

STUDY 4. NOTES FOR LEADERS.

1. Do you know any wealthy people? Does their wealth make them any different to you?

2. **See Luke 1:52-54, 4:18, 6:20, 18:18-25, 21:1-4.**

What is the general impression given by these verses?

Luke stresses the bias of Jesus towards the poor.

3. **Read James 5:1-6.**

a. James has some powerful words to say about the wealthy. Do you think they are a little harsh?

b. Do you think that these words apply to all wealthy people?

c. Do you think the people he is addressing are in the church?

d. Do these words remind you of any of the words of Jesus?

More than likely James is addressing a class of people who are not in the Church. He is speaking about the behaviour of the wealthy in general and is addressing the issue of how wealth can corrupt. e.g. Matthew 6.19-21.

4. a. Gold and silver cannot rust. What do you think James means by that reference to gold and silver rusting?

b. How do you explain verse 6?

James here is referring to the corruption of riches and how the investment is not going to bring about the dividend that the wealthy think it will.

Verse 6 is interpreted in 2 ways. It may be a reference to the fact that wealthy land owners will not heed the welfare of the innocent poor, or it may be a reference to the crucifixion of Christ who at times was known as "the righteous one."

SUPPORTING THE POOR

5. **Read James 1:27.**

James seems to be saying that if we look after the widows and orphans we are doing all that is necessary to be a Christian. Is that how you read that verse? What difference does it make when you put it into its context?

This verse needs to read in the context of James' central theme that faith needs the accompanying action (See 2:14-16). It also needs to be read in the context of the verse before that speaks of the misuse of the tongue. In that context the verse almost seems to be saying that faith is not to be just spoken about but also acted upon. "Widows and orphans" is a common "shorthand" for the deprived in the Old Testament (See Deut. 14:29, 26:12, Job 22:9, Ps. 68:5, Jer. 49:11). Understand that support for the under privileged was the responsibility of the community, not, as is today, the Government.

6. In connection with giving to the poor, a Time Magazine article (January 17th. Pp 48-49) once reported that research indicated that the eight steps towards a satisfying life were:

1. Count your blessings.

2. Practise acts of kindness.

3. Savour life's joys (take mental photographs of precious moments).

4. Thank your mentors.

5. Learn to forgive.

6. Invest time and energy in family and friends.

7. Take care of your body.

8. Develop strategies for coping with stress and hardships.

a. Which of those have you mastered?

b. Which do you need to develop?

c. Why do you think that acts of kindness are rated as No. 2?

d. Would you change the order?

7. Considering that widows of today normally receive a pension and orphans are hard to find in Australia, is this verse antiquated or are there modern equivalents of widows and orphans? If so, what is our church doing about this?

Some may mention care of orphans or children with special needs in our own community. Direct the group's attention to the word "distress" as this would include emotional needs as well as financial needs. Some in the group may mention our support of overseas poverty relief, special courses etc.

DON'T DISCRIMINATE

8. **Read James 2:1-7.**

- a. Why is this warning necessary? Could you imagine this happening in a church? Have you ever seen it happen?
- b. Should the church actively seek to win and involve influential people?
- c. What are the dangers facing a church that is predominantly made up of wealthy people?

Ministers who have served in such churches report the dangers of self-satisfaction, forgetting the needs of the poor, associating their wealth as a sign of God's blessing, as well as unconsciously making people with lesser incomes feel uncomfortable.

9. How has this study made you feel?
- a. Challenged?
 - b. Uncomfortable?
 - c. Confused?

Prayer: O God,

This week help us to use our wealth to help make a Christ like difference to our world.