

## **Leading a Small Group Discussion**

### **1. Prepare**

Work through the materials and think yourself into your group meeting.

### **2. Pray**

Pray before your group meeting.

### **3. Don't talk too much**

Your job is to get people thinking and talking and keep the discussion moving from member to member rather than talking to the members.

### **4. Be A Good Listener**

So simple yet so hard to do. Don't just listen to what people are saying – actively listen. The best leaders listen with their eyes and ears.

### **4. Don't Answer Your Own Questions**

The whole purpose of asking the question is to create an environment where group members feel safe to share. It's not about getting the right answer. When people are silent with some of these questions, embrace the silence: this might be where the introverts are thinking and the Holy Spirit is speaking!

### **5. Encourage Responses**

If no one really speaks you could say something like, “Paul, you look like you were going to say something...”

### **6. Ask Open-Ended Questions**

Open-ended questions help group members to say more than a simple yes or no. Use ‘what?’ or ‘how?’ questions to get people to open up.

### **7. Try To Involve Everyone**

Your group might be too big if everyone isn't able to speak their thoughts. Groups of over eight members will have difficulty doing this. In those cases, it might be best to divide the group into smaller groups for some of the time.

### **8. Keep the Main Thing, the Main Thing!**

Remember, the focus is not on getting through the material and you may not cover all the questions. If the discussion is fruitful then allow group members the time they need to discuss, process, and grow with the information.

### **9. Manage the Time**

Keep an eye on the clock. Don't let things get bogged down in interesting but irrelevant discussion. Bring things back on track and take the initiative to move things on when it feels right.

### **10. Leave time for application.**

Make sure people have time to think about the difference that this discussion will have in their daily ‘frontline’ lives.



## **4. Faith Works (James 2: 1 - 13)**

## WAY IN

- Can you think of what kinds of things make you favour one person more than another?

## Read James 2: 1 - 13

### Key Text: James 2: 1

- My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism.

## DISCUSS

1. How would sum up James key point about not showing favouritism and why?
2. What are some of the results of favouritism? (v 4, 6, 9, 13)
3. Why should believing in “our glorious Lord Jesu Christ” keep us from favouritism?
4. How would you feel if someone who didn’t conform to the social norms of hygiene or ways of behaving came into the church?
5. Why do people with lots of money seem to get preferential treatment?
6. Verse 5 says God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. Is not God showing favouritism? If not why not?

7. Is it easier to faith when you are poor than when you are rich? Why might this be so. Can you think of biblical account of a person with money problem?
8. From a practical standpoint, why was unwise for early Christians to favour rich over poor? (v 6 - 7)
9. To what extent is James description of the rich valid today?
10. How can “the royal law (v 8) guide our treatment of both poor and rich?
11. How v 9 - 11 emphasise the seriousness of treating people unequally?
12. In what sense is violating one law a serious a breaking every law? Give some current examples of how this might happen.
13. What happens to those who don’t show mercy? (v 12-13)
14. The cross is the ultimate example of mercy triumphing over judgement. How has the mercy you have received there affected the way you interact with others?

## WAY OUT

- Share with one another what you will be taking away from this session?
- Pray for one another

## Commentary

The world is always assessing people, sizing them up, putting them down, establishing a pecking order. And God, who sees and loves all alike, wants the church to reflect that generous, universal love in how it behaves. In some parts of the early church they had a rule that if a regular member of the congregation came into church the usher would look after them, but that if a stranger came in, particularly a poor stranger, the bishop himself would leave his chair and go to the door to welcome the newcomer. I have often wished I had the courage to do that. But James goes further than simply insisting on equality of treatment. He hints at something he will develop later: that the rich are likely to be oppressors, and even persecutors, of the church.

In every society, unless it takes scrupulous care, the rich can operate the ‘justice’ system to their own advantage. They can hire the best lawyers; they can, perhaps, even bribe the judges. They can get their way, and the poor have to put up with it. And in James’s society ‘the rich’ may be more sinister still. As verse 7 indicates, in the first century it was most likely ‘the rich’ who were anxious about the dangers of this new messianic movement, these raggle-taggle Jesus-followers, making a fuss about an executed madman and thinking that God’s new world had already been born. Don’t they know who’s in charge around here? And James is ready with his answer: Yes, it’s King Jesus who’s in charge. He is the Lord, the anointed one, the King of glory (verse 1)! All human status, all pride of wealth and fine clothing, pale into insignificance before him. And he, Jesus, has re-emphasized one of the most central passages of Israel’s ancient law: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. That was central to Jesus’ teaching, and it remained central in early Christianity.

But it needed to be spelled out and applied, as here, to one situation after another. This is the ‘royal law’, by which James presumably means ‘the law which King Jesus himself endorsed and insists upon’. This passage, incidentally, is one of several which make it quite clear that the early church really did see Jesus as ‘king’, as ‘Messiah’. They believed that God had established his ‘kingdom’ in and through Jesus, and they were determined to live under that rule, whether or not the rest of the world – and the rest of the Jewish people whose Messiah Jesus was! – took any notice. If this is the royal law, the ‘law of freedom’ (verse 12 looks back to chapter 1 verse 25), then to break this law is indeed to be a lawbreaker. And, as one wise writer put it a long time ago, the law is like a sheet of glass: if it’s broken, it’s broken. It’s no good saying it’s only a little bit broken. A sheet of glass can no more be only partly broken than a car tyre can be only partly flat. If it’s flat, it’s flat. James sees already, even in these early days of the movement, that some people were trying to drive on the flat tyre of social prestige rather than the full tyre of loving one’s neighbour as oneself. Here is the paradox, to which James returns in verse 13. God’s mercy is sovereign. It will triumph. But the minute you say ‘Oh well, that’s all right then; God will forgive, so it doesn’t matter what I do’ – and, in particular, when ‘what I do’ includes discriminating against the poor – then, precisely because God is the God of mercy, he must act in judgment.

Tom, Wright. Early Christian Letters for Everyone (New Testament for Everyone) (p. 16). SPCK.