

Discussion Starter

Hebrews 13:1-2 suggests that every time we meet someone we don't know we should consider that we might actually be meeting an angel. Read the verses and ask whether there is anyone in the group who thinks that they might have ever encountered an angel. If such a being were to visit our church, what sort of guise do you think they would turn up in? What sort of welcome do you think they would receive?

Worship Together

Read Genesis 1:26-27. Spend some time brainstorming answers to the question: In what aspects of our humanity do we see a reflection of the image of God?

Read Matthew 10:29-31. Take a few minutes to thank God for the way He has created us, and for the value that He bestows upon us.

Bible Study

"Prejudice, not being founded on reason, cannot be removed by argument."
Samuel Johnson

Read James 2:1-13 and discuss...

- Why should being a believer in "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" have a bearing on whether we show favouritism?
- How do you respond to verse 5? Is God giving preferential treatment to the poor? Read also 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.
- Do you think it is easier for poor people to have faith in God than wealthy people?
- Are James's derogatory comments about the rich still in any way justified or valid today?
- What do verses 9-11 tell us about James's view of the seriousness of the sin of favouritism? Read also Matthew 22:35-40.
- Look at the quote above from Samuel Johnson, and think about whether you agree with him. Do you think that if we have prejudices we can just *decide* to change them, or are they more deeply ingrained than that? If the latter, what can we do about them?

Talk it Through

- What kinds of people might feel uncomfortable walking into our church for the first time?
- What kinds of people might we feel uncomfortable inviting to join our own group?
- Do you think that within our church some people are treated as more or less important on account of their economic situation, their educational background, the job they do, the way they dress or speak or any other similar factor? If so, what can we do about it?

Pray Together

There may have been issues which have come out through the discussion which you want to turn to prayer. Pray as well for those who are regularly discriminated against in our society. Ask God what role He wants our church, or our small group, or us as individuals to play in making such people feel valued and loved.

Meditations

A few brief thoughts to ponder on before your group discussion.

Read James 2:1

The main thrust of what James has to say in this week's passage is summarised in three words of this first verse: "Don't show favouritism." Ask the Lord to show you whether there are groups of people who you might be tempted to show favouritism towards, or against. Ask Him to enable you to treat all people with Christ-like even handedness.

Read James 2:2-4

If your closest friend unexpectedly inherited ten million pounds, how do you think it would affect your friendship? How do you feel around people with significantly more, or significantly less, money than yourself? Does it affect the way you treat them? Does it influence how much you would trust them? Does it make feel uncomfortable or insecure? Turn these thoughts to prayer.

Read James 2:5

Reflect for a few minutes on the fact that God's desire for you is "to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him". Where in your life do you see the richness of faith that He is bringing about? Where in your life do you want to see

more of it? Turn these thoughts to thanksgiving and prayer.

Read James 2:8, Matthew 22:38-39 and Leviticus 19:18

James calls it the "royal law", Jesus referred to it as the second most important commandment of all: "Love your neighbour as yourself". Reflect upon why this, of all God's commands and laws, is given such pre-eminence in scripture. Jesus expanded upon it in what has become one of the best known of all His parables – the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). Ask the Lord, in the context of this command, "Who are you calling me to be a neighbour to...?"

Read James 2:12-13

Think about the ways in which you speak and act towards those who are different to you. To what extent do you think that your thoughts, words and actions are characterised by mercy, and to what extent by judgement? Pray that in your own heart mercy would always triumph over judgement.