

Join us in being on mission with God!

OUR VISION

To continually mature and grow as a united body of Jesus-imitators who live out God's greatest commandment to "Love" by exalting God and serving one another, and His greatest commission to "Go" by reaching into and shaping our local, regional, and global communities.

"The Hidden Cost of Stuff"

James 5:1-6

Getting Started

After an introductory time, discuss the following questions in your group or class.

Even though most of us own goods that our parents would have considered extreme luxuries, we normally do not consider ourselves to be wealthy or rich.

Q: List some of the things that you own that your parents would have regarded as tremendous luxuries when they were your age.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Thinking about Affluence

"Affluence" is a word we normally apply to other people rather than ourselves. Even compared to our parents, we tend to see ourselves as not that different when you factor in inflation. Our income may be higher, but we can't purchase a new car for \$2,000 or a new home for \$15,000. Some of the "essentials" we have are different than our parents, but no different than most of our peers.

1. Describe some of the circumstances of a person you would classify as "rich" by your own subjective standards.

Normally, rich people receive invitations to special events. They are invited to special university dinners, political fund raisers, inaugurations, exclusive concerts, and other functions that common people are unlikely to attend. But James issues an invitation that is radically different.

2. What does James invite some of the rich people to do in the first part of verse one? Why do you think he begins with this unexpected summons?



James 3:13-18

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

- 3. Riches are often viewed as a way to protect us from pain, suffering, worry, and anxiety. In what ways does wealth actually help shield us from such things?

- 4. In the end of verse one James states that something is going to happen that the rich cannot insulate themselves from because of their wealth. Why is it impossible for wealth to completely protect us from grief in life?

- 5. Why do you think many in our culture cling to the myth that money is the antidote to all pain and suffering?

In verses 2-3 James speaks of the future as if it is the past. His description of future events as though they have already happened is a graphic way to emphasize the fact that such things will *certainly* occur.

- 6. List the three things in verses 2-3a that James predicts will happen that will cause grief for the people he addresses:
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
 - 3. _____
- 7. Do you think James is speaking of something that will happen during their lives, or after they have died?

- 8. Gold and silver are treasured in part because they cannot rust or corrode. But James insists that they will. This cannot happen literally, so he must be speaking figuratively. In what sense could wealth in the form of gold or silver be said to "rust"?

- 9. There are two consequences inverse three that impact the owners of the riches. Name these two consequences and then describe what you think James might mean as he describes these two negative results.

The Hidden Cost of Stuff

10. The abuse of wealth that James identifies in verse 3 is *hording*. How would you describe *hording*? What is the difference between hording and preparing for unexpected events in the future? When does being prepared become hording?

There are a small number of Christian broadcasters in media who are loudly proclaiming that we are in the last minutes of the end times. They argue that we must be prepared for economic disaster by stockpiling large quantities of goods so that we will survive and not be among those who are caught unprepared.

12. How do you think James would have responded to this advice?

13. How does this kind of end-times advice square with the picture of life Jesus gave to the disciples in Matthew 24:38-41?

14. Verse 4 speaks about the importance of fairly compensating those who work for you. Describe the situation as James pictures it in the first part of that verse.

Apparently, the rich landlords in question did not respond to the pleas of the laborers to make things right financially. James uses a metaphor to describe the fact that the withheld wages actually cry out to him. Even if people do not alert God to injustice, it will become apparent to him.

15. How does God's awareness of wrongdoing encourage you when you feel that there is no one to appeal to, no one who will listen?

16. What are some of the situations in modern life where we have some say in how much we will compensate those who work for us or perform a task for us?



Reaching Up and Reaching Out

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17. What is the difference between getting a good deal and under compensating someone in a way that arouses God’s anger toward us? How do you know when your bargain-hunting instincts cross the line?

18. James uses a metaphor to describe the condition of the wealthy that he is addressing. In their case, they are immersed in their affluence and in all the benefits that come with wealth. If you were to describe someone today who was living in the way described in the first part of verse 5, how might you depict them?

Even today we speak of “finishing” animals. Producers take them at one stage of growth and feed them until they gain enough muscle to be ready for market. That is what James insists these particular wealthy individuals are doing with their riches.

19. How do James’ words parallel the teaching of Jesus in Luke 12:16-21?

The Bible does not condemn wealth itself. Solomon was wealthy. So was Barnabas, Joseph of Arimathea, and apparently Nicodemus.

20. How was wealth being used in Luke 8:3? What do you think contributed to the attitude behind these actions?

21. Using the examples you can think of from the Bible, describe some of the ways we can use the wealth God entrusts to us in ways that glorify him.
