

# WELCOME HOME

Open Arms // James 2:1-10

**THE POINT:** Welcoming others is more than a friendly “hello.”

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Familiarity and comfort can be good; after all, it allows us to feel at home, safe and secure. However, these same things can be dangerous to the Christian and can keep us from accomplishing God’s purposes for our lives. We naturally gravitate to the people we know best and who are like us. It’s easier to interact with people who have common backgrounds or interests. But when those friendships drive us to overlook others, or worse, show preferential treatment, it becomes a big problem. Jesus loves all people—and we’re called to do the same. We must learn to give up familiarity and comfort and embrace others with open arms.

▶ **When have you felt like the new kid?**

## JAMES 2:1-4

The Christians to whom James wrote claimed to believe the gospel and follow Jesus, but they were not treating people equally in their congregations. According to James, this was an evil thing to do for at least three reasons:

- ▶ **Favoritism neglects the image of God in others:** All people are created in God’s image, and when we treat some as more important (even more valuable) than others, we communicate that worth is based on the world’s values and not God’s.
- ▶ **Favoritism sees others as objects and not people:** Favoritism serves selfish purposes—a way to be more popular or have opportunities to go places with them—and is really a way of using people to get what we want.
- ▶ **Favoritism puts us in the place of judge:** God, the perfect Judge, says that all people are equally valuable. When we show favoritism, we’re disagreeing with God about a person’s worth and are elevating our own judgmental opinions over God’s.

As Jesus’ followers, we are called to be like Him, and He had no concern whatsoever for His reputation. In fact, He continually spent time with the outcasts of society. When we show favoritism, we reject Jesus’ ways for those of the world.

- ▶ **What are some ways we might be tempted to show favoritism today?**
- ▶ **What makes preferential treatment so dangerous?**

## JAMES 2:5-7

Scripture is filled with adjectives describing God—*holy, righteous, sovereign, compassionate, and kind*. When we consider God’s posture toward humanity, another word comes to mind: *grace*. Because of His great love for us, God has given us undeserved favor. Though we refused to honor God and lived in disobedience, He held back the punishment we deserved and instead did everything necessary to restore our relationship with Him. Sin must be punished, and Jesus took the penalty of sin. In turn, we’ve received what Jesus deserves—union with God and eternal blessings. This is grace. If we want to have the heart of God, there’s no room whatsoever for favoritism. It’s only by grace we’ve been welcomed into His family. We, too, are to welcome others in the same way.

- ▶ **What does it look like on a practical level to be rich in faith?**
- ▶ **How can we avoid showing partiality between types of people?**

## JAMES 2:8-10

Scripture teaches us that love is sacrificial and always seeks what’s best for others. Perhaps the most obvious reason why favoritism is wrong is because it’s altogether inconsistent with love. Above all else, love is the language of the Christian. In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus summarized the entire Old Testament law—it was intended to guide us in loving God and loving others. It’s impossible to separate these two commands. We may be tempted to believe we truly love God, while at the same time, failing to love the people around us well. However, Scripture teaches that the natural overflow of walking with Jesus is love. When the temptation arises within us to show favoritism for personal gain, we’d do well to look to God and remind ourselves that, because He first loved us, we are able to love others well. This is the essence of the Christian life.

- ▶ **What is the connection between our relationship with God and our relationship with others?**
- ▶ **What are some reasons favoritism and love will never go together?**



# LIVE IT OUT

Unit 1 // Session 2

## ▶ CHRIST

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Read the following passages about Christ's life.

➤ Mark 1:40-45

➤ Mark 2:13-17

➤ Luke 7:36-50

➤ John 4:1-10

➤ **What can you learn from these encounters about the way Jesus lived in terms of favoritism?**

➤ **How has Christ worked in you to engage with others in a similar way?**

How have you lived in ways that aren't Christlike? In a prayer, confess those and commit to living more like Jesus.

## ▶ COMMUNITY

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One characteristic of the church that stands out against the world is unity. God intends that all people in the church are equally loved, accepted, and valued. Favoritism keeps this from happening.

➤ **Who in your church or student ministry have you failed to love well because of reasons related to favoritism?**

➤ **What will you do this week to communicate that you value them?**

## ▶ CULTURE

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We are called to love not only those in our church family, but also those who aren't a part of God's family.

➤ **How has favoritism and concern for your reputation negatively impacted your witness among friends?**

➤ **This week, how will you show that you value those who may feel unloved?**