

Open Arms

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James 2:1-4 NIV

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. [2] Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. [3] If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," [4] have you not **discriminated** among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

1. Discrimination Is Lame

As God builds Empowered Student Ministries many different types of people will come in. We are going to have jocks, preps, skaters, punks, the popular kids, and the losers... the well off, and those that have nothing... the loud mouths, and the quiet ones. All different styles, flavors, and races of students will be a part of what God is doing. *James reminds us that as Christians we better not leave anybody out.* The world judges people based on what they have, what they look like, and who they hang out with... But God loves every person, from every background, and we are called to love them too.

Discrimination is when we push somebody away, because they are different than us. That is totally against God's ways. God loves every person, of every background, and He wants all of them to be a part of His Church. If we reject people, or ignore them when they come to Empowered Youth, it is like we are saying they don't matter. **People matter to God... and they should matter to us. Discrimination is lame.**

James 2:8-9 NIV

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "**Love your neighbor as yourself**," you are doing right. [9] But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

ASK: Do you remember what Jesus said the two "greatest commandments" are???

Mark 12:28-31 NIV

Mark 12:30-31 NIV

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' [31] The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

James is agreeing with Christ and saying that the absolute greatest thing we can do is love God. The second greatest thing we can do is to love other people.

2. The Greatest Thing Is LOVE

Love is the most powerful thing on earth. Love is what changes people's lives. **Love is the same powerful force that sent Jesus to the cross.** Love is what caused God to forgive a sinner like me.

John 3:16 NIV

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

God loves people so much, He sent Jesus to die for them. If we don't love people, and accept them into the Church, then we are pushing people away from God. Their blood is on our hands.

ASK: Do agree that it would be wrong to exclude somebody from coming to youth just because we don't like them???
Get a response...

We all agree that to keep somebody out, just 'cause they're not our style, or they smell, or they're not "cool" would be wrong.

Sometimes I think we exclude people without intending to. Maybe we are so busy hanging with our own friends that we don't take time to say hey to the new kid. Maybe we're so caught up in our own little clique that we forget about others. I'm not against cliques... it's ok to have some friends that are closer to others. You should have close friends, but don't let your group of friends become exclusive. A group should be open, not closed.

Illustration: Have four volunteers come up: Stand in a circle facing each other with arms locked. I can't get into the group. I feel rejected. Then have the four release arms and connect in the middle with just one hand... the other hand stretched outward (like spokes on a wheel). The other person can then walk up and grab the hand and is welcomed into the group. As Christians, we should be like the second group. Not closed in, but open to accept new people in. When we are open to others, it shows them they are important and valuable. **People matter to God... they should matter to us too.**

3. Be Merciful Or Be Judged


James 2:12-13 NIV

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, [13] because **judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!**

If we aren't merciful to others, God won't be merciful to us.

The word mercy in that verse is translated from the greek word ELEOS.

eleos, Greek 1656, Strong's

eleos,  *el'-eh-os*; of uncertain affinity; *compassion* (human or divine, especially active) :- (+ tender) mercy.

Mercy-active compassion

That means that we need to be actively seeking to show compassion to other people. We should look for opportunities to show people they are loved and cared for by God and us. If we are not looking out for people, and showing them mercy and love, then we shouldn't expect to be shown mercy and love either.

God is the one that helps us to love.

Prayer: God we ask that you would give us open arms. We know that You love people, and we ask You to help us love people too. Help us to really care about people. In Jesus name, amen.