

The Church Showed Favoritism

BIBLE PASSAGE: James 2:1-13

MAIN POINT: James calls us to treat people with mercy because Jesus shows us mercy.

KEY PASSAGE: Galatians 2:20

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why does God want us to obey Him? Obedience is our response to God's love for us.

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Leader BIBLE STUDY

During Jesus' earthly ministry, many Jews struggled to believe that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. This included James, Jesus' half-brother. But after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appeared to James, and at last James believed. James later became the leader of the church in Jerusalem—a vital role in the early, growing church.

The early church was comprised mostly of Jewish believers. That makes sense because of the church's origin in Israel but also because that was the mission Jesus gave: start with the Jews and spread out from there. James wrote a letter to Jewish believers who were scattered around the region,

helping them understand how their new faith in Jesus should frame how they live.

James told his fellow believers that one way they could live out the gospel was by not showing favoritism. James used an example of how a church might show favoritism to a wealthy man over a poor man who came to a meeting.

The natural response might be to treat the wealthy man better, but James told the believers that God does not show favoritism. God has treated all people—rich and poor—the same: generously with the gospel. God’s kindness toward us should cause us to want to treat others with similar love, generosity, and equality.

This week’s session is a great follow-up to last week’s. Some of your kids may think that being united is just a matter of getting along with one another and not fighting. But God’s heart is for us to be united far more deeply. Help your kids see that the gospel should compel them to treat one another in the same way—with the same love, mercy, and grace shown to us by Jesus.

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Additional resources for each session are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

The Church Showed Favoritism

James 2:1-13

• Draw a picture:

When describing the meeting, draw figures on a chalkboard or dry erase board to represent the rich man and poor man.

• Portray people:

Ask two volunteers or adult helpers to dress in nice, fancy clothes and worn, plain clothes to contrast the rich man and poor man.

The early church had many leaders. They taught other believers, encouraged them to keep following Jesus, and corrected them when they sinned. One of these leaders was Jesus' half-brother James, the son of Mary and Joseph.

James was a leader in the Jerusalem church. He wrote a letter to the Jewish believers who had moved to many different places. He told them the way believers should live. People who trust Jesus show that they really believe in Him by doing good and right things.

One important right thing, James taught, is to not show favoritism. That means we should treat everyone the same. No person is more important or less important than any other person.

James said, "Imagine you are meeting together and a man comes in wearing a gold ring and fancy clothes. Then a poor man in old, dirty clothes comes in, too. Is it right to pay attention to the man in fancy clothes and give him a chair to sit in, but say to the poor man 'Stand over there,' or 'Sit on the floor'? If you do this, you have treated one man better than the other."

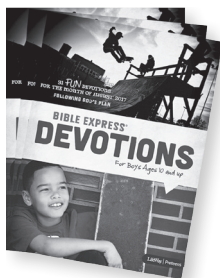
James said that God does not show favoritism. He does not treat rich people better than poor people, nor does He treat poor people better than rich people. God has a place in heaven for everyone who loves Him.

God taught us His law: Love your neighbor as yourself. Anyone who treats one person better than another person breaks God's law.

James told the believers to show mercy to others because they had been shown mercy. They were sinners,

but God forgave their sins through His Son, Jesus. James insisted, “Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

Christ Connection: When believers in the early church treated some people as better than others, James told them they were wrong. He reminded them that Jesus commanded believers to love one another. Because He has shown great mercy to us, we can show mercy to others.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD'S WORD?
GET
BIBLE EXPRESS!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover how God's Word can help them grow in the gospel. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Introduce the STORY

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BIBLE PASSAGE: James 2:1-13

MAIN POINT: James calls us to treat people with mercy because Jesus shows us mercy.

KEY PASSAGE: Galatians 2:20

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why does God want us to obey Him? Obedience is our response to God's love for us.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. Prompt kids to imagine a movie star or famous athlete came into the room and sat next to them. What would they do? What would they say?

SAY • How did you react today when your classmates came in the room? Why was your reaction different?

Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Code Word” on the activity page. Kids will write the first letter of each picture in the box above it and then circle the correction definition for the code word.

SAY • What code word did you discover? (*favoritism*) The word *favoritism* means “giving special treatment to a person or group.”

Today's Bible story is about a letter James wrote to believers who showed favoritism. We'll see if Paul approved or disapproved of their showing favoritism.

- “Code Word” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Favorites game

Give each kid an index card and a pencil. Instruct kids to number their cards from 1 to 4. Then read the following prompts and guide kids to list their answers:

1. Your favorite color
2. Your favorite movie
3. Your favorite teacher
4. Your favorite book

Instruct kids to write their names at the top of their cards. Then collect the cards and mix them up. Read the responses one at a time, challenging kids to guess whose card you are reading based on his or her favorites.

SAY • We all have favorite things, and we all have people we love to spend time with, like our family and closest friends. Today's Bible story will answer the question, "Does God have favorite people?" Let's find out.

OPTION 2: Most important person

Print and cut apart the people cards. Instruct kids to imagine they are planning an event. The guests will sit in order of importance. Challenge kids to order the cards from most important to least important. Invite kids to share how they decided who should sit where.

SAY • We might view some people as more important than others, but is that the way God sees people? God loves everyone the same. He does not show favoritism. We are going to learn more about that in our Bible story today.



- index cards
- pencils

• "People Cards" printable

Transition to teach the story

Teach the STORY

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

- leader attire
- backpack
- sunglasses or goggles
- Bible

[Leader enters wearing a hat or helmet, a backpack, and sunglasses or goggles. Before addressing kids, leader removes backpack and sunglasses or goggles.]

LEADER • Hello! Welcome back to the Mount Olam (oh LAHM) Base Camp! It sure is beautiful here today. Base camp is a good place to be. I can repack my bag for my next climbing adventure, refuel with some delicious hot food, and relax with all of you!

[Pull a Bible from the backpack.] When I'm not climbing, I enjoy reading the Bible. Isn't it amazing that God gave us His Word? Right here in my hand I have everything that God says we need to know about Him.

The Bible is full of stories about things that happened long ago, and it also contains some instructions for how to live as Jesus' followers.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • You might be thinking, *Instructions? I thought God doesn't require me to follow rules in order to be saved.* Well, you're exactly right. Salvation is a free gift that comes to us through God's Son, Jesus. Our big picture question and answer should clear things up: ***Why does God want us to obey Him? Obedience is our response to God's love for us.***

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline or big story circle. Point to previous stories as you review.

• Giant Timeline or Big Story Circle

LEADER • In our stories about letters to God's people, we've heard in the letter to the Galatians about how **Paul wrote that we are saved through faith in Jesus alone.** Jesus died for Jews and Gentiles; we don't have to follow rules to be accepted by God.

We also learned about divisions in the church. **Paul wrote that Christians are joined together by faith in Jesus.** Today we will hear about more problems in the church. Our story is called "The Church Showed Favoritism."

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to James 2:1-13. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video "The Church Showed Favoritism."

• Bibles
• "The Church Showed Favoritism" video
• Big Picture Question Poster
• Bible Story Picture Poster

LEADER • This Bible story comes from the Book of James. James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote a letter to Jewish believers and told them how they should live. Why do you think Christians should live differently

than people who are not Christians? Because Christians have been forgiven by God through Jesus' death and resurrection, Christians no longer live for themselves but for God. Our big picture question is, ***Why does God want us to obey Him? Obedience is our response to God's love for us.*** So when we see commands in the Bible about how to live, these aren't rules we have to keep to get to heaven. These are commands God wants us to keep because we love Him.

One important thing to do as a Christian is to not show favoritism. We should treat everyone the same. This isn't easy! Sin has messed up how we relate to one another. But no person is more important or less important than any other person. God created everyone in His image!

Here is the example James gave: Imagine someone comes into your meeting and he looks rich—fancy clothes and a gold ring. Then a poor man comes in. Maybe he has on old, dirty clothes. If you give the rich man a seat at the front of the room and tell the poor man to stand in the back or sit on the floor, that's showing favoritism. God does not show favoritism. He does not treat one group of people as better than another group. Everyone who trusts in Jesus will live with Him forever.

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Christ connection

LEADER • When believers in the early church treated some people as better than others, James told them they were wrong. He reminded them that Jesus commanded believers to love one another. **James**

calls us to treat people with mercy because Jesus shows us mercy.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Galatians 2:20.

- Key Passage Poster
- “key passage” song

LEADER • Our big picture question and answer is, *Why does God want us to obey Him?* This key passage answers that question. *Obedience is our response to God’s love for us.* As believers, we can obey God because we have been crucified with Christ. When we turn from our sin and turn to Jesus, our old way of living is dead and we have new life in Jesus. We live by faith in Jesus, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Let’s sing.

Lead boys and girls in singing “Crucified with Christ.”

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Can you remember a time you showed favoritism to others? How do you think the people that you didn’t “favor” felt? Think about that as you watch this video.

- “Unit 31, Session 3” discussion starter video

Show the “Unit 31, Session 3” discussion starter video.

Then lead kids to discuss the following questions:

- Did the kid in the video show favoritism? How did the other kids feel?
- What are some places you have experienced or witnessed favoritism? (Examples: *at school, with friends, on a team, at home*)
- How might others feel if we give special treatment to a person or group?

LEADER • People experience favoritism in the world, but

this should not be their experience when they come to church. We heard in our story today that **James calls us to treat people with mercy because Jesus shows us mercy.**

Not showing favoritism can be hard! There might be certain people you just don't get along with. But God asks us to do the right thing, even if it is hard. Remember our big picture question and answer:

Why does God want us to obey Him? Obedience is our response to God's love for us.

Sing (4 minutes)

- "Take My Life and Let It Be" song
- Bible

LEADER • The writer of the Psalms described many reasons we should praise God. Listen to this. [*Open your Bible and read aloud Psalm 113:1-8.*] Let's give praise to God by singing our unit theme song.

Sing together "Take My Life and Let It Be."

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • Lord God, we praise You. You have shown us great kindness in giving us Your Son. We confess we have shown favoritism and treated some people as better than others. Help us to love others without showing favoritism, like You have loved us. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Apply the STORY

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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- marker
- craft sticks

Before the session, write words or phrases of the key passage on separate craft sticks. Display the key passage poster. Lead the kids to read the key passage together. Then cover or remove the poster.

Distribute the prepared craft sticks and challenge boys and girls to arrange the sticks in order. Invite kids to take turns reading the key passage or reciting it from memory. If time allows, mix up the sticks and allow kids to arrange them again.

SAY • Good work. If you haven't already memorized our key passage, keep working on it. Memorizing God's Word is a good way to remember what is true about God and about ourselves.

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- index cards
- markers

Write the numbers 1 through 10 on separate index cards. Make two sets. Mix up the cards and place them facedown on the table.

Invite kids to take turns flipping over two cards. If the numbers match, read the corresponding review question. For a correct answer, the player keeps the cards. If he

answers incorrectly, he should turn the cards facedown. Play passes to the next kid.

1. What book of the Bible comes before James?
(*Hebrews*)
2. James was a leader in what church? (*Jerusalem*)
3. How did James communicate with believers far away? (*He wrote a letter.*)
4. What did James tell the believers not to do? (*show favoritism, James 2:1*)
5. What is favoritism? (favoritism *means “giving special treatment to a person or group.”*)
6. Who does not show favoritism? (*God does not show favoritism.*)
7. What does God’s law say about how we treat others?
(*Love your neighbor as yourself, James 2:8*)
8. How did God show us mercy? (*He forgave our sins through His Son, Jesus.*)
9. Why can we treat people with mercy? (**James calls us to treat people with mercy because Jesus shows us mercy.**)
10. ***Why does God want us to obey Him? Obedience is our response to God’s love for us.***

SAY • Great job, everyone! By doing good and right things, people who trust Jesus can show that they really believe in Him.

James said that God does not show favoritism. He does not treat rich people better than poor people. In fact, God gives faith to many people who are poor. He makes them rich—not with money, but with faith. God has a place in heaven for everyone who loves Him.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: “Captain, can I?”

Designate a player to be the Captain. The rest of the kids are crew members. The captain should stand at the opposite side of the room. Crew members should take turns asking, “Captain, can I take [*number*] steps forward?” For example, three steps or four baby steps.

The captain will answer, “Yes, you can,” or “No, you cannot.” The captain decides on his own who can move forward and who cannot. Kids may find the captain’s decisions unfair. The first player to cross the room wins.

SAY • Did the captain in our game show favoritism? Did he allow everyone to move? When we show favoritism, we sin by treating people as if God did not create everyone equal. We can treat everyone as important because God loves everyone. In our Bible story today, we learned that **James calls us to treat people with mercy because Jesus shows us mercy.**

OPTION 2: People collage

Provide kid-friendly magazines and encourage kids to look through them and find pictures of people. Instruct kids to cut out pictures of people. Kids should use glue sticks to paste the pictures to a large sheet of paper. All the kids will contribute to a single collage. Allow kids to decorate the collage with drawings of hearts. As kids work, explain that every person is valuable to God.

SAY • Why would someone show favoritism to a person who is rich? [*Allow kids to respond.*] We might be tempted to show favoritism to people who are rich because we hope that person will give us some money. We might be tempted to treat a person

- old magazines
- scissors
- glue sticks
- large sheet of paper
- crayons or markers

who is poor as less important because we think that person has nothing to give us.

The Bible says that God does not show favoritism. **James calls us to treat people with mercy because Jesus shows us mercy.** We have nothing to offer Jesus but empty hands of faith. He gives salvation as a free gift to anyone who puts their trust in Him.

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas. Then pray, asking God to help kids see one another as God sees them. Pray that God would change our hearts to help us love others as Jesus loves us. Pray that kids would obey God in response to His love for them.

As time allows, lead kids to complete "All the Same" on the activity page. Kids should find and circle the shadow that matches the people from the Bible story. Then challenge kids to write today's main point below the pictures.

- pencils
- Journal Page
- "All the Same" activity page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.