

The background of the cover is a photograph of a city skyline at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and light blue. The city buildings are silhouetted against the bright sun. In the foreground, there is a red-tinted area that looks like a sidewalk or a road, with some faint, blurry shapes that might be people walking. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

# SOCIAL Restoration

Bringing Peace & Renewal  
to a Polarized World

RYAN INGRAM

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to a Polarized World

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## AN INTRODUCTION: **OUR SOCIETY IS FRAYED**

What a crazy year 2020 was. The entire world changed overnight.

Remember the early days of COVID-19? You couldn't find toilet paper anywhere! Okay, I realize TP wasn't the most important issue that everyone was facing, but it symbolized the craziness we suddenly had to deal with, right?

Remember going to a grocery store and feeling as though you were in an apocalyptic movie? No one would make eye contact. Items were rationed one or two per person. Entire aisles were completely bare.

And who knew designer face masks would be the hottest fashion trend of 2020—and the symbol of a divisive philosophical and political debate?

That was just the beginning of 2020. In addition to a global pandemic, we faced:

- *An economic downturn that shuttered businesses and sent hundreds of thousands to the unemployment lines*
- *A racial justice uprising that rivaled the civil rights movement of the 1960s*
- *A contentious presidential election that revealed a deeply divided nation*
- *A “cancel culture” of social-media shaming for dealing with disagreements*

Our social fabric is frayed! We desperately need what I call *Social Restoration*.

## Shedding Light on Social Restoration

Social Restoration is the process of mending the deep relationship divisions in our communities and cities. It is the means by which followers of Jesus are to actively bring peace, wholeness, and renewal to a polarized culture in the midst of turmoil and upheaval.

This isn't new to the Church. Over the centuries, the Church has grown the strongest in the soil of disorder and tribulation.

Remember what Jesus said? It's a passage so familiar that we tend to take it for granted.

*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)*

Jesus didn't say you *will be* the light of the world or that one day, someday, when you get your act together, you will be the light of the world. He said *right now*, at this very moment, you are the light of the world. And by *you* He means the Church. You and me.

- Not the government.
- Not a particular political candidate.
- Not a vaccine.

The Church was never intended to be a social club, a holy huddle that exists to meet your needs. No, Jesus followers are to be the light of the world—to draw people to Christ and bring about the renewal and restoration of our neighborhoods, workplaces, cities, and culture.

***So how do we bring about the light of Social Restoration when there's nothing but the darkness of social disruption around us?***

James, the wise pastor of the church in Jerusalem, has some answers for us. He was writing during a time that was facing its own “2020 year.”

**Our circumstances have changed, but our calling has not.**

To challenge and activate a group of discouraged believers to live out their divine calling, James discussed what I call the **Four Phases of Social Restoration:**

**Phase 1: Social Distinction** (James 2:1-13)

**Phase 2: Social Action** (James 2:14-26)

**Phase 3: Social Language** (James 3:1-12)

**Phase 4: Social Wisdom** (James 3:13-18)

The trauma of 2020 has definitely left its mark on us. Our circumstances have changed, but our calling has not. We're called to bring about Social Restoration.

## PHASE 1: SOCIAL DISTINCTION

What sets the Church apart from every other community today?

When I was growing up, there was a saying: “Don’t drink, smoke, or chew or run with boys and girls who do.” Is the distinctive mark of a Christian primarily what we do *not* do?

When you read the teachings of Jesus, what sets a Christ follower apart from others is clear: *the distinctive mark of a Christian is how we love one another.*

In the gospel of John, Jesus told His disciples,

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*  
(John 13:34-35)

We display the light of Christ to a hurting world most clearly when we love one another the way Jesus loved us. How did Jesus love us? He moved toward us when we were far from Him. He sacrificially gave His life that we might join the family of God. That is how Jesus loved us, and that is how we are to love one another.

The problem is that in the Church, we really struggle with this, don’t we? Our pride, our “rights,” and our selfishness get in the way. It is easy to love the people who look like us, think like

us, and talk like us. But what about those who look, think, and talk differently than us?

The early Church struggled with this very thing. In his second chapter, James wrote,

*My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 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," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:1-4)*

In a world that gives preferential treatment to the famous, beautiful, wealthy, and powerful, Jesus followers are to treat every single person with dignity, honor, and value. This is the distinctive mark of loving the way Jesus did. This is the countercultural way of restoration and renewal.

***The social distinction of the Church is that it makes no social distinctions.***

But it's hard. The early Church was an incredibly diverse community ethnically, socioeconomically, and politically, yet favoritism crept into their worship services. Those early followers of Jesus started treating wealthy believers better and poor believers worse.



This would never happen in our day, would it? Suppose a person showed up to your church in an expensive sports car, wearing designer clothes, and happened to be a social-media influencer with hundreds of thousands of followers. And imagine that a homeless person in dirty and tattered clothing, smelling horribly and pushing all their belongings in a shopping cart, also entered your worship service.

I know what my first response would be, and I am ashamed of it. I would go out of my way to meet this new “wealthy” person, and I would have someone keep an eye on the homeless one. I’d make sure the homeless person got some free coffee and pastries and then went on their way.

How terrible is that? I could spiritualize it by justifying that if the wealthy person starts attending and giving to our church, then we can help so many more homeless people. But that doesn’t fly with God.

### **God tells us to stop playing favorites.**

Favoritism means giving unfair preferential treatment to someone. It is so embedded in our culture that we often don’t even see it. There are three primary ways favoritism, or partiality, shows up in our lives.

#### **• Treating certain people as more valuable than others**

At the root of favoritism is prejudice. We prejudge others based on what they wear, how they look, the color of their skin, the

cars they drive, the political parties they belong to, and the churches they attend.

This is the exact opposite of loving the way Jesus loved. Racism, bigotry, prejudice, and favoritism have absolutely no place in Jesus's Church.

- **Looking down on people we disagree with**

We often don't think of this as a form of favoritism, as it has become the native tongue of our culture. We feel justified to "cancel" those we disagree with in our conversation and put them in their place on social media through negative comments.

- **Overlooking people who make us feel uncomfortable**

We naturally avoid or dismiss people who make us feel uncomfortable. They might be the homeless. In church, they might be the "EGRs": the Extra Grace Required people. You know, the people who are socially awkward or overbearing.

Who are the  
people you might  
be overlooking?

Who are the people you might be overlooking?

# Why Favoritism Is Such a Bad Thing in the Eyes of God

Favoritism in any form brings social devastation instead of Social Restoration. In the second chapter of his book, James gave us three compelling reasons why we need to ruthlessly root it out of our lives.

## Reason #1: It is an affront to the heart of God.

*Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?*  
(James 2:5)

Every single person on this planet has intrinsic value. We have value not because of what we have, how beautiful we are, or where we work. We are valued because our Designer and Creator made us in His image.

When we treat someone poorly or less than, it is exactly the opposite of how God would treat them.

In addition, Scripture makes it clear that God has a special concern for the poor, marginalized, mistreated, and exploited. When we treat someone poorly or less than, it is exactly the opposite of how God would treat them.

## **Reason #2: The law of love demands consistency.**

*If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. (James 2:8)*

When we show favoritism, we’re actually extending more love to some “neighbors” than to others. And truth be told, we are good at choosing who our neighbors are and are not. We feel justified in the inconsistency of our love for others.

## **Reason #3: You are not the judge and jury; God is.**

*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:12-13)*

Today we are so quick to judge people’s motives, intentions, and actions that we can tend to speak and act as if we are the judge and jury. We say things like, “I can’t believe they did \_\_\_\_\_ or spent \_\_\_\_\_ or said \_\_\_\_\_.” And when we do this, we fail to recognize that we will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be held accountable for what *we* said and did.

The way of Jesus is the path of renewal and restoration for our families, churches, cities, and culture. This is what it means to be a light in the dark and draw people to Christ.

***Social Restoration begins when followers of  
Jesus make no social distinctions.***

## PHASE 2: SOCIAL ACTION

The Church was never intended to be a social club. We are to be people who bring about a social revolution in the name of Jesus. If we want to experience Social Restoration, we need to put our faith into action.

We are called to have a faith that works.

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? (James 2:14)*

In other words, what good does it do if we believe in certain things but don't act how we say we believe? What good is that sort of faith?

Then James continued,

*Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? (James 2:15-16)*

No good, of course. It's like telling someone needy, "You should get some clothes. You should get some food. You really need to take care of that."

That sort of "faith," faith without action, is worthless. It's dead.

## A Faith That Works

What's the big deal about all of this? What is it about acting on faith that will help bring about Social Restoration? James gave us three reasons why this is so incredibly important.

- **Your behavior reveals what you believe.**

*But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. (James 2:18-19)*

How you behave reveals what you actually believe, not what you say you believe. If you want to know what you truly believe, just look at how you spend your time, energy, and money.

- **Action is the completion of faith, not its competition.**

*You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. (James 2:20-24)*

Faith precedes every activity of your life. Your core convictions are revealed not by what you say but how you live. Faith and action are not in competition. Action is the completion of your faith.

- **Faith without action is like a body without breath.**

*In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:25-26)*

**The world needs practicing Christians.**

Faith without action is like a body without breath. That kind of faith is dead. The world does not need perfect Christians; it needs practicing Christians.

## **What Does Faith That Works Look Like?**

You might be asking, “Okay, God, what would You have me do?” Let me give you two things to help get you started on this journey.

1. **Start with prayer.** Prayer activates our faith. Wherever prayer focuses, the power of God falls.
2. **Start small.** Simply put, take the next right step you know to take. Consistency, not intensity, is what produces lasting impact.

Don't wait for the timing to be right or everything to be perfect. Just get started today! We, the Church, must rise up and act out our faith to bring peace, wholeness, and renewal to a polarized culture in the midst of turmoil.

***Social Restoration demands that we, as followers of Jesus, put our faith into social action.***

## **PHASE 3: SOCIAL LANGUAGE**

James shifted his attention to the power of words, which is so timely for us with our culture being driven in many ways by an onslaught of negativity and a “cancel culture” on social media.

***Social Restoration requires that we, as followers of Jesus, pay careful attention to our language.***

It's interesting how James began his third chapter.

*Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. (James 3:1-2)*

God cares about every word that comes out of our mouths. Proverbs 10:19 tells us that when words are many, sin is not far behind!



Here's how we can apply this teaching. It's true that a teacher of God's Word is subject to stricter judgment. But what is James saying for the rest of us?

One of the perks of being an up-front teacher is the honor it brings: the platform, the prestige, the influence to persuade people. Today, everyone can choose a social-media platform from which to share their opinions and preferences—to influence their “audience.” Think about your Instagram feed, your Facebook page, and your Snapchat account. Yes, we may just share photos of our dogs or posts about our children or grandchildren, but for most of us, social media is all about influencing people.

## **True Communication**

And here's what James was saying when it comes to Social Restoration and our language. If we as believers in Christ are going to bring about Social Restoration, we have to watch our words. Why? Because our words shape and guide our lives.

Words are how the mind finds its expression. They come from the deepest parts of who we are. They're not detached. They're not some abstract thing “out there.” They're *in* there, in our hearts, before they pop out of our mouths or the tips of our pens or fingers.

This is so important in this season of our nation's history, in addition to our lives as followers of Jesus. Our words have the power to help mend the deep divisions of our hurting world.

So, how can you watch your words? Before you speak, *stop and think*. I know that sounds like common sense, but it's not so common anymore. Before you send that text, before you send that email, before you post on Instagram or Facebook, before you react in a rant or even just a retort, stop and think.

Ask yourself, *Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it kind? Have I truly listened?*

These four questions are simple but powerful. Pausing long enough to ask them will guide your conversation to bring healing and wholeness.

We also have to be mindful of not just *what* we say but *how* we say it.

Communication isn't just the words we use; it's also our tone and timing. In fact, experts tell us that an estimated 90 percent of communication is nonverbal: body language, tone, and facial expression. The reality is that we can say the "right" thing in the wrong way, and it will be received wrong.

Why should we watch our words? Why are we to be so careful with what we say? Here's why:

- **Our words have directional force.**

*When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. (James 3:3-4)*

Our words have the power to help mend the deep divisions of our hurting world.

We've all experienced the power of words, for good or bad. Maybe a mentor encouraged us, or a coach told us we had no skills. A simple comment by an important person in our lives may well have led to life-changing choices.

- **Our words have destructive power.**

*Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. (James 3:5-6 )*

One word can have a devastating impact, just as a spark can start a wildfire. It doesn't matter if you "didn't mean it." The destruction has a lasting effect.

- **Our words are very difficult to control.**

*All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (James 3:7-8)*

We can't control our words through our own willpower. In fact, in our own strength it is impossible to fully tame our

tongues. We need the power of the Spirit of God to bring our words under control. Otherwise, we'll have a tough time being instruments of healing in our world.

And so, what do we do? How do we begin to allow the Spirit of God to do His work in our lives? James gave two practical steps for us to take.

We need the power of the Spirit of God to bring our words under control.

1. *Repent for the incongruity of your words (James 3:9-10).*

James tells us that we can't praise out of the same mouth we use to curse people. We need to recognize the inconsistency of our words and ask for forgiveness from our Heavenly Father.

2. *Go to the root to address the fruit (James 3:11-12).* Our words merely reveal what is going on inside our hearts. The root issue isn't with our words but with our hearts. We do not need a better filter for our words; we need to cultivate a heart that is tender and responsive to our Heavenly Father.

***Social Restoration requires followers of Jesus to do the work to bring about redemptive social language.***

## PHASE 4: SOCIAL WISDOM

James then turned to a topic that we all need to embrace: wisdom!

*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. (James 3:13)*

We desperately need wisdom, don't we? We live in incredibly complex, divisive, emotionally charged times. Wisdom is an essential ingredient for Social Restoration.

***We, as Christ followers, need wisdom to navigate through the cultural mess toward justice and reconciliation.***

We live in a world that's overloaded with information but starved for wisdom. I define wisdom as the skill of living well in God's universe. We are to walk daily in divine wisdom. It's a skill that is learned and developed. It starts with our attitude toward God. Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord [or the awe of the Lord] is the beginning of wisdom."

**We live in a world that's overloaded with information but starved for wisdom.**

Wisdom means recognizing that the universe belongs to God and operates according to His design. I've heard it said that wisdom is God's fixed order for life. It's an

order opposed to chaos and death. *If we are going to navigate these times, we have to walk in wisdom.* One of the dangers today is the certainty with which people share their opinions without having the foundation of wisdom to guide them.

By the way, the word translated as *humility* in verse 13 is the same term Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, “Blessed are the meek” (Matthew 5:5). Humility is not weakness; it’s strength under control. It’s the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance.

## **What Wisdom Is Not**

Where do we begin? Well, James teaches where *not* to begin and forces us to be honest about the condition of our hearts.

*If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*  
(James 3:14-16)

Let’s call that kind of wisdom *counterfeit* wisdom. It’s fueled by negative emotions, like bitterness, selfishness, and envy. These emotions are powerful because we feel justified for having them. We tell ourselves that we’re *just living our truth*. Counterfeit wisdom often sounds good, but its source is bad. James says its source is earthly and even demonic.

You can spot counterfeit wisdom by what it produces: division, disorder, and discord. Instead of bringing people together, it drives them apart. Nothing good grows out of bitterness, selfishness, or envy.

True wisdom  
always takes  
the high road.

In contrast, true wisdom *always* takes the high road.

## What Wisdom Is

*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. (James 3:17)*

Let's dig deeper into what wisdom is. James says it is:

- **Pure.** That means it's holy, without moral defect. It's what awakens awe.
- **Peace-loving.** Wisdom involves right relationships between individuals and between individuals and God.
- **Considerate.** It's merciful, lenient. Wisdom doesn't insist on enforcing the strict letter of the law.
- **Submissive.** Wisdom is being willing to listen and not be stubborn, to be open to adopting another position or course of action.
- **Full of mercy and good fruit.** Wise mercy is compassion moved to action. It's compassion for those who suffer unjustly as well as those who brought the suffering on themselves.

- **Impartial.** Wisdom means not causing factions or divisions within a group and not being judgmental. It also means being free from prejudice.
- **Sincere.** A sincere wisdom is without hypocrisy or pretense, never pretending to be what it is not or acting to gain its own ends.

## **Sowing Seeds of Reconciliation**

*Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*  
(James 3:18)

Social Restoration is cultivated by followers of Jesus sowing peace as true social wisdom. Reconciliation is the process by which enemies are brought into friendship. You may be thinking that can't happen, but remember that's what God did for us in Christ Jesus!

As a result, God has entrusted to *us* the ministry of reconciliation to bring peace and hope to those around us. Peacemakers who sow seeds of peace reap a harvest of righteousness, a harvest of justice. When we as followers of Jesus sow seeds of peace, the harvest is right relationships between God and others. Restoration. Social Restoration.

I want you to notice something we mentioned earlier: Social Restoration is cultivated. In our instant culture, it's easy to expect everything to happen overnight. But James cautions us to remember that Social Restoration takes time and consistency and sowing and fertilizing and watering and waiting and trusting.



Are you willing to sow seeds of peace and work to bring Social Restoration? James would have you believe that this is the way of following Jesus. And following Him is the only path to mending the deep divisions in our communities and bringing healing, wholeness, and renewal to our broken world in the name of Jesus.

*Social Restoration is cultivated by followers  
of Jesus sowing peace as true social wisdom.*

# Daily Discipleship

with Chip

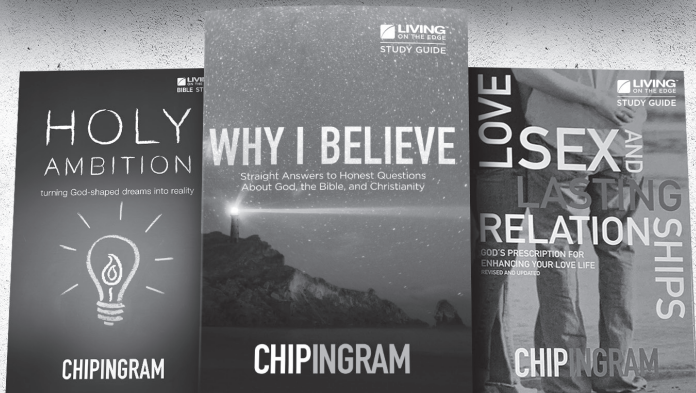


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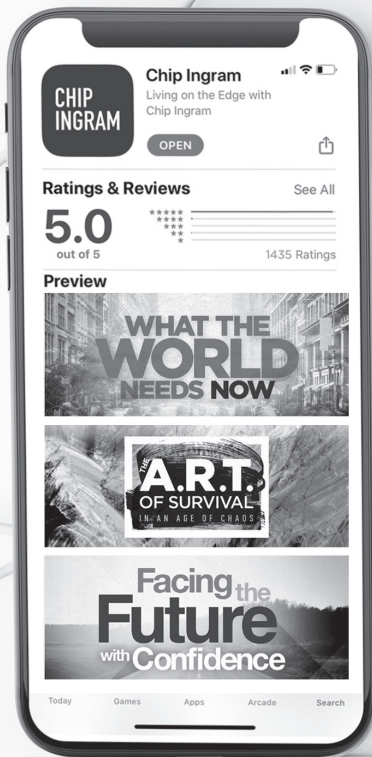
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# OUR SOCIETY IS DIVIDED

## How can we restore hope and unity?

A global pandemic, job losses and economic devastation, racial protests, contentious politics, angry social media and a “cancel culture” . . .

**Our world feels like it’s unraveling.  
We need SOCIAL RESTORATION.**

How? In this practical booklet, Pastor Ryan Ingram teaches four crucial steps from James 2 and 3 that Christians must take to bring hope and renewal amidst the polarization and suffering around us.

### **Social Restoration...**

- Begins when followers of Jesus **make no social distinctions**.
- Demands that followers of Jesus **put faith into social action**.
- Requires followers of Jesus to **pay attention to our language**.
- Is cultivated when followers of Jesus **sow peace with wisdom**.

Are you willing to be a light in the darkness?

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**RYAN INGRAM** is the founding and lead pastor of Awakening Church, a vibrant, fast-growing church in the heart of Silicon Valley, one of the most unchurched places in the United States. Ryan has been in pastoral leadership for nearly two decades and has a passion for equipping the next generation of world changers. He and his wife, Jenny, have been married for 18 years and have three amazing kids: Ella, Ryder, and Miles.

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P.O. Box 3007 • Suwanee, GA 30024  
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