

“People Who Don’t Belong in Church” //

James 2:1–13 // The Book of James #4

Announcement

Student Camp update

- On Wednesday of this week all of our students got back from camp.
- Took right at 1100 up to Ocoee, TN
- Incredible couple of weeks...
- 24 Professions of faith; 17 indicated sensing a call to Vocational Ministry
- As always, behind these numbers are lots of stories. *Students who have been prayed for for years by other students or their parents or one our leaders...*
- I know of one staff member who invited his adult brothers to attend camp and help out the students at his campus and one of those brothers gave his life to Christ.

So much to be thankful for--so, as an expression of gratitude and praise toward God who is working so mightily in our student ministry, can we **put our hands together?**

¹ Works Consulted: Sam Allberry, *James For You: Showing You How Real Faith Looks in Real Life*, “God’s Word For You” series, The Good Book Company; Tony Merida, “Welcoming,” sermon preached at Imago Dei Church on August 29, 2021; *ESV Study Bible* notes; Tony Evans, “The Problem of Partiality,” sermon posted on RightNowMedia published by The Urban Alternative, 2014; Kaci Nicole, “Bible Study With Me | James 2,” study

Introduction

James 2, if you have your Bibles.¹ (I want to preach a message entitled “The People Who Don’t Belong in Church,” or, at least, the ones we assume don’t belong in church.)

2:1 My brothers (James says), show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

“No partiality,” in Greek, is literally “*without respect to face*.” Don’t judge someone, or show favoritism, with respect to “facial,” or external, characteristics. (BTW, as a point of interest: that word, here it is: **prosōpolēmpsiai** let’s all say it together, 1, 2, 3... Honestly, I wasn’t sure how to say it so I was hoping some of you would. It’s **PRAHS-uh-pah-LEMP-see-eye**²--without “favoritism,” is not found anywhere else in the Bible or Greek literature. As far as we can tell, James made it up. What that means is that this was a uniquely Christian concept, virtually unknown in the ancient world. They didn’t even have a word for what James is commanding Christians here.)

In vs 2, James, like any good Bible teacher, tells a story to illustrate his point: **2** For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, **3** and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” **4** have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

posted by Kaci Nicole on March 20, 2020; Allen Parr, “Favoritism, Prejudice, Racism FORBIDDEN!” a YouTube video posted by THE BEAT (YouTube Channel) on December 1, 2017. Rebecca McLaughlin, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/make-sunday-mornings-uncomfortable>. And others as noted throughout.

² prosōpolēmpsiai

So here you've got a situation where a rich man comes into church and he gets ushered right to the best seats down front, and right after him a poor man comes in and he is told to sit in the back. This illustration doesn't fully translate to us anymore because today in most Baptist churches the coveted seats are in the back, but go with me here... The point is: The church was granting status and privilege based on worldly wealth.

If you do this, James asks, **4 have you not then made (ungodly) distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?**

The sin of partiality is categorizing people based on things that don't matter to God. Or, to quote Tony Evans, "when you make a value judgment based on unbiblical criteria."

It's when you judge a book, so to speak, by the cover. Years ago I read an article by a guy who grew up in a poor community but had done really well in school and managed to get an incentive scholarship to Harvard (or, as we like to call it... 'the Campbell University of the North'). Well, in his first semester there, he apparently picked up some of the Harvard "airs"-- he started speaking with a Boston accent; he donned expensive Italian-leather Saint Lauren shoes and started wearing Vineyard Vines; he'd correct his family's grammar when they'd talk on the phone; he even started smoking a pipe.

Well, when he came home for Christmas his father invited him out onto the back porch and opened up a box of cigars. The boy was impressed, because he saw the label 'Padron' on them, which meant they were \$30 a stick. He took one out and sniffed it and then cut the top off and said in a very condescending tone, "See, dad, you can tell this is an expensive cigar because of the way the top just pops off. It's been properly rolled." He then lit it and said, "See dad, you can tell this is a good cigar by the way it lights—the tobacco is still properly

moist so it takes a moment to catch flame. That's because it's been properly cured."

He proceeded to make several more expert-sounding observations about the aroma and the way the smoke wafted and etc, really lecturing his dad about differentiating good cigars from bad ones. Finally, his dad said, "That's great, son, especially since these are really cheap cigars." The boy said, "No, Dad--the Padron is a \$30 cigar." "Yes, son," his dad said, "but that's a \$30 Padron wrapper on a 75 cent cigar. I know, because I changed them. These are Swisher Sweets in Padron wrappers."

At which point, the guy writing the article said, my dad explained to me how simply putting a fancy cover onto something doesn't make the inside any different. He said, "I never forgot the lesson--though to be honest the main thing I could never get over is my dad's patience in spending \$1000 on cigars and then unwrapping and rewrapping each of them by hand to teach me this lesson. And, of course, wondering what happened to all those expensive cigars."

You can't judge a book, or a cigar, or a person, by its cover.

A similar thing was happening in James' church. The church was differentiating people--making assumptions about them--based on distinctions that carry no weight with God.

Now, before you say, "*I'm ENJOYING this sermon because it's not about me at all! We're not like that anymore. There was no usher down front this morning directing rich people toward the front and poor people toward the back.*"

Not so fast. **Think about all the ways we prejudge one another** in the church. (Warning: this is about to get super uncomfortable).

- **Some of you, just like James says, have a tendency** to look down on people who are poor. You assume that in this country, the only

way you could end up poor is by being lazy. So obviously that person doesn't have what it takes like you did.

- **Others of you are prejudiced AGAINST the rich.** "Look at them with their posh lifestyle. I bet they have never worked a day in their life. They don't know what real life is like. They're so entitled, they got everything handed to them on a silver platter--and I bet they are raising their kids the same way. I don't even want to be around them."
- Some of you look down on people who are **overweight or out of shape.** "Clearly they have no self-control or self-respect." Some of you don't like people who are skinny. "Clearly they are image-obsessed and superficial."
- Some of **you don't like passionate worshippers** because you assume they are attention-seeking show-offs. Others of you don't like subdued worshippers because you assume they are unspiritual.
- Some of you **look down on divorced people** because clearly they don't know how to make a commitment; others of you don't like people with happy homes because you assume they're faking it.
- Some of you **look with suspicion at working moms**--obviously they put their careers above their families; others of you judge stay at home moms because you assume they are pampered and unambitious;
- Some of you **assume people of color come into our church** with a chip on their shoulder ready to turn everything into a race issue. Others of you assume white people are blind to their privilege and don't care anything about what you're going through and will turn on you in a second. Some of you see Hispanic people and you assume they've done something illegal in getting here and they don't care anything about assimilating into American culture.
- Some of you are suspicious of those who **send their kids to public schools**--clearly they don't really care about their kids; others of you don't like homeschool parents because clearly they parent from fear and are setting up their kids to fail when they encounter the real world.

- Some of you **assume anyone who leans left politically doesn't really care about godliness**, has no backbone and no understanding of how economics work; others of you assume that those who lean right politically just don't care about justice and only about preserving a status quo that benefits them.
- *Am I preaching in here yet? Am I talking to anyone here?*

Now, please, before you send me emails telling me how unfair my characterizations are, I'm just saying that there's a lot of prejudice at work in our hearts, on whatever side of whatever issue you fall. And if you do send me an email I'll just know it's because when you...

Tony Merida, a fellow pastor here in Raleigh, says in the church we tend to categorize by: **1. Affluence:** Wealth (that's what James brings up). **2. Appearance:** (How somebody looks, how they dress, or the color of their skin) **3. Accent:** You assume that someone's accent means something about them. If they have a Hispanic accent it means this. If they have a country accent it means... *that*. I grew up with a Southern accent (and I still have a little bit of one), but when I was getting my PhD I realized that if you spoke with a British accent you automatically got a 15-point IQ bump in the eyes of whoever you were talking to. If you spoke with a Southern accent it got you a 15-point deduction. So, I could be just as smart as my British classmate but he'd automatically start 30-IQ points ahead of me. Now, I say that lightheartedly, but for many people it's not funny. People make assumptions about them because of their accent. Or their name. I know people of color who talk about how frustrating it is for employers to make assumptions about them because their name is Keeshawn rather than Scott. Hey, good news for those of you in that category: The disciples were looked down on for having Galilean accents and they still changed the world. But you shouldn't have to overcome those suspicions in the church.

We make assumptions because of **4. Age.** Old people love to talk about how "kids these days; those dang millennials (who are not kids

anymore, btw, millennials are now middle-aged!), or them Gen Z lunatics..." Young people love to talk about how old and out of touch Boomers are. (BTW, that was a problem in the early church, too: Paul had to tell Timothy not to let people look down on him because of his youth!) **5. Ancestry:** In some parts of the world this is everything. What family are you from? What caste do you belong to? There was a day not too long ago in this country when black people either couldn't come into white churches or, if they did, they had to sit in the balcony. That was not only a horrible sin, it is, as James says, a betrayal of the very gospel that we preach. **6. Achievement:** We make assumptions about people because of their education. Or their vocation. Lastly, **7. Alliteration.** Some people, like me and Pastor Tony, have the ability to make everything start with the same letter. And some of you don't. That doesn't make us better than you, just more Baptist. It's a gift.

So, that's the sin of partiality. **Why is it so wrong, especially in the church?**

3 reasons--the first is in vs. 5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

1. External riches rarely reflect internal excellencies

- If anything, James says, those who are worldly-rich tend to miss spiritual blessings.
- James says to them, "Look around! It's not the rich who are flooding your churches. It's the poor. The rich who are resisting you and persecuting you."
 - It was the RYR and the Pharisees who missed Jesus, and the prostitutes and tax collectors who flocked to be around him.

- Look around today--go over to the halls of academia at Duke and UNC, and there they'll tell you that Jesus isn't the Son of God and the Bible is a joke. Or go over to the country clubs this morning and you'll find rich people who see no real need for Jesus in their lives. Meanwhile, sitting in here is a guy who drives a dump truck and a single mom working two jobs with tears in their eyes as they worship who are joint heirs of the kingdom.
- Paul says in Corinthians, echoing James [26] For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; (this isn't random or circumstantial) God **chose** what is weak in the world to shame the strong... (WHY?)[29] so that no human being might boast in his presence." God more often than not chooses the poor to fill his church in order to humble human pride. It's not that NO rich or powerful or super-intelligent come to Jesus, just that it's not our riches that attract his attention; it's not our intelligence that figures him out; and it's not our goodness that earns his favor. God gives knowledge of him as a gift of grace, and when it comes to receiving grace, riches and strength and righteousness, if anything, can be liabilities to putting yourself in a position to receive grace.

So reason #1 partiality is wrong in the church: **External riches rarely reflect internal excellencies.** In vs 8, James gives a 2nd reason: If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

2. Showing no partiality is the essence of the Great Commandment!

In Matthew 22, Jesus was asked, "Which is the most important commandment?" and he answered, "Easy: First, Love God with all

your heart, soul and mind. Second, Love others as you love yourself-- or like you would want to be loved." And then Jesus said those 2 commandments summed up all 613 of the Old Testament laws! These are the heart of everything.

James says, "Well, when you treat someone differently because of how they look or how much money they have, you are breaking the 2nd commandment. One of the only 2 given directly by Jesus.

And then in vs 10 James really drives home his point by means of another gut punch: **10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.**

You say, "Well, I don't murder or steal." Good for you! But one of the **two commandments that Jesus gave directly**--that he said was the summation of the others--you are flouting!

Say you've got a guy in court who has murdered multiple people, and right before being sentenced, he asks to address the court, and he tells everybody, "Y'all, I just wanted to let you know that I did not commit adultery. And for that reason, the Court should go easy on me!" What's the Judge going to say? That's great, but who cares! We're all glad you kept that law--but arguably the essence of our laws--that you respect the property and the lives of others, you have utterly disregarded!"

James says the same thing to those showing partiality or prejudice in the church: You claim to keep God's laws, but then you break the big one, his ROYAL law. You say, "I'm pro life, I'm pro marriage!" Yeah, but if you're racist or preferential, you've rejected the authority of King Jesus at precisely the point he said the Law mattered most.

So what if you avoid orgies of sex, if you foster orgies of anger and suspicion and racism around your dinner table? So what if you have your family in church every Sunday if you despise a lot of the people there or look with prejudice at a lot of the people in your community?

This is when you realize that a lot of those churches that claim to represent Jesus the most in our country actually don't represent him at all. They have bumper stickers that say "family values" on their cars but practice no "gospel values" in their homes. Churches that have crosses on the top and "Jesus saves" on the billboard but would probably hate Jesus if he actually showed up, with his emphasis on loving the refugee and the outcast.

Tony Evans says, "Maybe the reason we haven't solved the race problem is that we haven't not put it on par with murder. But King Jesus is the one who said, "Love like you've been loved;" The same one who said, "Do not murder" said, "receive like you've been received," and if you're racist you're definitely not doing that.

Listen: Looking down on someone for any superficial reason or treating them with any less respect because of something they are or are not is a sin. Not just a sin: A ROYAL SIN.

That means if Michael Jordan, Joe Biden, Taylor Swift and Nicolas Cage all walked into this church at the same time as a homeless man, all of them had better receive the exact same welcome (and this is where I need to confess to you as your pastor--cuz darn it if I don't think Nic should get top priority around here).

I have a pastor friend who painted the doors entering their worship center red, symbolizing the blood of Jesus, because he wanted it to be clear that when we come in here, we don't bring our appearance, accomplishments, affluence, achievements, ancestry, or our good or bad works. Regardless of our status or the color of our skin or our religious pasts, we are all sinners in need of a Savior, made clean

before God only by the blood of his Son. As the old saying goes, “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.” That’s a cool idea. I wish I’d thought of the red doors thing. It’s not too late, I guess.

But, either way, what matters when you come in here is not status or money or success. What matters is that you are made in the image of God and purchased by the blood of Christ. Nothing else matters. That’s where your dignity comes from. That’s why we love you. That’s why we accept you. It’s why we’re accepted.

(Now, a quick clarification here: Saying that we don’t show favoritism in church is not to say that we should not give honor to whom honor is due. If the president walks into our church, we should all respect him with the unique respect that is due to the president of our country. The same would be true for the governor or mayor. That would not be a violation of James 2.)

What I mean is that at the most fundamental level, we recognize the value of each person comes from being made in the image of God and purchased by his blood. Things like appearance or affluence or achievement have no value before God. Those things don’t change your status or where you sit, metaphorically speaking, before God.

Vs 12, James turns the knife one more time: **12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.**

3. Disdain for the poor demonstrates disconnect from the gospel

- Remember, James says, how you expect to be judged. If you are a Christian, you’ve put all your hope for eternal life in God’s mercy. Embracing the gospel means embracing that there’s nothing about your worthiness that earns God’s favor, he gives it to you, the unworthy, freely as a gift.
- The gospel is about God’s rescue of the poor, not his rewarding of the rich. The gospel is that before God we were poor, blind, wretched because of our sin; children of wrath, sons and

daughters of disobedience; enemies of God; outcasts; strangers to the covenant. But now, in grace, God has brought us near, and now our hope is his promise that he will not judge us according to our sins but according to his mercy given us in Christ. A Christian who understands that should treat others in the same way. God set you free from your sin. You are judged by the law of freedom, of liberty. You should receive others the same way!

- And then, vs 13, James says something that at first seems harsh: **Vs. 13: “Judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy.” Mercy triumphs over judgment.** IOW, he says, if you don’t show mercy, you won’t receive mercy.
- **Now, hold on ... does James mean that we earn God’s mercy by showing mercy?**
- Well, no. That would contradict so much other clear teaching in the Bible. You can’t EARN God’s mercy by showing mercy. God’s mercy is a free gift you receive by faith: For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God—not of works (even the work of showing mercy!), so that nobody can boast. (Nobody will get to heaven and say, “I’m here because I showed so much mercy to others.”)
- What James is saying is not that we earn God’s mercy by showing mercy. He’s actually saying the flip of that. Follow me here—lean in: James means ***the evidence that we have experienced mercy is that we show it.***
- If you have really received God’s mercy, you can’t help but show it to others. It’s impossible, James says, to have any true awareness of the gospel and remain a judging, unforgiving, locked-up person. And if you are that, the only explanation is that you haven’t received mercy—not for real.
- I think **the best place Jesus made this point** was in that parable he told of the man who was forgiven 10,000 talents, which is my favorite of his parables. (Which is why you hear about it about every 6 months in my sermons.)
 - Basically, you’ve got a man in court with a debt of 10,000 talents that he owes to this other man. I’ve told you this

before, but a talent was equivalent to about 20 years of labor for the average worker. In your whole lifetime, you could earn maybe 2 or 3 talents? This man owes 10,000—5,000 lifetimes of work. And 10,000 was the highest number you could count to in Greek, so it was like saying this man owed a gazillion dollars to this other guy. It was a debt he could not repay. Well, the debt is due, and in those days, if you couldn't pay your debt...

- At this point in the story, his hearers would probably have said, “No way. Come on man, I thought you were telling a real story. There’s no way someone who just got forgiven a gazillion dollars would hold someone else accountable for \$1.50.” And Jesus said, “Exactly. In the same way, there’s no way you could receive the kind of mercy God gave you in forgiving your sins and withhold mercy from others. There’s no way you could experience that kind of generosity and not be moved to give to those around you in need.”
- There is **no way** to believe that God received you when you were an outcast, and then look down on or show prejudice toward someone else. The fact that you’re like that means you’ve probably never experienced the gospel. *That’s what James is saying.*
- Last week to the middle schoolers I described it like being hit with a Mac Truck... there’s no way you could get hit with that kind of force and stay the same.
- **Those who genuinely encounter mercy become merciful--** AND SO FROM ONE ANGLE you can say that only those who show mercy toward others should expect it from God. Because if you don’t show mercy, there’s no way you could really have experienced it. The little indicator light that you have received mercy is that you become merciful.
- Jesus repeated this theme often in the Gospels: **He taught us to pray, for example, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”** IOW, we can expect God’s forgiveness in similar

measure to how we forgive others--because, again, It’s not that we’re earning God’s forgiveness. It’s that **the sign we’ve received the mercy of the gospel is that we show the mercy of the gospel.** Showing mercy, and receiving others in mercy, is the indicator light that you have experienced the gospel.

Look at the last line: “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (v. 13) In this context, that phrase means that on the final day *your* acts of mercy will triumph over judgment. In this context, that phrase does not mean that on the final day God’s mercy will triumph over judgment in his heart, but that your mercy will triumph over judgment, because your acts of mercy will demonstrate that you understood the gospel and received it.

- **This is not original with James. James picked this principle up from his half-brother Jesus.** In Matthew 25 Jesus said on Judgment Day he’ll separate the sheep from the goats. And in this particular judgment scene, everyone present confesses Jesus as Lord. But he divides them into the sheep and goats, and he puts the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (You stay where you are in James, we’ll come right back to you.)

[34] Then the King will say to those on his right (the sheep), *‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [35] For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ [37] Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? [38] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? [39] And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ [40] And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’*

[41] “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. [42] For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, [43] I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ [44] Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we (miss doing all these things).’ And he’ll respond, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ [46] And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

- Let this settle in: According to Jesus, the only difference between the sheep and the goats was what they did or did not DO. They weren’t separated according to what they believed--they all believed the same thing. **The difference between the sheep and the goats was whether their understanding of the gospel produced tangible acts of mercy in them.**
- Again, I want to be clear: It’s not that their acts of mercy earned them salvation--no, salvation is a free gift we receive only by faith--BUT, their acts of mercy demonstrated that they had experienced salvation.
- So, on Judgment Day, their acts of mercy “triumphed” over judgment. Their acts of mercy demonstrated that they had understood and embraced the gospel.

So, here’s the question: What if we evaluated your belief in the gospel solely by how generous you were, how forgiving you were, how non-judgmental you were, how accepting you are; and how you treated the poor?

- **Now, I know some of you are going to get overwhelmed here:** Just because you have relapses in this or are inconsistent with it doesn’t mean you aren’t saved.
- In fact, in **Galatians 2**, Paul confronted Peter, the leader of the early church, because Peter had started to act in a racist manner. Peter, the leader of the early church, would eat and fellowship

with Jews but not with Gentiles. And Paul confronts him, publicly, and he says, “Peter, you’re not acting in line with the gospel.” He doesn’t say, “Peter, you’re not saved.” We all need renewals to bring our behavior in line with the gospel.

- But still the point remains: **How you treat the poor (or, how forgiving you are, or how accepting you are of others) is an indicator light of whether you understand the gospel.**
- **That’s James’s big point there.** You wanna know if you understand the gospel? It’s shown in your generosity of spirit toward people around you—whether that’s accepting those who are different, receiving those with troubled pasts, or sharing resources with those who don’t have them.

Let’s end our time with a few application questions:

In what ways are you personally involved with the poor?

- If Matthew 25 happened tonight, what would you hear from Jesus?
- Let me be clear: we have some amazing people in our church doing amazing, Matthew 25-type ministries--with prisoners and unwed mothers and high school dropouts in our church, but as a church, we’re not known for this as much as we are other things, and we should be. I’ve been praying about ways we can up our engagement with the poor of our city.

Which leads to this question we have to ask as a church: **How many of our ministries in the church are focused on those who can’t ‘pay us back’?**

- A lot of our ministries and facilities bring people into the church, people of means who can help pay the bills. And those are indeed ministries, and I’m not taking away from them. But in another sense, having those kinds of ministries can just make good business sense for us. So, we should ask: “Do we have ministries toward people who will never be able to pay us back?”

- Over the years, we've talked about the HOPUD of our city, and we've seen amazing things:
 - One of the ministries we've invested in the most in is the prison ministry. In the last year, some of our members have started some amazing transitional housing and job programs to help restore prisoners to full functioning in society.
 - We're funding thousands of Compassion Children around the world refugee centers in places like Ukraine and India.
 - So there's some amazing things happening, but honestly, as a church, we have a ton of room to grow here.
 - We're praying about providing affordable faith-driven daycare for single / working moms... if you're interested in talking about that, reach out to us at missions@summitchurch.com
 - Or just do something--there are lots of opportunities at your campus where we need people. Email that address to get connected. Or, maybe God will use YOU to identify the next area our church needs to engage
- One of the things we have tried to apply this principle is through church planting. Each year, we give millions of dollars each year away to missions and church plants, and as I've explained, these plants rarely benefit us.
- We have close to 300 of our members serving overseas right now and we give millions of dollars to the IMB each year to help fund them.
- Of course, we have to ask, Are we planting campuses and churches as much in poor areas as in affluent ones? We're trying to be intentional with this: For example, we've planted churches in red light districts in India and slum-adjacent areas in the Dominican Republic. Closer to home, we've planted campuses in several prisons and in many poorer urban areas. There have been a couple parts of our city we became convinced that the style of our church wouldn't reach, so we planted independent churches there instead of campuses.

- Right now, we are funding a Farsi network of church plants, and each week, we host Hispanic, Arabic, and Mandarin-language gatherings at our church.
- So, we're trying to be intentional but we've got to stay vigilant at this. For example, we don't have a great strategy yet for reaching rural areas. But we'll keep all this in front of our church if we're truly gospel people.

A little closer to home: How quickly do you identify and reach out to disconnected people in the church?

- Is this church a welcoming community for those who feel isolated elsewhere?
- Who can forget that moving scene in the movie, 42, on Jackie Robinson's life where Jackie Robinson is standing all by himself on the baseball field as all these Cincinnati fans call him the worst names. Jackie was the only black player in MLB and the recipient of the most despicable kinds of hatred. Well, as Jackie stands there, by himself, all alone, one of his white teammates, Pee Wee Reese, walks out to him and puts his arm around Jackie's shoulder, looks up into the stands and says, "Jackie, I want them to know. I want them to know that you're my teammate and I stand with you." It's so moving... It's one of those "I'm glad we're in a dark theater so nobody can see my tears" kind of moments.
- There's something powerful in showing love to someone THE WORLD says is not worthy of love. CHURCH, this ought to be the place where people FROM VARIOUS ETHNICITIES AND CLASSES and BACKGROUNDS PUT THEIR ARMS AROUND EACH OTHER AND LOVE each other. **Is that what people experience here? How quickly do you identify and reach out to disconnected people in the church?**
- **Or how about people who just look ALONE at church?** (Let's make this really practical, ok?) How quickly do you reach out and talk to someone who looks alone? I hear so many people complain that they went to some church and nobody ever talked

to them. **Rebecca McLaughlin**, says, **"An alone person in the church is an emergency."**

- Your friends, Rebecca says, can wait. Meet them at Chipotle later. At church, find those people who look alone and introduce yourself to them. Then introduce them to someone else. *"When someone is sitting alone on their phone," she says, "you MUST approach them and you MUST ask them if they have someone to sit with. It shouldn't be said that they came to church and left without anyone knowing their name."*³
- **Summit, what if we reserved the 7 minutes right before and the 7 minutes right after church just to do *this*?** Wouldn't that be a great way of demonstrating the gospel--saying "Here you matter and you are important!" You're not invisible in here. Do you know what kind of place this would become if we did that?
- It's one of the things that irritates me about you guys that cruise in 10 minutes late or leave 5 minutes before we dismiss. It's not that I'm mad you're missing part of the service; it's that you treat church like a religious show instead of a welcoming community that you are a part of. When people say that the church is unfriendly and it feels like a big production, you're the problem. And **don't even get me started on you guys** still sitting at home in your pajamas streaming online when healthwise you can and should be back in the church. You have absolutely reduced church to a program you watch, and that's not church at all.
- **(Hey, James is punchy, I get to be, too.)**

How quickly do you embrace people of questionable circumstances?

- Are you the kind of person who--if someone doesn't fit just the right profile or pedigree for you, or they come from questionable circumstances--that you keep your distance from them?

- My quiet time reading this week took me through John 4, and I was thinking about this woman that Jesus found by the well. This was a woman who clearly didn't know how to run a family. She's had not 1, not 2, not 3, not 4, but FIVE failed marriages. For many of us, this was the kind of woman you'd whisper about, or complain about, or want in your small group, or hanging around your family and influencing your kids. **And yet, JESUS made her the greatest evangelist in Samaria.** Would you have recognized that? Would you have embraced her?

Christianity is supposed to be good news for the poor. So here's my question: Does it feel that way at The Summit Church? What do you need to change so that it does?

I called this message "People Who Don't Belong in Church," and I hope you can see that the irony is that there's no one who doesn't belong in church--except for those who think that their status makes them more welcome than others. This is a place where the entry doors are red, so to speak, because broken, outcast sinners find welcome and acceptance in the arms of the Father.

OUR WORSHIP TEAMS ARE COMING. STAND, IF YOU WILL. Look around. One day, friends, we will be gathered in eternity with a great multitude from every nation, tribe, and tongue. Almost for sure, whoever you stand next to up there will have different accents and ancestries. There will be people who were rich, and those who were poor; former world rulers standing alongside former slaves. Movie stars and maintenance men. And we will all be there for one reason: because of our status. That's right, I said, "We'll be there because of our status"--our status as sons and daughters of the King.

Look at that person to your right and left (non-awkwardly, sneak a peak). That's a child of the King! (You might want to reach out and

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/make-sunday-mornings-uncomfortable>

touch them! You can go home and tell someone you touched royalty today!) They are special, whoever they are. Let's start treating each other that way right now.