understand how serious this issue of giving preferential treatment is. God cares deeply that His children refuse to judge each other based on the standards of the world (h).

The summary of the law is to love God and love your neighbor. If you disobey this by showing partiality you have disobeyed the law to love your neighbor, and therefore have broken the entire law. Why does James bring this up? Perhaps it is to stress the seriousness of showing favoritism. If you treat people differently because of appearance or status then you are guilty in God's sight and deserve judgment. So, if God's law is like this, what is our hope? How can anyone escape God's judgment? Obviously, our only hope is to trust in Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for us! He alone can save us from our sins (c).

### Questions for Reflection:

- How serious is showing favoritism?
- What are some motivations behind favoritism?
- In what ways might believers show favoritism in church? How about outside the church?

Additional resources for this day - see appendix.

### **Prayer, Day 3**

- If you are comfortable praying as a conversation with God, find some focused time to do so.
- Find a place where you can have silence and solitude and talk to God. Be attentive to how He leads your thoughts and emotions.
- You may find it helpful to write down in a journal what you talked with God about and how He answered.
- If you are new to prayer, or struggle with focus, you may want to simply pray using a Psalm...they are really great prayers! Find one that you resonate with, and pray it aloud: Simply read through a Psalm, such as Psalm 23 or 51. Pray aloud, even if in a whisper, slowly and with concentration on the words. Try to be attentive to the thoughts that come to mind and discern if those may be something God is trying to tell you.

### **Time in the Word, Day 3, Read James 2:10**

#### Background and Insights on the Reading:

This verse clearly doesn't mean that if you broke one law that you actually broke every single law. For example, you can steal without committing adultery and vice-versa. The Mosaic law is an indivisible unit. Breaking one command incurs the same penalty for breaking the whole law. Please note that although the law is a unit, this judgement does not mean that all commandments are equal. Jesus referred to both the greatest commandments (Matthew 22:36-40) and the "weightier provisions" of the law (Matthew 23:23) (a).

We must not use this verse to justify sinning. We dare not say: "Because I cannot keep every demand of God, why even try?" James reminds us that if we've broken just one law, we are sinners. We can't decide to keep part of God's law and ignore the rest. You can't break the law a little bit. If you have broken it at all, you need Christ to pay for your sin. Measure yourself, not someone else, against God's standards. Ask for forgiveness where you need it, and then renew your effort to put your faith into practice (b).

James recognizes that our human tendency is to dismiss our sin. But he's not going to let us off of the hook. To sin in this area of favoritism and prejudice, James reveals, makes us just as guilty as if we had systematically broken every single command in the Law. The point is not that all sins are equally heinous. Rather, it is that on God's legal scorecard, for those He will judge according to the Old Testament Law, even one sin is damning. A person either is perfect, or they are not. One "stumble," as James describes it here, earns us the same "fail" rating as a lifetime of deliberate disobedience. The laws we follow do not make up for the ones we break (h). Our only hope is to trust in Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for us! He alone can save us from our sins (c).

#### Questions for Reflection:

- What does it mean that the person who stumbles in one point becomes guilty of all?
  
- Since we have all broken at least one law, what hope do we have?

Additional resources for this day - see appendix.

## Prayer, Day 4

- If you are comfortable praying as a conversation with God, find some focused time to do so.
- Find a place where you can have silence and solitude and talk to God. Be attentive to how He leads your thoughts and emotions.
- You may find it helpful to write down in a journal what you talked with God about and how He answered.
- If you are new to prayer, or struggle with focus, you may want to pray using the ACTS method as an outline (for your own). **Adoration** - (a time of worship)' don't be afraid of "artistic expressions" here, or to use Psalms or hymns or other forms of praise. **Confession** - we all fall short and miss the mark. Confession of sin helps us in our relationship to God. **Thanksgiving** - simply tell God what you're thankful for. **Supplication** - ask God for needs of the world, our country and leaders, our church, and anything and everything else. God wants to hear from you.

## Time in the Word, Day 4, Read James 2:11

### Background and Insights on the Reading:

James continues his thought from the previous verse regarding the eternal consequences of sin. Whoever stumbles over any single command in God's Law is just as imperfect, and therefore guilty, as the one who breaks all of the commands in God's Law. Both have failed to keep the Law. Both are lawbreakers (h). The point is, no matter which law you broke, even the smallest one, you are a lawbreaker and are guilty. No matter which of God's laws we have broken, we are a transgressor. We are guilty in His sight. He doesn't divide commands and say, "Well you've only broken 27% of the commandments so you are 73% good." It doesn't work like that. If we have broken even 1% of His commandments, we are a transgressor, guilty and deserving of His judgment. (c) Again, our only hope is to trust in Jesus who paid the penalty for us! He alone can save us from our sins.

Paul wrote something very similar in Romans, but went a bit further: Everyone is a lawbreaker. Everyone has sinned and, by definition, fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). That's why we need for God to forgive us, to judge us according to Jesus' goodness and not our own. Paul's declaration that all have sinned continues in the next verse: "and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:24)." (h).

### Questions for Reflection:

- How has God provided a way for you to earn His favor while not being required to follow a set of rules? Thank God that He has shown you grace by giving you a salvation which you did not deserve.

Additional resources for this day - see appendix.

## Prayer, Day 5

- If you are comfortable praying as a conversation with God, find some focused time to do so.
- Find a place where you can have silence and solitude and talk to God. Be attentive to how He leads your thoughts and emotions.  
You may find it helpful to write down in a journal what you talked with God about and how He answered.
- If you are new to prayer, or struggle with focus, you may want to pray using prayer from St. Augustine: Lord my God, I believe in you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Insofar as I can, insofar as you have given me the power, I have sought you. I became weary and I labored. O Lord my God, my sole hope, help me to believe and never to cease seeking you. Grant that I may always and ardently seek out your countenance. Give me the strength to seek you, to help me find you. You have more and more given me the hope of finding you. Here I am before you with my firmness and my infirmity. Preserve the first and heal the second. Here I am before you with my strength and my ignorance. Where you have opened the door to me, welcome me at the entrance; where you have closed the door to me, open to my cry; enable me to remember you, to understand you, and to love you. Amen.

## Time in the Word, Day 5, Read James 2:12

### Background and Insights on the Reading:

As Christians we are saved by God's free gift (grace) through faith, not by keeping the law. But as Christians, we are also required to obey Christ. The apostle Paul taught "for we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10) to be judged for our conduct. God's grace does not cancel our duty to obey Him; it gives our obedience a new basis. The law is no longer an external set of rules, but it is a "law that gives freedom" – one we joyfully and willingly carry out, because we love God and because we have the power of His Holy Spirit to carry it out (b).

THE LAW OF LIBERTY. One of the main blessings of being a Christian is that it brings freedom from the law. That does not mean that Christians do not live under a law at all. On the contrary, as James affirms, we live under the royal law of King Jesus. But there is something fascinating about that law: it is a law of liberty, not of slavery. As Paul says in Galatians 5:1, "Christ has set us free!" What he means is that we no longer relate to the law as slaves, obeying it out of fear of punishment. Rather, we relate to our King's royal law as heirs and sons, obeying it out of love for the King himself and a desire to live lives that will honor him. Our obedience is not one of slavery, but one of freedom! (h).

### Questions for Reflection:

- What is the law that gives freedom/the law of liberty? Is it the same law referred to in verse 10?
- When you are tempted to show partiality, what should you remember from verse 12?

Additional resources for this day - see appendix.

## **Prayer, Day 6: A Time for Reflection**

- Traditional time of Examen. This is a version of the five-step Daily Examen that St. Ignatius practiced.
- Become aware of God's presence. Breathe and slow down. Ask God to make you aware of His presence and to bring to mind moments of your day to focus on.
- Review the day with gratitude. Walk through your day and give thanks for areas where you saw God "show up" and for His blessings.
- Pay attention to your emotions. The things you feel when you review often highlight areas where God wants you to focus and what he wants to teach you. Often this results in confession when you see your emotions out of line with walking in the Spirit.
- Choose one feature of the day and pray about it. Ask God to show you moments where you loved others well (or, conversely, He may bring to mind an area you didn't). Give thanks or ask forgiveness as warranted.
- Look toward tomorrow. Think through your day tomorrow and ask God what He may be calling you to do or be in the upcoming day.

## **Time in the Word, Day 6, Read James 2:13**

### Background and Insights on the Reading:

If we do forgive others, it is because God has forgiven us and enabled us to forgive them. This is directly connected to the idea of partiality. Mercy overlooks people's flaws, weaknesses, and external appearance in order to extend God's love to them. (c)

In this verse, James writes that God will judge without mercy people who have shown no mercy to others. First, it's important to understand what this does not mean. It does not mean that a Christian who has been unmerciful at times will go to hell. It does not mean an unbeliever who is merciful will go to heaven. What James means is that those who trust in God, who are in Christ, will show mercy to others. Of course, they won't be perfect. Christians still sin, in this and other ways. But trust in the God of mercy causes Christians to show mercy, at least as a matter of habit. One who never shows mercy, or rarely shows it, is not one who trusts in Christ, and God will not judge that person with mercy (h).

Only God in His mercy can forgive our sins. We can't earn forgiveness by forgiving others. But when we withhold forgiveness from others after having received it ourselves, we show that we don't understand or appreciate God's mercy toward us (see Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-35; Ephesians 4:31-32) (b).

### Questions for Reflection:

- Who is a person in your life that you need to show more love to? How will you do this?
  
- How are showing mercy and being impartial linked?

Additional resources for this day - see appendix.

## Huddle Meeting:

General Check-In (10 minutes)

Emotional Check-In (10 minutes)

- Using the SACHET wheel, describe how you're doing emotionally right now. You may want to write down some of these to pray for your huddle during the week.



Rhythms Check-In (10 minutes)

- Describe your experience with the individual rhythms this week.
- Describe your experience with the corporate rhythms this week.
- How can the huddle encourage you this week in these areas? Or.....How can you encourage the huddle this week in these areas?

Discussion for Growth (30 Minutes)

- Feel free to discuss any questions from the prior days' studies.
- Think about one or two times you might've been tempted to show partiality. Why were you tempted? How will you improve in this area?
- What is something you feel God truly taught you this week?
- What is one thing you need to obey from this week's passages?

## Appendix

### References

- a. The Moody Bible Commentary, Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, General Editors, Moody Publishers, Chicago, Illinois, 2014
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- e. James – Mercy Triumphs, Beth Moore, LifeWay Press Copyright 2011, reprinted September 2020,
- f. What Does It Mean to Be Chosen? Amanda Jenkins, Dallas Jenkins, & Douglas S. Huffman, Published by David Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 80918
- g. The MacArthur Study Bible, Copyright 1997 by Thomas Nelson Inc. App Version 2.0.9
- h. The Gospel Coalition, thegospelcoalition.org, Copyright 2021
- i. Gty.org, Unleashing God’s Truth, One Verse at a Time, ©2021 Grace to You

**Time in the Word, Day 1, James 2:8,** If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right.

James says that the royal law accords with the commandment “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In other words, that commandment encapsulates and sums up the law that King Jesus gives to his people. Why does James choose that particular commandment as the “summing up” one? Does he pick it at random out of all the commandments Jesus gives, or does Jesus himself give it some special status? (Hint: read Matthew 22:36–40.) (h).

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Jesus said that the most important commands in Scripture are to love God with your heart, soul, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. In every situation when we consider what God wants us to do, we should ask ourselves “what is the loving thing to do?” (c)

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THE ROYAL LAW. In Matthew 5, Jesus claimed to have the right to interpret God’s law—that is, to say what it meant. The symbolism there is striking. Just as Moses went up on a mountain to receive the law that God would give, so Jesus stands on a mountain to deliver his Sermon on the Mount. He is the divine Lawgiver, and he alone has the right to interpret the law. James recognizes this in his phrase “the royal law.” He is not referring to the Old Testament law as such, but rather to that law as interpreted and fulfilled by King Jesus (h).

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It goes along, doesn’t it, with Deuteronomy 6. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 says, “The first law is to love the Lord your God with” – what? – “all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” You take Deuteronomy 6:4-5, you take Leviticus 19:18, you combine them together, and you have the sum of all the law and the prophets, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus pulled those two together in Matthew’s gospel and said, “This is the sum of all the law; on these two things hang all the law and the prophets.” Now, James calls this the sovereign law. It is a law made by God, and if this law is obeyed, there will be no partiality. Why? If you love your neighbor as you love yourself, you’ll wind up loving everybody the way you love yourself. And since you love yourself so much – and you do – I mean it’s as simple as whose mouth do you put food in? Whose face do you wash? Whose hair do you comb? Whose body

do you dress? Whose looks are you concerned about when you leave the house? Whose career occupies your mind? Who are you trying to make comfortable? Who are you trying to make happy? It's you. And when you learn to occupy yourself with everyone else, in the same way you are occupied with yourself, you will have no problem with partiality. Because no matter whether a person is poor or rich, educated or uneducated, ignorant or intelligent, no matter whether a person looks good or doesn't look good, whether they're high in the social scale or low, if you treat them all the same way you treat yourself; you will treat them all equally.

But I do understand this, that I take care of me, and God says, "Take care of other people just the same way you take care of you." And that's what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. To the same degree, with the same intensity; to the same benefit, with the same protection; the same concern for health, and care, and spiritual well-being, and growth in grace and holiness; and Christlikeness and all those things, you are to be concerned with others as much as you are with yourself. And if that law is obeyed, there will be no partiality, James says. So, when you are continually fulfilling the supreme law given in the Scripture, to love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. You're not showing any partiality.

The point is if we understand this law, it becomes a supreme law of all human relationships. The first of those great laws the Lord mentioned, in Matthew 22 and also in Mark 12, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind." That takes care of the first half of the Ten Commandments, which have to do with God. If I love him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, I'm not going to have a graven image; I'm not going to make an idol; I'm not going to take His name in vain; I'm not going to violate the worship experience with Him. So, those two things sum everything up. The issue again I say is not emotional love; it is service in time of need, and it is simply the thing that marks believers. We are known by our love. We are known by our love.

So, James says, "If you do that, if you demonstrate equality of love to one another, meeting needs no matter who the people are, then you show that you are fulfilling the great royal, supreme, sovereign law of God, and you are doing well." The word "well" means doing excellently. You're doing excellently. This is God's will; this is consistent with His glory. This is consistent with His Son, with His Word, with bearing His name, with believing in Him. You are doing excellently (i).

Related Scripture:

- Leviticus 19:18, Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.
- Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
- Matthew 22: 37-40, Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

**Time in the Word, Day2**, James 2:9, But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

Within the community of Christians, there must be no castes of people: we are not to divide the world into levels or ranks of human beings. As Paul wrote in Colossians 3:11, "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." This teaching was one of the reasons Christianity attracted so many people so quickly. The world was dominated by

the Roman caste system that defined the relative value of every person. The idea that in Christ everyone is of equal value in the eyes of God and the eyes of His children was revolutionary. It's essential that Christians show each other that we genuinely believe this is true (h).

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“But when you have respect of persons (favoritism), you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. It's not an occasional slip; this is a continual practice. “You who continually practice favoritism are working sin.” This is blatant; this is frank; this is stark in terms of its accusation. On the one hand, when you love everybody the same, you show no partiality and no favoritism; you fulfill the Word of God; you fulfill the supreme law of God and you do well. On the other hand, when there's a habitual favoritism and partiality, you violate the law. The law forbids it. If you do it, you break that law. And by the way, the Mosaic Law does forbid that in Deuteronomy 1:17, Deuteronomy 16:19. The law of God forbids partiality. And James is saying, “If you do it, you transgress the law.” You break the law. You are a transgressor. That's a willful stepping across the boundary to transgress. Now, you'll notice the two words in here for sin – verse 9 - “You commit sin, and you are a transgressor.” “Sin” has a negative connotation. That word means to come short of the mark – hamartia – to miss the mark. “Transgressor” means to go beyond the limits. That's a positive word. The negative word says you've come short; the positive word says you've gone too far. Both define sin. Sin is a coming short of the perfect standard, and it is going beyond the law of God. So, James says, “You're a transgressor of the law.” Now, that's a characterization, by the way. Did you get that? He doesn't say, “You broke the law.” He says, “You are a” – what? – “transgressor.” That's a characterization. If you show partiality, you are characteristically a violator of God's law. You are characteristically a sin committer. A sinner and a transgressor. Now, somebody at this point is going to say, “Wow, this is a little heavy for such a small thing. I mean everybody's a little bit partial. How can James get so worked up about this, the common sin of prejudice, selfishness, partiality? It's just a part of human nature, just a sort of small thing.” No, it's not. It so violates the law of God as to make you characteristically a transgressor. It's a big sin. To confirm the severity of the sin and the devastating nature of it, and the largeness of it, and how it violates God's law, follow James' reasoning. And this is very profound (i).

Related Scripture:

- Deuteronomy 1:17 – Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of anyone, for judgment belongs to God. Bring me any case too hard for you, and I will hear it.
- Deuteronomy 16:19 – Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the innocent.
- Leviticus 19:15, Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

**Time in the Word, Day 3**, James 2:10, For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

How many laws do you have to break to be a lawbreaker? One. How many laws do you have to break to be a transgressor? One. How many sins do you have to commit to be characterized as a sinner? One. The unity of God's law is that it all hangs together. We have an obligation to all of God's law; to break the law at one point is to be a lawbreaker. Because what you're doing is defying the authority of God. You're denying full love and devotion to God, and you're saying, “I will not love You with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength in that area. I will not submit to You in that area. I will not obey You in that area. I will violate that area.” So, you are a lawbreaker, though you only break one small part of the law, you are characterized as a sinner and a transgressor, for you have demonstrated a heart of violence

toward the law of God. Matthew 5:19, “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, she shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.” If you just break one, you are a violator.

Some of the rabbis used to say, and I’m quoting, “Whoever obeys only one law, good is appointed unto him.” What a lie, “Whoever obeys only one law, good is appointed to him.” Therefore, a man could add up the ones he kept and subtract the ones he broke and, as it were, emerge with a credit of debt balance.” That is typical of any works righteousness system. You stack up the good stuff, and you stack up the bad stuff, and you hope the bad stuff subtracted from the good stuff leaves a little on the top side and you’re okay.

There are so many people who are under the illusion that there’s some kind of credit-debit balance being kept, and if they come out on the top end, everything’s okay. That’s not the way it is. Lawbreaking is not like bowling. You didn’t know that did you? You can’t just hit a few pins and leave the rest standing. That’s the idea. Lawbreaking is like hitting a window with a hammer. You may only hit it in one spot, but it’ll shatter the whole thing. And that’s how it is when you violate God’s law. When you hit it at one point, you shatter the whole thing; it’s one piece. And no one can justify himself by saying, “Hey, I only knocked down two; eight are standing” – or – “I only committed little sins like prejudice, partiality, indifference to the poor; I certainly didn’t commit the biggies.” Listen, you hit the law of God with a hammer, and you smash the whole thing. So, don’t kid yourself that you’re some kind of righteous person because your sins are minor. See it there in verse 10; even if one keeps the whole law and offends in one area, he has literally shattered the whole thing though he stumbles only one point. And I agree that not all sins are equally ugly, not all sins are equally horrible, not all sins are equally heinous, not all sins are equally damaging, but they all shatter the unity of God’s law, and they turn us into violators, rebels, and transgressors.

You see, the law of God is the transcript of the divine mind. It’s the transcript of the will of sovereign God. And the essential thing that God is after in His law is the attitude of submission to Him. And any violation strikes a blow at God and says, “I will not submit.” It demonstrates non-submission; it demonstrates a refusal to love God at that point, and because of that, it shatters the whole law. And anyone who runs around selecting a few laws to obey, and a few laws to disobey, and hoping they can balance the thing at the end is only fooling themselves. The true heart of obedience really acknowledges, “God, I want to keep all your law. And when you break that law, you see yourself as a transgressor, and you come to the Savior for cleansing and forgiveness (i).

Related Scripture:

- Matthew 22:36-40, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
- Matthew 23:23, Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

**Time in the Word, Day 4, James 2:11**, For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not commit murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

There is no grace in the law. There is none. God does not have one whit of tolerance for anyone violating the law that allows such a violation to go unpunished. That is why to a person who does not know the grace of Christ, there is no grace. None in terms of ultimate judgment. But they took the law, and they threw in grace, and they said, "Well, God knows you can't keep it all; so, God will understand, and he will overlook things." And then they came down to the point where, as I mentioned earlier, some of the rabbis actually taught that if you just kept one law, you'd be okay, because God would just sort of look over the rest. In effect, they were saying, "Sin is not really sin; sin and good works kind of balance out because God overlooks things. And on the one hand His demands, and on the other hand His grace and His kindness, and He'll forgive the little ones you broke." And all of this was an escape from the reality that they couldn't keep the law. So, they read grace into the law, and therefore they had no need for a Savior. Do you see that? What do they need a Savior for? If there's already grace in the law, they don't need a Savior. That's the point. The law shows you you're a sinner; and when you break it, you are a transgressor, and you are doomed for condemnation and judgment and eternal hell unless you come to the Savior who dispenses grace. But there's no grace in the law.

So, James here is reinforcing the nature of God's law as a condemner of sinners without grace. And so, he says, "You may think you're some small-time – some sort of small, peanut-type sinner just committing a few little things here and there. I want you to know you have shattered the law of God. And if you're saying to yourself, "Well, but it's the little stuff, and certainly God's gracious, and he'll pass over that. There's got to be a little grace in law." And James says, there is no grace in law. You are a violator of God's law by favoritism alone, and therefore you are condemned, for you have shattered the whole thing, though you may have struck the glass only at one point. You are guilty; you are worthy of judgment.

And if you are partial, you have violated the Scripture, because you have violated the supreme sovereign law which says to love your neighbor as yourself. And if you have shown partiality, you have struck a blow that shattered the entire law of God, and you are condemned as a transgressor. And there's no grace in that law; there's only grace outside that law in Jesus Christ." (i)

Related Scripture:

- Romans 3:23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
- Romans 3:24, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

**Time in the Word, Day 5, James 2:12**, Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,

Christians must speak and act out of the forgiveness they have received. Recall the law that gives freedom/the law of liberty (v 1:25), is the "law" or "principle" by which God frees believers from sin (Galatians 2:4, 5:1, 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16), namely, the gospel, creating in them new selves (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10) (a).

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James is urging us to carry with us an awareness that we are lawbreakers. We must acknowledge the fact that we are sinners. Perhaps some of his readers believed themselves to be superior to other Christians. Maybe that's why they tended to show favoritism to the wealthy. They may have believed themselves to be more spiritual, or closer to God, because of their relatively "better" obedience to the law. James says that attitude is wrong. All Christians are equally guilty of sin: none are perfect. All of us

are fully depending on God's mercy to save us. Our good works are not what make us righteous in the eyes of God. We should treat each other as if that is true. We should speak and act as those who will, in fact, experience God's judgment (h).

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This is a call to take account of the danger of divine judgment. It tells me that in this congregation, there were true believers who were fulfilling the supreme law, the sovereign law, the royal law. And then there were others who were continually showing favoritism, continually violating that law of God being transgressors and sinners. In other words, you better speak, and you better act as people who are headed for a future judgment. Why is it a law of liberty or a law of freedom? Because it frees us from sins slavery. It brings us to eternal freedom and glory. It frees us from the curse of death and the curse of hell. It gives us the truth. So, it frees us from the search for truth. It calls us to serve God freely out of love. It calls us to obey God freely by inward constraint, not by outward restraint. It is, in every sense, a law of freedom, a law of liberation. So, he says, "You will be judged by God's law. You will face a judgment on the basis of whether you have kept or violated God's law.

You say, "I thought I was judged by my faith in Christ." Yes, but your faith in Christ is manifest through your works. So, the final judgment's a look at your life. If God looks at your life and sees that you handle trials in a godly way, that you handle temptation in a godly way, that you responded to the Word, and that you didn't demonstrate favoritism as a pattern of life, those are the works that evidence the truth of your faith. Right? God's going to look at the record of your life, because "Every believer" – Ephesians 2:10 says – "is created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has already in the past ordained that we should walk in them." So, the pattern of your life is good works that God is producing in you; that's the evidence of your salvation. Redemption always brings about obedient living. Now obviously, we have our times of disobedience, but the pattern is good works. Living faith will be revealed, then, in living love. It'll be revealed in godly behavior. And as a general pattern, we will not be partial in showing favoritism.

"The new covenant" - it says in Jeremiah 31:31-34 – "writes God's law" - on the what? – "on the heart." Obedience is liberated living, free from sin's bondage and doing what God wants us to do freely because we love to do it from the heart. So, everybody's going to be judged in the future. So, he says, "Speak and do as one who will be judged by God's Word." Keep that in mind in all you say, and keep it in mind in all you do, that ultimately, you're going to be judged on the basis of that (i).

#### Related Scripture:

- Galatians 5:1 – It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
- 2 Corinthians 5:10, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
- Colossians 3:10, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.
- Galatians 2:4, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.
- Galatians 5:1, It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
- Galatians 5:13, You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

- 1 Peter 2:16, Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.
- Ephesians 4:24, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
- Ephesians 2:10, For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
- Jeremiah 31:31-34, "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."
- Matthew 5:7, Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

**Time in the Word, Day 6, James 2:13** ...because judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement.

MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT. In James 2:13, the author appeals to the mercy God has shown to us in order to motivate our own obedience. Salvation, once again, is not a matter of doing enough to earn God's favor. It is a matter of his mercy in Christ. He does not give us what we deserve for our sin. Because of that, our own lives should be marked by mercy as well. As we interact with people, our sinful hearts inevitably desire to judge and create divisions, to separate and push away. But mercy, James exhorts, should triumph over judgment, just as it did in our own case before God (h).

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So, he closes by saying in verse 13, "And mercy rejoices" – or literally – "mercy triumphs over judgment." What does he mean? If your life is characterized by mercy, you will triumph over judgment. You will escape judgment. Because one who is merciful proves he has a transformed life; that's the point. So, if you, as a characteristic of life, are merciful, without partiality, meeting people at the point of their need, no matter who they are, you give evidence of having received such mercy and of being transformed by the power of God, and thus ready for the Day of Judgment. And you will triumph in that day by the demonstration of new life that comes through the attitude and the action of mercy toward others.

So, James brings us to the climax of a great argument. Partiality is inconsistent with a Christian faith because the Christian faith is consistent with the nature of God, and God is impartial. Partiality is inconsistent with the purpose and the plan of God in choosing the poor of this world to be rich. Partiality is inconsistent with loving your neighbor as yourself. Partiality, strictly speaking, is a sin that shatters totally the entire law of God and makes a person a transgressor.

On the other hand, if He looks at your life and sees the pattern of mercy toward others and impartiality toward those in need, then you will triumph over judgment by virtue of the life of God in your soul and the salvation found in Jesus Christ. That's his message. So, it says two things to us as we close. Number one, examine your life. Every one of these is a test that James has given to see the validity of our faith. Number one, examine your life. Is your life characterized by impartiality? Are you concerned to be gracious and kind and thoughtful and loving and provide equally for those who are poor

and who do not come up the ladder, as it were, socially, as you are for anyone else? That's the first issue. The second one is, as a Christian, this is an exhortation to us to be certain that we are living out these principles in the church of Christ, and that we are showing love for one another. If that's the pattern of our life, it's evidence of your faith in Christ. It's evidence of his work in your heart. It's evidence that the life of God is in your soul ministering. But when you see those times when you violate that, that's time to confess, to seek his face, to seek forgiveness, and to be restored to the place that God would have you be restored to. If, on the other hand, you look at your own heart, and you see the absence of a continual pattern of love toward one another, then you ought to do a little bit of a deeper look and see if you really know Christ at all. That's what James is saying. And he calls us to that examination (i).

#### Related Scripture:

- Mathew 6:14-15, For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.
- Mathew 18:21-35, 21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. 23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26 "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. 28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. 29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' 30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."
- Ephesians 4:31-32, Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.