



# Small Group Discussion Questions

- Read James 5:1-6

## **Kid Questions**

- How do you personally get money (e.g. chores, babysitting, Christmas and birthdays)?
- What are some ways you can use that money to help people?

## **Group Questions**

- As a group reflect back on the message, quiet time and the passage itself, and share anything that stuck out to you or felt interesting.
- As a group discuss any poor investments or purchases you've made over your life time.
- Knowing what you know now, how would you change that investment if you could go back?
- What was something that God taught you as a result of that experience?

# DAY ONE

## Read James 5:1-6

Sometimes reading passages like this can be difficult to interpret and understand. Sometimes it can seem like James is saying that God is against the rich and wealthy and hates money. However, James is not condemning all that have wealth or even the pursuit of wealth, but rather, those that harm others in the accumulation of wealth.

As we study this passage it can be helpful to remember some important details about the style of writing as well as the condition of the culture to which he was writing.

First, James' style of writing mirrors the Jewish wisdom literature\* that would have been familiar at the time. Take for example the similarities between James 5:6 and the wisdom book, Sirach 34:22 *"to take away a neighbor's living is to murder him; to deprive an employee of his wages is to shed blood"* This is important because the wisdom literature tends to make broad sweeping statements that can be very direct and black and white but, are meant to be received as wisdom rather than absolute fact, 100% of the time.

Second, at the time of writing, in the first century, we know there was a SIGNIFICANT wealth gap. There were a few that were very wealthy, and many that literally lived paycheck to paycheck. So to be wealthy and withhold money or abuse those that had nothing could literally mean they couldn't feed their families.

## REFLECT

- Can you think of times where others have harmed you in their pursuit of wealth?
- Can you think of times where you have harmed others in your pursuit of wealth or perhaps agreed to work on unethical projects?

## RESPOND

*Lord, please reveal to me any areas where, in my pursuit of wealth, possessions or security, I have stepped on or harmed others. Reveal to me any areas where I have elevated my money or possessions above people. Help me to honor you with the things that you have trusted me with and help me to steward your resources well. Amen*

\*The Wisdom books in the Bible, in their probable order of writing, are Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes (also called Qohelet), Ben Sira (also called Sirach or Ecclesiasticus), and the Wisdom of Solomon. The first three are included in Jewish and Protestant Bibles. The Septuagint and the Bibles of the Eastern Churches and the Roman Catholic Church include all five books. (*What is Wisdom Literature?* by David Penchansky)

# DAY TWO

## Read James 5:1

There is some debate among scholars regarding the intended audience of this passage because, much like James 4:13-17, it is unclear whether James is reprimanding a certain group of believers or whether or not he is referring to those outside of the church. Regardless of the difficulty of the specific audience he is confronting, James included it in his letter to believers; so it's logical to conclude that there are some reasons they needed to hear the stern rebuke. Some possible explanations of that are:

- We know from other passages in James that many of the believers who he sent the letter are, themselves, being oppressed by the rich and wealthy. See (James 1:2,9) James rebuke of the rich could serve as a reminder that God hears their cries.
- We also know from other passages in James that some of the believers were indeed wealthy and were taking advantage of others. So James could be including them in the rebuke. See (James 2:1-7)
- James' writing also imitates much of the literary styles of the Jewish literature, particularly the wisdom texts. It was not uncommon for old testament prophets or even proverbs to speak directly to those opposed to God. For example Ezekiel 25.

## REFLECT

- Our culture very rarely views the possession of money as something to “weep and wail” about. Have you ever felt like your wealth was a burden that you didn't want to carry?

## RESPOND

- How does this passage apply to your life? Are you in the camp of those being oppressed that need to focus on eternity and God being the Judge or are you the one pursuing wealth that needs to evaluate the fruit of that pursuit?
- Take some time to specifically pray about your finances and possessions and invite God to align your perspective to His.

*Lord, please help me to align my perspective about wealth and possessions to yours. Please give me the wisdom to know how to steward your resources well. Amen*

# DAY THREE

## Read James 5:2-3

*Recently, my wife and I travelled with our 4 boys to North Carolina to visit my parents. While there we all lived out of our small suitcases and lived very minimally. When we came back, my wife and I realized just how much stuff we had. In fact, as we've begun spring cleaning, it's been a bit overwhelming to get rid of it all. We've realized that so many of our clothes, toys and possessions have been damaged or broken and honestly just need to be thrown away. We often ask, "how did we get so much junk"?*

John Calvin said: *"God has not appointed gold for rust, nor garments for moths; but, on the contrary, he has designed them as aids and helps to human life."*

In this sense, James may intend the decay of good described in vv. 2-3a to be understood, at least in part, literally: the actual evidence of disuse will stand as a witness against the rich. In other words, the things around us that are falling into disuse and rusting should be a reminder that they won't last through eternity. Which begs the question: how badly do we really need that stuff now? Are there better investments we could make in light of eternity?

### REFLECT

- Take a quick inventory of your possessions: Is your house cluttered with too much junk?
- Are there some items that you know were bad investments?

### RESPOND

- With an eternal perspective in mind, what are some positive investments you could make towards eternity?
- Could God be encouraging you to sell something towards making that investment in eternity?

*Lord, help me to make wise investments. Help me to keep my mind on your kingdom and the kind of investments that last and won't rot or rust. Amen*

# DAY FOUR

## Read James 5:4

*One summer in High School I picked up a painting job with a buddy of mine. Myself, my friend, and two others were a small house painting crew and we had a manager. All throughout the summer we were booked to paint houses and it was hard work. I remember we started in late June and by Mid July we had painted about 3 houses and hadn't seen a pay check. Our manager kept assuring us that we would be paid once the jobs closed and all expenses were paid and so as Highschoolers we didn't push it too much. By the end of July though, we began to get pretty frustrated. We were working long hours and even received supposed "raises" but still hadn't seen a dime. It was at that point we realized something was quite wrong. We walked off the jobsite and didn't look back. While I know now there was a lot more I could have done, at the time I felt pretty helpless and really discouraged.*

James writes these verses to let people know that God cares about stories like mine. He hates the injustice and it matters to Him. Maybe you have a similar story? I believe the message for you is that God loves and deeply cares about it and about you. He is the one that will seek justice as the ultimate Judge.

But, maybe there are ways that those of us that aren't intentionally trying to harm people can apply this passage as well. Have you ever pledged money to a missionary, charity or church than forgot to pay or decided not to in the end? If I'm honest with myself, there have been times where I simply forgot to send the check to the missionary and I know they literally need it to survive.

## REFLECT

- Are there any pledges, debts or promises that you haven't honored?

## RESPOND

- Is it possible to honor those pledges, debts or promises even now?

*Lord, help me to be a person of my word. Help me to honor my debts and promises and support those in need. Amen*

# DAY FIVE

## Read James 5:5

*When was the last time you moved? While the joy of living in a new place may be fun I've never met anyone who enjoyed the process of actually moving all the junk. You know what I mean... the big truck, the days of packing, the begging and bribing of all of your friends to try to get some help and then the YEARS of unpacking that all goes along with it. Someone once told me jokingly, "there must be a special place in hell where all people do is move things from house to house for all eternity". I've noticed that the more we move, the worse it seems to get. Every time we seem to have more and more stuff.*

James is making a similar point to confront those who live lavish lives of self-indulgence. He makes the comparison of an animal being fattened for the slaughter because his audience would be very familiar with the concept. Eventually, whether it comes to an end on this earth or when they die and face judgment, all of that stuff will fade and won't last and it will be that much harder to let go. Jesus illustrates this point in his conversation with the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-27.

## REFLECT

- What possessions of yours would you have a really hard time getting rid of?

## RESPOND

- What's your motivation for keeping those possessions? How would you respond if God asked you to give them up?
- Whether God is inviting you to sacrifice them or not, your emotional response can be a great indicator of the position of your heart.

*Lord, thank you for the many blessings you have given me. Help me to remember that I am only a steward of the things you have given me. Help me also not to become so attached to the gift that I forget that you are the giver. Thank you Jesus. Amen*

# DAY SIX

## Read James 5:6

Two Sundays ago, Nick explained the difference between the sins of “commission” and the sins of “omission”. “Commission” means that there was an action taken to cause the sin, whether intentional or unintentional whereas, “omission” means that it was the lack of a right action that caused the sin. In this verse it is more likely that James is suggesting that the rich did not literally murder those they have oppressed by their sins of commission; meaning they didn’t murder them with their own hands. He is however saying that because they failed to pay them a wage, which they rightly earned (sin of omission) it is actually very likely that some did literally die due to starvation and poverty.

Another point that James tries to make is that the people that have been “condemned and murdered” are “righteous”, meaning they have done nothing to deserve such treatment. The last phrase of verse 6 says, “he does not resist you”. This likely points to the fact that the poor and oppressed don’t have many options to fight back.

### REFLECT

- While murder may seem like an extreme example, can you think of some times in your life where you failed to take action even when you knew it was right and it negatively impacted someone?

### RESPOND

*Lord, help us to be aware of those in need around us. Give us your eyes to see the people that need our help and support and help us to be open handed with the resources you have entrusted us with. Amen*