

■ DISCUSS

Okay, let's be honest. Suppose the scene described in verses 2-3 were to happen this week in our church. What do you think would happen? How would we treat the two people differently?

In James 2:5-7, what does it say about the poor and the rich?

How does this connect with the previous point about favoritism?

Do you think James is promoting a "reverse favoritism," in which we welcome and honor the poor more than the rich?

What is the "royal law" James mentions in verse 8?

How does showing favoritism break that law?

According to verses 10-12, how would James respond to someone who said, "I've kept seven of the Ten Commandments. That's a passing grade, right?"

In James 2:12, James speaks again of the "law of liberty" (see 1:25). But his previous comments seem to be more restrictive, forcing us to keep every point in the law. How does the law give us freedom?

Two key words appear in verse 13. Let's define them. What is judgment? What is mercy?

How does the idea of mercy bring us back to the matter of showing favoritism?

■ LIVE IT OUT

The book of James emphasizes the active side of our faith, so let's consider several ways we might put its teaching into practice.

Memorization: Learn the Beatitudes. Matthew 5:3-12 or Luke 6:20-26. In a succinct way, these describe the reordering of the world from God's perspective.

Seek Counsel: If you have been working hard to keep God's rules, and you're troubled by this assertion that breaking even one command makes you a lawbreaker, talk with a pastor or teacher about this. Ask how to unpack the idea of God's "mercy."

Evaluation: If you are in a position of authority in the church, take this opportunity to evaluate the church's response to visitors—not just the stated policies, but the actual behaviors. Is favoritism shown? If so, what can you do about it?

Serving: Can you get involved in a ministry to the poor and homeless in your community? Many such ministries need volunteers and financial support. If you can't find one to connect with, perhaps you could start one.

Spiritual-Financial Audit: This might be a good time to talk with your spouse and family about the financial decisions you make. How do your spiritual principles come into play? This is more than just a review of your fiscal security, but a chance to ask, "Where does our security really come from?" How can you as a family keep from loving, serving, or trusting in money, while still being good stewards?

Prayer: Consider offering a prayer of confession, individually or with others. Ask for forgiveness if you have shown favoritism to the rich, disregarded the poor, or worshiped money.