

THE JUSTICE THREAD

Tracing God's Heart for Justice
throughout God's Word

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Endorsements

“The Justice Thread is a straightforward and helpful study tool that serves to connect the church with God’s inexorable love for the poor and His deep heart for justice.”

- **Gary Haugen**, *Founder and CEO, International Justice Mission*

“Human rights advocates are doing their best to bring justice to the forefront, but they have their limitations as they do this from a humanistic perspective. Very few Christians have written on justice from a Christian perspective. This lack is what this study guide attempts to address. Reading it will help you understand the basic principles of justice from a biblical perspective. You and your group need this resource material.”

- **Apostle Prof. Opoku Onyina**,
Former Chairman, Church of Pentecost, Ghana

This is a great resource that is needed for our times. It is long overdue. In this booklet, Christians have a useful guide to strengthen our faithfulness to God in responding to His calling to be witnesses to God’s love, mercy, might and justice. We are very grateful to the International Justice Mission for spearheading this important work.

- **Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi Ph.D.**
Former General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (March 2000 to August 2014)
Senior Lecturer at Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra, Ghana

This is a precious and priceless piece. It contains simple, straight to the point and self-explanatory sentences and yet is a brilliant bible-based booklet that delivers God’s mission for justice to God’s people everywhere irrespective of social status or situation. This is certainly a worthy work tool for the arsenal of any serious social justice student. I have one.

- **Rev. Dr. Cyril Fayose, Ph.D.**
General Secretary Christian Council of Ghana
Former President of Evangelical Presbyterian University College
Former President of Trinity Theological Seminary

Ghana's Coat of Arms boldly displays "Freedom and Justice" as a core value. Ghanaians have been very enthusiastic in affirming and asserting our freedom since independence. Justice, however, has not received much traction in our understanding and application.

In this study material by Matt Robbins, he delves into the definition and nuances of justice. Using biblical, linguistic and historical texts, he shows us the importance of justice in the development of any society if the people want to experience peace, progress and prosperity. This is the reason why the Bible exhorts humanity to ensure that there is justice for all, especially for the four vulnerable groups: widows, orphans, foreigners and the poor. Trafficked children in particular receive attention in the study.

The Justice Thread curriculum is a rich study of the issues of justice. It offers practical insight and steps to rescuing trafficked children. It equips the reader, whether an individual or a group, with the skills and tools for advocacy. I heartily endorse its use in our churches and communities

- Rev. Fred Deegbe

Senior Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Accra, Ghana

Former General Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana

With the publication of this book, the International Justice Mission has provided a long-desired resource needed to equip the whole church to uphold justice and pursue mercy as a Christian life-style. Christian leaders concerned about the neglect of issues of justice as a major part of the call to discipleship now have material to disciple their church members. Church leaders, committed to making holistic disciples, can realize their goal more easily by using the material in this book. It is a strong Bible-based interactive study written in a language and style easily accessible to everybody who can read and write. Now ordinary Christians can understand their calling to uphold justice and pursue mercy, and hopefully, respond in obedience.

- Rev Dr Abamfo Atiemo, Ph.D.

Former Head of Department for the Study of

Religions, University of Ghana

Minster of the Grace Presbyterian Church, West Legon

This curriculum is a very useful resource. It can be used by churches as well as every group of people who are concerned about the injustices in society and would like God's intervention to bring about justice and God's righteous reign on earth. The suggestion of how the group should sit in a circle gives the feeling of inclusiveness and the participation of all group members exhibits justice in dealing with each other and doing right by all.

The most important part of the curriculum is that it is Scripture-based in the Word of God, the Bible. This makes it different from any ordinary book on righteousness and justice.

The topic of justice and righteousness is inexhaustible and I would suggest that the Scriptures and examples in this curriculum could be used as a springboard on the topic, and users anywhere and at any time could add on as they use the resource.

Good work by IJM.

- Rev. Dr. Dorothy BEA Akoto, Ph.D.

*Academic Dean and Senior Lecturer in Biblical Hebrew, Old Testament, and Gender Studies
Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra, Ghana
District Pastor, Kisseman District Evangelical
Presbyterian Church, Ghana*

Dedication

To my beloved colleagues at International Justice Mission who work tirelessly every day to rescue children and end child trafficking in Ghana and for the thousands of children still in need of rescue. Tell them we are coming.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Leo Ackon for his encouragement and companionship throughout this project. Leo's vision, insight, and enthusiasm were a driving force for the project and he wrote most of the prayers and conclusions.

Thank you to University Covenant Church for your generous financial support throughout the project and publication. Thanks also to Westwood Church, Eastern Hills Bible Church, Pole Line Baptist Church, Ken and Jean Robbins and Brett and Erin Arnold for your support as well!

Special thanks to professors Abamfo Atiemo, Dorothy BEA Akoto, Setri Nyomi, and Mark Labberton for their insights and encouragement.

Many thanks to everyone at International Justice Mission for all their incredible support and inspiring work. Your patient steadfast faithful labor is changing the world one rescued child at a time. A special acknowledgment is due Gregg Conley and Monica Netthey from the IJM legal team and to the IJM investigations team for their contributions with regard to Ghanaian law and intervention strategy. Thanks to drivers Randy Jones Amediku, Henry Agbeko, Robert Odoi, and Samuel Opare for always getting us to the field and back safely!

Thanks to Enoch Asmah, Selorm Tamakloe, Leo Ackon, Ken Kaiser, Brian Suter, Chaz Nichols, and Dan Mans for field testing this material all over Ghana with me. I will always remember

fondly these adventurous road trips. Thanks to the Local Council of Churches in Kpando, Kete-Krachi, and Yeji for hosting our field tests and partnering with us on Justice Conferences in your communities.

Thanks to all my great editors, including Dianne Marty, Dorinda Bosu, Thomasine Laib, Lauren Agnew, and the justice team from Westwood Church. Thanks to Landon Ellis for the cover design. Thank you to Yvonne Porterfield for editing for the American context and Sue McKinney for getting it printed!

Thank you Joy Robbins for your kente photography, your patience, and your many sacrifices during this project!

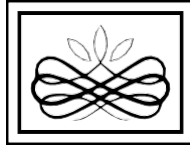
Thank you to Gary Haugen for introducing me to the God of Justice, whom I never knew before, but now find everywhere and love with all my heart.

Thank you most of all to each of you who will use this curriculum to teach others. May eyes be opened, lives be changed, and justice be done.

To God be the Glory!

Osofo Kwame Matthew Robbins

Introduction



The Justice Thread

Kente Weaving and the Bible

Few things can be said to be more authentically Ghanaian than the weaving of Kente cloth. Kente is a woven cloth made of silk and cotton threads forming colorful and complex designs rich with symbolic meaning. It is the favorite cloth of chiefs and is often used in celebrations such as graduations and weddings.



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Kente weavers stretch out a great length of parallel threads running vertically and then methodically weave a variety of colored threads horizontally (side to side) to create beautiful designs in the finished fabric.



The weaving of Kente cloth can help us understand the way God has woven together the Bible into a rich and ornate fabric with deep meaning for our lives and potential to transform our communities. As you read the Bible, you might notice a great number of stories about people. Each of these characters come and go, and the Bible moves forward beyond them. Imagine that each of these stories is a horizontal thread woven by a Master Kente Weaver.

If the stories in the Bible represent the horizontal threads, then what corresponds to the long vertical threads? Into what are these stories about people being woven? What are the long threads which hold them all together and form a coherent whole? What are the long threads that run through the length of the Bible forming a great story and teaching us a great truth?

Since God is the main character of the Bible, these long threads are the characteristics of God that the Bible reveals. They are the great Biblical themes of God's love, God's mercy, God's faithfulness and God's holiness. We see these themes on display throughout the many stories of the Bible: Creation, the Exodus, the history of Israel, the Coming of Christ, and the formation of the Church. Ask yourself, "What stories from the Bible have taught me that God is powerful?"



You might think of the creation story or the parting of the Red Sea. What other stories that reveal God’s power come to mind? Now consider, “What stories from the Bible have taught you that God is loving?” You could make a list of many such stories, and if you did, you would be tracing the theme (or thread) of God’s power and God’s love throughout the Bible as it interweaves with the great stories of the Bible.

If a Kente weaver tried to weave Kente cloth with only horizontal threads (side to side), it would not work. It would be weaving into air. A Kente weaver who tried such a thing would end up with only a pile of thread on his or her shoes! No cloth could be made with only side-to-side threads. In the same way, it is not enough for a Christian to simply learn the stories of the Bible while neglecting the great themes of the Bible that teach us the character of God. This is what ties the fabric of the Word of God together and helps us see a rich and meaningful design.

In the same way, one could not remove one of the long threads from the middle of the cloth without severely damaging it and destroying the design of the maker.

Can you imagine a Bible that teaches that God is powerful but not that God is loving? What kind of faith would we have in this God? Perhaps we would be very afraid of this god, but we would never love him or have a relationship with him. Imagine a Bible that teaches God is loving but not powerful. What would our faith in this god be



like then? Perhaps we would like this god, but we would not trust him with our lives. We might still be seeking protection from shrines and traditional religion thought to be more powerful than the God of the Bible. But no, the Bible reveals that the one true God is both powerful and loving and our faith reflects this knowledge.

You cannot remove the thread of God’s power or God’s love from the Kente cloth of the Bible without severely damaging the design of its Maker. However, this is what sometimes happens in our churches when one of the important themes of the Bible is neglected or forgotten. One of the greatest themes of the Bible, which has been neglected and forgotten in a great many churches in Ghana and the world at large, is the theme of God’s Justice.

The Bible teaches us that God is VERY passionate about justice. We see one example out of hundreds in Isaiah 61:8: “For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing.” As this study will demonstrate, justice is one of the central themes of the Bible. Yet it is not a theme we tend to talk about in our churches. Can you imagine how incomplete your understanding of God would be if you never heard about God’s love? Or God’s mercy? What if you never learned that God is powerful and holy? Think how that would affect your life, your faith, your understanding of the Word of God! The Kente cloth would be less beautiful and complete and strong without those threads. Yet many of us have been missing a thread without even knowing it: THE THREAD OF JUSTICE. We are missing out!

This study traces the thread of justice that runs throughout the pages of the Bible. We begin with the creation of the world and God’s perfect vision for the way people should treat one another. We then study man’s fall into sin as we read stories

about injustices such as Cain killing Abel and Joseph being sold into slavery. The Exodus story shows us that God is a rescuer of slaves and defender of the oppressed. We see God's heart for justice in the Old Testament laws defending vulnerable widows and orphans, foreigners and the poor. We see God advocating for justice through Judges and Kings and Prophets. Finally, we see true justice lived out and modeled for us in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. We extend a warm welcome to you to join us on this journey following the justice thread through the pages and stories of the Bible.





Before we begin, it is important to note that the “justice thread” is one that makes a significant difference in the way a church behaves. It is a sad fact of history that some churches who have forgotten the justice thread have become complicit in acts of great injustice.

Ghana has two great monuments to the transatlantic slave trade: castles at Elmina and Cape Coast. Both of these castles contain churches in which European Christians worshipped God and professed faith in Christ just steps from Africans in chains. Many



Church in Elmina Castle, where European Christians worshipped just steps from where African slaves were held in chains.

people rightly ask, “How can this be?” At least part of the answer is a neglect of the justice thread. Perhaps they just focused on other attributes of God such as God’s forgiveness of their sin without also learning about God’s call to justice. We need to heed the justice thread to avoid making similar mistakes.

However, we can be inspired by other Christians throughout history that took seriously the theme of justice in the Bible and thus became advocates of God's justice in the world. We must take note of great Christian abolitionists that fought against the slave trade like William Wilberforce, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Abraham Lincoln.

We must applaud modern Christian leaders like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Desmond Tutu who have fought for equal rights. These were all Christians who took the justice thread seriously and it changed their lives in a way that also changed the world.



Harriet Tubman, American abolitionist who, after escaping slavery herself, risked her life on 13 separate rescue missions that rescued seventy people from slavery via the "underground railroad."



American President Abraham Lincoln led the fight to abolish slavery in the United States.



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who famously led the civil rights movement in the United States demanding equal rights for all people.



Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who led opposition to Apartheid in South Africa, a system of racial segregation and discrimination.

In today's world, we are confronted with many forms of injustice. We see injustice in gender-based violence, government and corporate corruption, child abuse, abuse of power, bullying, work place inequalities, human trafficking, racial prejudice, among many others. One particular form of injustice to which this curriculum will call attention is child-trafficking, a modern form of slavery, as it is found in the West African Nation of Ghana, where the author worked for a season with International Justice Mission.



Thousands of children have been trafficked to Lake Volta, sold, or rented to boat masters to be used as cheap labor on fishing boats.

It is our prayer that future generations will be told the heroic stories of Ghanaian Christians who stood for justice and ended child-trafficking.



Perhaps your photo will one day be placed here as an example of a Christian hero who took a brave stand against injustice!

Leader's Guide



The Role Of Shepherd

Dear Leader,

Thank you so much for taking the time to lead your group in studying such an important theme in Scripture. We hope this study will be enjoyable, enlightening, and challenging for both you and your group. Your leadership role will be key in helping your group to grasp and embrace this important topic. Please allow us to share with you some suggestions on how you can lead in such a way as to maximize your impact.

How to Feed Sheep

The job of a pastor or church leader is to be a shepherd of Jesus' sheep. In John 21:16, Jesus told Peter, "Feed my sheep." Pastors have long understood this to mean "feeding God's people with the Word of God." We hope this Bible study helps to accomplish this sacred mission.

Leaders must ask themselves though, *how* does a shepherd feed his sheep? Do shepherds pick up the grass and push clumps of

it into the sheep's mouth? Do shepherds chew the grass for the sheep? No! A good shepherd guides the sheep on the path to fresh water and green grass and then lets the sheep find it and eat it themselves. *The sheep have a role to play in their own feeding.*

The same is true in how we teach this curriculum. Our job is not to deposit information into them. Our job is to guide them on a path where they can find good food to eat. They must do much of the discovery and chewing themselves.

How do we do this? Mostly it is through *asking good questions*. In this curriculum, we walk them over to a portion of Scripture and ask them to look at it in a new way. We then give them our undivided attention as they search the Scripture, reflect, and process. We provide encouragement along the way. When they stumble upon fresh insight, we marvel at it and celebrate with them!

You might ask, "Why?" Isn't it easier and faster to simply preach the truth and tell them the facts directly? While that form of teaching has an important place, *there is also great power in self-discovery*. When you discover a new insight yourself, you get something more than knowledge; you get excitement and ownership of the knowledge. You will remember it longer, you will repeat it more often, and you are more likely to apply it to your life. That's why we encourage our group leaders not to preach this material, but rather gently guide your group and ask questions and draw godly insights out of your people. **You know you have been very successful when your group begins to preach these truths to you!**

Action Steps

1. **Invite Your Group Members to Share Their Thoughts.** When you read a question or Scripture passage, seek group members' thoughts before providing them with any of your own knowledge. Be the best listener in the room!
2. **Get your group to sit in a circle rather than in rows.** This will signal to the group that this is a mutual discussion instead of a lecture.
3. **Make Each Group Member Feel Valued.** Show your group that you value their thoughts and give them lots of affirmation for their contributions.
4. **Celebrate your group.** At the end of the entire study, express excitement and appreciation for their commitment, thoughts, and what you've also learned from them through the study. Celebrate them for a good job done and for making the conversation fruitful and impactful.

How to Guide Sheep

Sheep are prone to wander. A little wandering is good. It means the sheep have a healthy desire to explore, but a lot of wandering can get them in trouble. A shepherd sets boundaries and gently rounds up strays. Good group leadership is similar.

In the same way, **leaders need to keep things moving in the right direction.** A good shepherd does this with gentleness. Time will move fast and we don't want to waste it. The group leader must be the judge of when time is being used well or not. If the group is really interested in a particular question and the discussion is bearing fruit for their understanding of Biblical

justice, slow down and let them linger in it. However, if the discussion is becoming repetitive or has moved off topic, gently get them back on track or move to the next question.

Action Steps

5. **Keep Track of Time.** Don't let your group feel rushed, neither let time be wasted. Use your judgment on when to move to the next question or even skip a question (if it's already been answered) to ensure you finish the lesson in time.
6. **Maintain the Course.** Encourage discussion about Biblical justice, but provide enough direction so that the conversation does not veer off track.
7. **Use the Leader Guide.** Whenever you see an asterisk (*) after a question, it means that there is a leader's guide note for you about this question. You can find these leader's guide notes at the end of the lesson.

How to Guard Sheep

Another role of a shepherd is to protect the sheep. In the case of leading this study, we suggest you watch out for these two dangers: distraction and domineering.

Action Steps

8. **Minimize Distraction.** Ask your group to silence their phones or turn them off. Find a quiet place for your group to meet. Sit in a circle so that everyone can see and hear each other. Take responsibility for assuring the best possible environment for focused attention.
9. **Decrease Domineering.** Domineering is when one member of the group does most of the talking while others remain

silent. If this continues, the group will miss out on the opportunity to hear from other group members and quiet members lose out on the chance to process their own thoughts with the group. We believe all sheep must eat and thus the group leader must ensure that **everyone participates**.

If one group member is dominating all the discussion, the leader must tactfully help draw out the others so that all group members are involved. This can be done by giving extra eye contact and attentiveness to the quieter group members, calling on them for their thoughts, and saying something like, “We’ve heard a lot from this member of the group, I’d love to hear from the rest of you as well.”

Final Word: When you have completed the entire study, take time to ask your group to share some of the compelling things they have learned from the teaching. Week 8 has some questions that can guide the reflection.

Week 1



Creation and the Fall

Memory Verse: Genesis 4:10

The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”

Key Concepts: *Shalom*, Image of God, Injustice

Introduction (Have a volunteer read this to the group)

In the beginning, God created a world with perfect *shalom*. Before humanity’s fall into sin, the Garden of Eden was a place of perfect health, righteousness, and peace. We often think of “the fall” as the moment when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, but that was only the beginning. Humanity kept falling. Cain killing his brother Abel was the next chapter of the fall. This introduced violent injustice into our world, which continues to grow through the chapters of the Bible and throughout our history.

Shalom is the Hebrew word we translate into English as peace. It is a word rich with meaning that the English word “peace”

does not fully convey. In English, we might think of peace as the absence of war, but the Hebrew word *Shalom* implies a certain quality of relationships between people, tranquility, safety, well-being, and holistic health (physical and relational). *Shalom* is not merely the absence of violence, but also the presence of justice.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once asked his church to imagine that two men are fighting and one man successfully strikes the other so that he is knocked out and collapses on the floor with the first man standing over his unconscious body. Dr. King asked his church, “*Is this a picture of peace because the two men are no longer fighting?*” The answer is “no” because true peace (*shalom*) is not merely the absence of fighting, but the presence of justice.

The shalom in the Garden of Eden is not merely non-violent, but also includes the right relationship of all things to each other: God, people, animals, and plants. It was a place of health, justice, and peace. The shalom of creation is shattered by a series of sins. These sins are rebellions against God and unjust actions against human beings made in God’s image. The result is a fallen world without shalom, full of injustice.

While the definition of justice can be difficult and will be the subject of this entire Bible Study series, let’s begin with a definition of *injustice*, something we all intuitively recognize:

*“God intends for you to have life, liberty, dignity, well-being and the fruit of your love and labor. **Injustice** is when someone misuses power to take these things away from someone.” -Gary Haugen, Founder of International Justice Mission*

Question: What do you think of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s analogy? Can you think of situations that appear peaceful, but really are full of injustice and thus not truly *shalom*?

Bible Study Questions

Read Genesis 1:26-27 (Creation of Humanity)

- 1) What does it mean that God created men and women in His image? What does it tell you about the value of every human life?

- 2) In Genesis 9:6, God tells Noah that one reason why no person should be murdered is because each person bears the image of God. What does this tell you about the dignity and importance of every human life, even those people the world may think are of little value?

Read Genesis 4:1-12 (Cain and Abel)

- 3) In verse 10, God tells Cain, “Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!” When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, it was a direct offense against God. This time, the sin is an attack on another human. God is also angry about this and treats an offense against a human as an offense against Himself.
 - a. What does this teach us about the character of God?

 - b. Can we have *shalom* peace with God while refusing to give peace and justice to others?

- 4) In verses 11-12, God punishes Cain for the murder of Abel.
 - a. Why? What purpose is served by the punishment of severe sins?

- b. What would happen in our world if there was no punishment for acts of injustice such as murder?
- c. Can you think of crimes in your community that are rarely or never punished?

Read Genesis 37:18-36 (Joseph Sold into Slavery by His Brothers)

- 5) Because of their jealousy and rivalry, Joseph's brothers commit the crime of *child-trafficking*, the buying and selling of children for labor, a crime which still exists today. Those who practice child-trafficking use two tools to enslave children: *violence* and *deception*. How are these two tools used by Joseph's brothers in this story?
- 6) In verse 36, the Midianite traders resell Joseph in Egypt for a profit. Children who've been trafficked to fisherman on Lake Volta in Ghana are often sold many times to new masters, even "rented" out to other boat-masters for a small fee.
 - a. How would you feel if your family sold you as a child?
 - b. How would you feel if someone did this to your child?
- 7) If Jacob learned the truth of what happened to Joseph and decided to try and rescue his son, what challenges would he face in finding and rescuing Joseph?
- 8) In California, almost 9 out of 10 cases of child trafficking are for sexual exploitation. Children in the foster care system are particularly vulnerable and represent at least half of victims in California. How might Christians proactively address this exploitation and protect these children?

Conclusion

God's perfect plan is for all people to have right relationships with others and be treated with dignity and respect. God wants everyone to live in peace and have the freedom to live life to its fullest, no matter their race, social status or gender. The Bible teaches us to treat everyone with dignity (1 Peter 2:17a).

However, in our society today, many are being treated unfairly as a result of their vulnerability and lack of social prestige such as connections, wealth, education, and immigration status. This has led to the abuse of rights, oppression, violence, and denial of basic human essentials such as health care, water, rest, leisure, and freedom.

Closing Prayer

Lord Almighty, I pray that You forgive me of any form of injustice I have committed against my fellow human beings. Please help me to be an instrument of your shalom to everyone I meet. Help me to see the image of God in everyone I meet. Lord, for all the children in the world today who have been trafficked, we ask for freedom, hope, and peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Week 2



Exodus: God of Justice, Rescuer of Slaves

Memory Verse: Exodus 3:7

The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.”

Key Concepts: Slavery, God is a rescuer of slaves, Sabbath as anti-slavery command

Introduction

One of the most dramatic moments in the Old Testament is when God rescues the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. It is an event that is referred to throughout the Old Testament and came to define God’s relationship with His people. It also tells us a great deal about God’s character, His heart, and what really matters to Him.

The so-called “gods” of the Ancient World did not tend to care about the poor, the oppressed, and the enslaved. In fact, many

of these “gods” behaved like slave-masters and criminals. In Ghana, there are shrines people visit to perform curse rituals in order to get a local “god” to do all sorts of harm to someone. In this way, the “gods” can become agents of injustice.

In the introduction to this study, reference was made to the transatlantic slave trade, and how the church was silent, even though there were chapels in places such as the Elmina and Cape Coast Castles in those terrible centuries. Many who professed Christ did not link God’s thread of justice with their faith and therefore they surrendered to the “gods” of this world and could think only of their gain. Even after the abolition of slavery, the descendants of slavery continued to suffer violence and injustice. This was often at the hands of Christians who were ignorant of the “justice thread.”

This is never the case with the God of the Bible. God is always on the side of justice. The Exodus story reveals that the one true God cares deeply about victims of injustice and that God is, in fact, a rescuer of slaves. God works for justice by His power, but through His people. He works through His people to bring freedom to the oppressed.

Bible Study

Read Exodus 1:6-14 (Israelites Enslaved in Egypt)

- 1) What was life like for the Israelites in Egypt? How would you describe their suffering?
- 2) What do you think God would say about enslaved persons who were forcibly taken from their homes in Africa and made to become slaves, they and their descendants, for hundreds of years in foreign lands?

- 3) Slavery still exists in the world today. A recent study by the United Nations affiliated International Labor Organization estimates there are 50 million people in slavery today¹. This plague persists despite being outlawed everywhere in the world. The slave-masters prey on people who are weak, poor, or uneducated by using lies, tricks, or threats to enslave people. They sometimes pretend to be “helping” the poor, while actually taking advantage of them. They don’t call it “slavery” anymore. They may call it “domestic servitude” in the Middle East, “bonded labor to pay off a debt” in India, or a “fishing apprenticeship” on Lake Volta in Ghana, but it is still slavery all the same. Slavery is when someone is forced to work, often without pay, and is not allowed to leave the job.

Would you recognize modern-day slavery if you saw it in your community?

Read Exodus 3: 1-10 (Moses and the Burning Bush)

- 4) In Exodus 3:7 and 3:9, the LORD tells us what He has seen, what He has heard, and what He is concerned about. What does this verse teach us about God? What matters to God’s heart?
- 5) Does your heart reflect the heart of your God? In what ways are you concerned about those who suffer injustice?
- 6) In Exodus 3:8, God announces that He has come down to rescue His people from slavery. What do you think and feel about God being a “rescuer of slaves”?

¹2021 Global Slavery Index, published by International Labor Office (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation, in partnership with International Organization for Migration (IOM)

- 7) In Exodus 3:10, God reveals that He will use an ordinary man (Moses) to stand up to the King of Egypt and rescue His people from slavery.
- a. How do you think Moses felt when he heard this?
 - b. How would you feel if God asked you to stand up to a strong slave-master and set a slave free? Would you obey?

Read Exodus 6:5-7 (The LORD is coming to the Rescue!)

- 8) The King of Egypt refused to obey God and release his slaves, but God encourages the people to trust that He is coming to rescue them. How would you feel...
- a. if you were a slave and your master refused to let you leave?
 - b. if you heard God say that He is coming to rescue you?
 - c. the day you were finally set free?

Read Deuteronomy 5:6 (Introduction to the Ten Commandments)

- 9) In Deuteronomy 5:6, God refers to the rescue from slavery as His introduction to the 10 commandments.
- a. Why does God begin the commandments like this?
 - b. What does it tell us about God's character?
 - c. What does it tell us about His relationship to His people?

Read Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (The Fourth Commandment: Sabbath)

- 10) What reason is given in Deuteronomy 5:15 for why we should observe the Sabbath?

- 11) Deuteronomy 5:14 teaches that the Sabbath command is not just for us to rest, but that we must also give Sabbath to our children and to all those people who work for us.
 - a. If we don't give our workers Sabbath rest, are we acting like the Egyptian slave-masters?

 - b. If our house helpers or other employees work from dawn to dusk for seven days each week without at least a day's break, are we breaking the Sabbath commandment by not giving Sabbath rest to our workers?

 - c. How does the Sabbath command break the cycle of slavery?

The Trafficking Victim Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000

The TVPA equipped the U.S. Government with new tools and resources to mount a comprehensive and coordinated campaign to eliminate modern forms of slavery. Critically, the TVPA established the framework for the “3 P’s” of the fight against human trafficking: **protection, prevention, and prosecution.**

Protection: The TVPA provided increased protections for trafficking victims in the United States by making foreign victims eligible for benefits and services regardless of their immigration status and by creating immigration protections for foreign national victims of human trafficking, including protection from removal for victims of trafficking (the T visa).

Prevention: The TVPA strengthened the U.S. Government's prevention efforts by providing for international initiatives to improve economic opportunity for potential victims as a means of deterring trafficking. Perhaps most significantly, the TVPA created the *Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons* in the State Department, making that office responsible for publishing an annual *Trafficking In Persons (TIP) report* that describes and ranks the efforts of countries to combat human trafficking. The TIP Report is the U.S. Government's principal diplomatic tool to engage foreign governments on human trafficking.

Prosecution: The TVPA sharpened and enhanced the capacity of federal prosecutors to bring human traffickers to justice for their crimes by adding new criminal provisions prohibiting forced labor, debt slavery, forced labor, and sex trafficking of children by force, fraud, or coercion. It further strengthened penalties for existing trafficking crimes and mandated that traffickers pay restitution to their victims.

Conclusion

We live in a world full of injustice in many forms. Murder, adultery, armed robbery, fraud, corruption and child-trafficking abound. It can be depressing to think of it all. But there is some good news for us! As Gary Haugen says, “The good news about injustice is that God is against it.” This is the good news we read about in the Exodus story. God sees when His children suffer. God hears their cries. God is concerned about it. God uses His power and His people to rescue people, to fight injustice, and to right wrongs in the world. It is exciting that we may worship a God like that! It is an honor that we are invited to serve in His work of doing justice in the world. How might God use you?

Closing Prayer

Father, I pray for the countless multitudes of people who are being oppressed and enslaved, and ask that You bring freedom and restoration to them all. My Father, please grant me the wisdom and courage to help in every way possible to bring freedom to the oppressed in my family, community and nation. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Leader's Guide

Today's lesson focuses on the Exodus story and aims to build an appreciation of God's compassion for those who suffer injustice. The foundation of Biblical Justice is the heart of God.

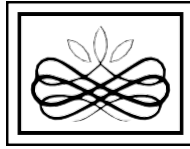
Discussing injustice can be emotional. Your group members are likely to express sadness, compassion, and anger. Assure them that these are all OKAY. God shows us He also has these feelings about injustice in the world. Let your group members fully explore the emotions connected with injustice. It will lead to a greater appreciation of our God, the God of Justice.

It might become a great comfort to your group members to learn that God cares about their suffering. Emphasize this. But don't let them think only about their own suffering. Push them to also think about other people in your community who suffer injustice. Push them to consider those in other countries who suffer injustice. Challenge them to think about how God might use the people in this very room to do justice, similar to the way God used Moses.

Two notes about the final Scripture, the Sabbath command. First, note that the Sabbath command does not just apply to our own work, but extends to those we oversee. If we are resting on the Sabbath, but hampering other people from observing sabbath, we are breaking the command in a very serious way.

Second, note that the reason given for the Sabbath in Deuteronomy is the history of slavery. God did not rescue the Israelites from slavery just to see them enslave one another. That would be working against God's miracle. When one person enslaves another, he/she is taking the place of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and fighting against God Himself. When someone tries to free a slave, he/she is functioning as Moses and fighting on God's side with God's power.

Week 3



Just Laws and Good Government

Memory Verse: Proverbs 21:15

When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers.

Key Concepts: Righteousness (*Tzadeqah*), Corrective Justice (*Mishpat*), Duty of Government, Quartet of the Vulnerable (note: a quartet is a group of four)

Introduction

In the Old Testament there are two important Hebrew words for justice that appear together frequently throughout the pages of the Bible: *Tzadeqah* and *Mishpat*.

Bible Study: The Hebrew Word *Tzadeqah* (Righteousness/ Being Just)

Tzadeqah can be translated as “being just”, but is more often translated as “righteousness”. It is important to know that when you read the word righteousness in the Old Testament, you are reading about justice

In *Generous Justice*, Tim Keller writes, “*Tzadeqah* refers to a life of right relationships. When most modern people see the word “righteousness” in the Bible, they tend to think of it in terms of private morality, such as sexual chastity or diligence in prayer and Bible study. But in the Bible, *tzadeqah* refers to day-to-day living in which a person conducts all relationships in family and society with fairness, generosity and equity.” *Tzadeqah* means that children respect and honor their parents. It means that parents nurture and provide for their children and always act in the child’s best interest. It means that neighbors are honest with each other and share with one another. *Tzadeqah* means that a husband and wife are faithful to each other and don’t have extra-marital affairs. It means that employers pay honest wages to their workers and workers don’t cheat or steal from their employers. People are treating each other with fairness, respect, honesty, generosity and love. This is *tzadeqah*.

Tzadeqah can be understood well by examining the Ten Commandments.

Read Deuteronomy 5:6-21 (Ten Commandments)

- 1) We defined *Tzadeqah* as a life of “right relationships”. How do you see this reflected in the Ten Commandments?
- 2) How many of the Ten Commandments govern the relationship of people with God? How many of the Ten Commandments govern the relationship of people with other people? *
- 3) Notice that for most of the Ten Commandments, no punishment is listed. That is because the Ten

commandments are examples of *Tzadeqah*, what it means to be a just person who lives in right relationships with God and others. If all people lived according to these rules, would we need police, jails, courts or even locks? *

Bible Study: The Hebrew Word *Mishpat* (Justice/ Corrective Justice)

The Ten Commandments reflect *tzadeqah*, a vision of righteousness that, if all people followed, would result in peace and justice. Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world in which people sin and commit acts of injustice. Through greed and rebellion, by deception and violence, people break these commands, shattering shalom and abandoning *tzadeqah*. Other people get hurt.

This is why God has also given us *mishpat*, or corrective justice. *Mishpat* calls upon societies and God-fearing people to correct injustices in the world. This is the word you most often see translated as justice in the Old Testament. *Mishpat* means punishing wrongdoers, caring for victims of injustice, and protecting the vulnerable from potential injustice. When God punished Pharaoh and rescued the Israelites, it was an act of *Mishpat* (justice) founded on the *tzadeqah* (righteousness) of God's character.

Much of the Torah consists of laws with punishments attached. Prophets, judges, and kings all have a role in enforcing these laws, correcting injustices and promoting justice in the land.

In a fallen world, the strong prey on the weak (Joseph attacked by older brothers, Israelites enslaved by Egyptians). To correct this, God sets up rulers, governments, and judges to advocate for justice.

- 4) What is the difference between *tzadeqah* and *mishpat*?

Read Deuteronomy 16:18-20 (The Duty of Judges and Officials)

- 5) In verse 18, what is the duty of the judges and officials?
- 6) What does verse 19 warn the judges and officials against? Why is this so important?
- 7) Do the leaders in your community follow the guidance of this Scripture? If not, what can be done about it?

Read Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14 (A Prayer for the King)

- 8) Psalm 72 is a prayer for the King.
- a. What does the psalmist pray that God give to the King?
 - b. What does this psalm show as a primary duty of the King of Israel?
- 9) Reflect on your government and leaders in relation to Psalm 72:
- a. Do they “judge the people in righteousness, the afflicted ones with justice?” (verse 2)
 - b. Do they “defend the afflicted among the people, save the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor?” (verse 4)
 - c. Do they “take pity on the weak and the needy” (verse 12) and “rescue them from oppression and violence?” (verse 14)
 - d. Do they “regard the blood of the oppressed as precious in the sight of God?” (verse 14)

- 10) How might your church encourage your government leaders to fight for justice?

- 11) What are some forms of injustice that occur in your community to which you would like to see corrective justice (mishpat) applied? What would justice look like in these cases? *

Bible Study: Mishpat Laws for the Protection of the Vulnerable
Throughout the Biblical teachings on justice, there are four groups of people who are quite frequently mentioned: widows, orphans/fatherless, foreigners, and the poor. Theologians refer to these four groups as “**The Quartet of the Vulnerable.**”³ In Israelite society, these four groups are identified as requiring special attention and care because of their unique vulnerability to injustice. Widows and orphans had no man to protect them and provide for them. Foreigners are minority groups and may lack language skills and social connections to protect them. The poor have less resources to fall back on in times of trouble and cannot afford a lawyer if they need one. In today’s world, we might add other groups to the list of those “most vulnerable” such as the mentally ill, the elderly, the homeless, single parents, and refugees. God consistently reveals throughout the Bible that He has a special place in His heart for these vulnerable groups. Righteousness and justice demand that we all join Him in extending an active interest in protecting and providing for these people.

³ Quartet means group of four. If someone performs alone, they sing a solo. If two, then it is a duet. Three is a trio. Four is a quartet. The phrase “Quartet of the Vulnerable” is used to describe the four groups of vulnerable people who often appear together in scriptures about justice in the Bible: widows, orphans/fatherless, foreigners, and the poor.

“The mishpat, or justness, of a society, according to the Bible, is evaluated by how it treats these groups. Any neglect shown to the needs of the members of this quartet is not called merely a lack of mercy or charity but a violation of justice, of mishpat. God loves and defends those with the least economic and social power, and so should we. That is what it means to “do justice.”⁴

Read Psalm 68:4-5 (Praise to God)

- 12) God is called “father to the fatherless and defender of widows.” What significance do you see in this being a title of God?

Read Deuteronomy 24:19-22 (Farming Law)

- 13) How does this farming law show God’s concern for the vulnerable?

Read Deuteronomy 14:28-29 (Tithing Law)

Many churches teach on verse 28, but forget to study verse 29.

- 14) In verse 29, what was the tithe used for?
- 15) How was the tithe meant to advance justice for the vulnerable?

⁴ Keller

DEFINING BIBLICAL JUSTICE

Based on what we have learned so far, a definition of biblical justice begins to emerge:

To relate rightly to God (through loyalty and devotion), to relate rightly to other people (through fairness, honesty, and generosity), and the orderly, morally upright use of power to correct and discourage acts of injustice. These corrective actions include punishment of perpetrators and protection for the vulnerable.

Conclusion

Many of us want to limit righteous living to simply avoiding certain sinful behaviors. These are called sins of commission because these sins are actions people commit. But there is another category of sin called sins of omission: this is when we fail to do (omit) something God commands us to do. These are sins of inaction or omission.

For example, we might feel we are innocent of the sin of commission regarding child trafficking and say, “I have never bought or sold a child!” We might feel similarly about other crimes such as robbery, gang violence, murder, rape, or domestic violence.

But what of the sin of omission? Have we known about someone who is suffering and done nothing to help? That would also be sinful.

The Word of God teaches us that we have a responsibility to be an extension of God’s justice to others. God wants us to support the oppressed by taking courageous action to set them free of oppression. God wants us to protect the vulnerable from

potential oppression. God wants us to support the poor with livelihood development to help them thrive and to be less vulnerable in the future. This is righteousness. This is justice. Let us not commit a sin of omission by refusing to heed God's commands.

This will sometimes require us to hold our government accountable and ensure it puts in place social interventions that protect vulnerable groups against slavery, violence and oppression. Holding governments accountable will be the subject of next week's lesson.

Closing Prayer

My Father, I commit to become a person that truly lives a life of righteousness. Help me to be an extension of Your justice in my community. Today, I ask for Your grace to pursue both *tzadeqah* and *mishpat* in its totality. I offer myself to Your service.

Amen

Leader's Guide

Question 3: The first four commandments describe a right relationship with God. The last seven commandments describe right relationships with other people. Notice it adds up to 11! This is a bit of a trick question. As we discussed last week, the fourth commandment (Sabbath) covers both our relationship with God and with others because we are required to give our workers and children Sabbath.

Question 5: If everyone practiced *tzadeqah*, we might live in a just world and would not have need for police or jails or courts or punishments. We would live in *shalom*.

Question 13: If your group needs prompting, consider suggesting crimes you are aware of locally such as armed robbery, fraudulent land deals, witchcraft trials, child-trafficking, forced child marriage, rape, and domestic violence. Help your group to yearn to see justice done and to imagine a more just community.

Week 4



Reforming Government: Speaking Truth to Power

Memory Verse: Ezekiel 45:9a

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘You have gone far enough, princes of Israel! Give up your violence and oppression and do what is just and right.’”

Key Concepts: The Role of the Prophet: Speaking Truth to Power, Servant Leadership

Introduction

We saw in weeks 1 and 2 that in this fallen world, there is a sinful tendency for the strong to prey on the weak. Cain killed Abel. Joseph was attacked and sold by his older brothers. The powerful Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. God is the great leveler, standing up for the downtrodden and fighting for justice.

In Week 3 we learned that God sets up laws and leaders for the purpose of representing Him in administering justice. Laws and leaders fight the sinful tendency of the tyranny of the strong by

defending the weak and restraining the hand of the oppressor. God-ordained power given to rulers is **not to be used for personal profit, but for establishing justice.**

But what happens when the leaders appointed by God to fight for justice fail to do the job? Even worse, what happens when these leaders abuse their power and use it for injustice and personal gain? This is the subject for study in Week 4.

In the story of the Old Testament, when the Kings turn to evil and injustice, that's when God raises up godly men (called prophets) whose job is to speak truth to power. They are God's voice for justice against an unjust ruler. This is the original and truest mission of a prophet of God. As Christians, we should pay attention because it is not a role reserved uniquely for prophets; Jesus will show us that being advocates for justice is a calling for all of us.

Bible Study: The Role of Prophet to Speak Truth to Power

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-13 (Nathan confronts King David)

- 1) In what ways did King David abuse his power?
- 2) Why was it important for Nathan to confront the King?
- 3) What happens if no one confronts leaders who abuse their power?
- 4) How would you feel if God chose you to be like Nathan and confront a powerful ruler? Could you trust God enough to obey?
- 5) It is difficult to confront or challenge a person of authority such as a mayor or government official about an

injustice. Have you ever tried? How did it go? If someone you know planned to do this, how would you advise them to go about it?

- 6) Why did Nathan tell a story? Was it effective?
- 7) In verse 13, David was struck to the heart and repented of his sin (see also Psalm 51) and God had mercy on him. In light of these results, was Nathan's confrontation of David actually an act of love?

Read 1 Kings 21 (Elijah confronts King Ahab)

- 8) God gives rulers power not for their own benefit, but for those they lead.
 - a. In what ways did Jezebel abuse her power?
 - b. In what ways did Ahab abuse his power?
 - c. What is the Lord's response to these abuses of power?
 - d. Why is it so important that leaders are held accountable for the way they use their power?

Read Malachi 3:5 (Malachi confronts Jewish Leaders)

- 9) Malachi describes a trial in which God will judge people for the injustices they have done. How does God's judgment of oppressors show God's love for the victims of injustice?
- 10) Can you think of a local example of each injustice listed in verse 5?
 - a. Sorcery
 - b. Adultery
 - c. Perjury
 - d. Defrauding (cheating) workers out of their wages

- e. Oppressing the widows and fatherless
- f. Depriving the foreigner among you of justice

- 11) Traffickers tend to prey on people who are economically or socially vulnerable such as youth who are living in poverty, or on the streets, or experience physical or sexual abuse, or addiction. They may pose as a friend, offering meals, gifts, or just a sympathetic ear. They sometimes appeal to young people through false advertisements and promises of jobs in modeling or acting. In other cases, people are forced to work in unsafe abusive conditions in domestic labor or sweat shops with the threat of reprisal, firing, or deportation. How do these actions this violate the scripture above?
- 12) How is the fear of God related to a life of justice?

Bible Study: Servant Leadership

Much of the rampant injustice in the world occurs when those with power make one simple mistake: believing their power exists for their own personal gain. Jesus teaches us a different form of leadership, one that is consistent with the intentions of God in the Old Testament.

Read Matthew 20:20-28

- 13) Why does the mother want her sons to sit at Christ's right and left?
- 14) What does Jesus mean that Gentiles "lord their authority over" each other?

- 15) What examples have you seen of people in authority behaving in this way?
- 16) How is Christian leadership to be different? What is servant leadership?
- 17) How might the United States change if our leaders all learned from Jesus and became servant-leaders?

**STORY: SAINT ANTONY AND THE FIRST
CHRISTIAN GOVERNMENT**

St. Antony lived from the year 251 to 356, during the transition from Roman emperors persecuting Christians to a time when the emperors themselves became Christians. St. Antony was a monk who lived in the desert of Egypt and had an international reputation for righteousness and wisdom.

One day the emperor of Rome wrote him a letter asking for advice on how to be a Christian ruler, since the world had never seen one before. St. Antony wrote back “approving them because they worshipped Christ, and giving them counsel on things pertaining to salvation, not to think much of the present, but rather to remember the judgment that is coming, and to know that Christ alone was the true and Eternal King. He begged them to be merciful and to give heed to justice and the poor.”

- *The Life of St. Antony*, by St. Athanasius, translated by H. Ellershaw

Reflection Questions:

1. What do you like about St. Antony's advice for the emperor?
2. Imagine that the President of the U.S. wrote you a letter asking your advice on how to apply what you are learning about biblical justice. What would you advise? Take some time to write your response in the space provided and then share with your group.

Dear President,

Thank you for your kind letter requesting my advice on how you can practice biblical justice as you lead our country. Here is my advice...

Conclusion

God requires us to speak truth to power. He wants us to speak truth to our pastors, bosses, legislators, presidents and anyone in authority. This is often difficult, especially in cultures where it is seen as disrespectful to disagree with a leader. Others of us may fear we won't be seen or heard. We fear the consequences of confronting those with power, as they might turn on us.

However, God wants us to rise up and become His prophetic mouthpiece just like Nathan and Elijah. God wants us to call out the wrongs in our society like Micah did, declare what is right, and help fix what is broken. He wants us to confront the authorities that oppress the poor and vulnerable. To those in authority who simply neglect their God-given duty to do justice... God wants us to prod them into action! This means we must learn to be brave.

We are not to do this in an uncooperative and obnoxious manner. God wants us to confront with respect, love, and wisdom. Make up your mind today to become God's mouthpiece that will speak truth to power. It is only when we hold our leaders accountable that our community and nation will be full of justice.

Closing Prayer

Father, I offer myself to be Your mouthpiece. Help me to be a person with the courage to speak truth to power in love and wisdom. I pray for those in authority and leadership, that they would be receptive to accountability and truth, even when it does not sound good to them. Amen

Week 5



Just Worship

Memory Verse: Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

Key Concept: God wants us to worship Him by doing justice.

Introduction

Last week we learned that God sent His prophets to speak truth to power. Prophets stand up to corrupt rulers, demanding that they reform their ways and use their power for justice instead of personal gain. Before we become too judgmental of others, we need to remember that the prophets and Jesus Himself often reserved some of their harshest words for religious leaders. Sometimes religious leaders, even Christian pastors, are the ones to misunderstand their God-given authority and use it for personal gain or for increasing their own profile. When we do this, we fail in God’s mission for us and we abandon those in our care who most need our help. In addition to the prophets’

rebuke of corrupt rulers, they also speak warnings from God to the religious leaders and the worshippers of God when they go astray in their worship of God. This is the subject of study for Week 5.

We will see in each of these cases that the people of God have lost sight of what really matters to God. They are still praising, praying, and performing religious rituals, yet God is not pleased with their worship. Why not? What is missing? The Scriptures in today's lesson show us that worship is about more than simply singing and music. Worship includes living a life of obedience and orienting our lives around what truly matters to God.

Bible Study Questions

Read Isaiah 58:1-11 (True Fasting)

- 1) In verses 3-4, what has gone wrong with the people's worship? Why does God reject their fasting? *

- 2) God gives His people a list of actions (verses 6-7 and 9-10) that He would receive as very pleasing worship and which would lead to blessing.
 - a. How many of these actions can you name?

 - b. Do you think of these actions as acts of worship?

 - c. How do you feel about God asking us to worship Him through our acts of justice?

- 3) How might you and your church adjust your efforts so that you focus more on what really pleases God?

Read Amos 5: 7, 10-15, 21-24 (True Worship)

- 4) In Amos 5:21-23, God says He despises the people's religious festivals, which were intended to worship Him. Why does God despise these traditions? *
- 5) What does God ask the people for instead (Amos 5:14-15, 24)?
- 6) What would it look like in your community for justice (Mishpat) to roll down like water and righteousness (Tzadeqah) to flow like a never-failing stream?

Micah and Jesus make known What Really Matters to God

The prophet Micah and then later Jesus find themselves in similar prophetic confrontations with religious leaders who have lost sight of what God values. Each seeks to refocus the people of God onto what pleases God.

Read Micah 6:6-8 (What the LORD Requires)

- 7) What are the three things mentioned in verse 8 that God requires of us?
- 8) Which of these do you find the most challenging? Why?
- 9) What does it mean to “do justice”?
- 10) How would you apply these three requirements of God to the modern problem of child-trafficking (child slavery)?

Read Matthew 23:23 (The Weightier Matters of the Law)

- 11) What similarities do you see between Jesus' words here and Micah 6:8?
- 12) How can your church practice all three of these things Jesus says are the “weightier matters of the law”?

STORY: A MOTHER'S CHRISTMAS REQUEST

A mother had four children who all grew to be successful adults who loved the LORD. Each child got a job, got married, moved away, and had children of their own. Every year, the whole family would gather to celebrate Christmas and they would say to the mother, “Hey Mom, you have shown us so much love all these years, caring for all our needs. We want to buy you some special Christmas presents to thank you and show we love you. What do you want us to give you for Christmas?” The mother would smile at her children and say, “I want just one thing for Christmas and if you give me this, I will be so happy. What I want is to see all my kids gather together and enjoy each other’s company. I want to see you get along and love each other. That is all I want for a Christmas present.” Every year the children tried to present their mother with this gift, but they were headstrong, and had quick tempers, and loved to argue with each other. So, instead, most years they would just buy her art, purses, random electronic gadgets, and flowers and hope they would make her happy.

1. What does this story teach us?
2. Do you see the similarity between the loving mother with her children and God with His people?

We offer God all sorts of gifts and praise songs, but deny Him the thing He most desires: to see His children love each other and treat each other with justice.

- 3) How might acts of justice on behalf of those who suffer injustice be like giving God a Christmas present?

Conclusion

Last week, we discussed how political rulers can forget their power exists to promote justice and defend the weak. Instead, they focus on their own personal gain. In a similar way, we as the people of God sometimes forget that worship exists for God, not for us. We focus on what would please us: prayer for blessings from God, music that we enjoy, a sermon that makes us feel good.

Instead, we need to remember that when we gather in worship before Almighty God, it is a time which changes us. It resets our priorities and aligns them with the priorities of God. One fundamental thing which takes place is that worship realigns power. We surrender to God, acknowledging that He is the One who truly holds the power in the world. We are reminded that the power God has given us is to be used for justice. We seek God's strength to overcome those who abuse their power. We seek God's strength to do our part to defend the weak and oppressed. We are brought together to worship as equal brothers and sisters before the Lord.

Closing Prayer

Father, I confess that I have been selfish in my worship and in my prayers. I have focused on what pleases me and how to get that from You, instead of focusing on what pleases You. Help me to reform my ways. I offer my life as an act of true worship to You. Help me to focus on things that please You and truly matter to You. I surrender myself totally to You and commit to be a person that pursues the best interest of others. May my life be a worship song to You! Amen

Leader's Guide

Question 1: Your group might answer that the worshippers were not passionate in their worship. A stronger answer is that even though the people were worshipping in earnest (fasting, praying), they lost sight of what really matters to God: living lives of justice.

Question 4: It is not that God hates all traditions. It is not that the people are not seeking Him with passion. God rejects their worship festivals **because** they have rejected justice.

Week 6



The Holistic Mission of Jesus

Memory Verse: Luke 4:18-19

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Main Concepts: Holistic Ministry (Spiritual, Physical, Social)

Introduction

Jesus is the perfect embodiment of the three Old Testament callings: Priest, Prophet and King.

As High Priest, Jesus makes intercession with God. He makes atonement for our sin (in His own body, rather than a sacrificial lamb). He gives unrighteous people an opportunity to repent, turn their lives around, and share in the *shalom* of God.

As Prophet, Jesus calls out the injustice of His day. Jesus urges the people to repent of their injustice and return to God. This includes the religious leaders of His time.

As King, Jesus is an establisher of justice. Jesus reorders power according to the righteousness of God. Jesus will one day return, on Judgment Day, to render final and lasting justice to the world.

At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, right after His baptism and temptation, He returns to His hometown and visits the synagogue of Nazareth, where His ministry begins. He is given an opportunity to choose a Scripture to read and then to teach on it. What did Jesus choose for His very first sermon? Read Luke 4:14-21 to find out.

Bible Study

Read Luke 4:14-21 (Jesus' Mission Statement)

- 1) Of all the Scriptures in the Old Testament, why do you think Jesus chose this Scripture for His first sermon?

- 2) In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came upon God's chosen agents to empower them to fulfill their callings from God. The Spirit fell on Jesus at His baptism and now Jesus tells us what the Spirit will empower Him to do. What do verses 18-20 tell us about Jesus' mission?

- 3) Can you think of examples in Scripture of Jesus doing each of those tasks?

- 4) Jesus specifies that part of His mission is to set the oppressed free.
 - a. What does Jesus mean by that?

 - b. Does this freedom only have spiritual meaning or does it also have physical and social meanings?

Read Luke 5:12-13 (Jesus and the Leper)

- 5) In what way does Jesus address the spiritual needs of the man?
- 6) How does Jesus meet the physical needs of the man?
- 7) How does Jesus meet the social needs of the man?

Hint: Lepers were social outcasts because people were afraid of catching leprosy. For fear of infection, lepers were cut off from human contact and forced to live outside of town. When they walked through town, they had to shout “unclean, unclean!” so people could clear out of their path. They were viewed as being “unclean” and consequently “unblessed.” Can you imagine having zero human contact for years because you were considered dirty and untouchable? Think how Jesus’ touching the man changes the man’s social position and connects him with humanity!

- 8) Which happened first: Jesus healing the man or Jesus touching the man? Why did Jesus do it in that order?

Hint: What message would it have sent to the man and to other lepers (who don’t get healed) if Jesus had done it in the reverse order? What message does it send to society that Jesus touched an “unclean man”?

Read John 9:1-7 (Jesus and the Man Born Blind)

- 9) In what way does Jesus address the spiritual needs of the man?
- 10) How does Jesus meet the physical needs of the man?
- 11) How does Jesus meet the social needs of the man?

Hint: Notice that the community around the man believes that his blindness is God's punishment for his sins. The community is debating whether this punishment is due to his sin or his parents' sin, but they are convinced that his affliction is God's judgment. This adds to the man's pain. He is ostracized and shamed in his community as a sinner and someone that God is against. Jesus challenges that theology and identifies the man as one who has been specially chosen to glorify God. Think of how that changes his role in the community.

Read Matthew 18:5-7

- 12) In this case, Jesus champions another lowly category of people in society: children. What do Jesus' words instruct us about how children should be valued and treated? What warning do these words have for those who harm children?

Conclusion

Jesus shows a strong compassion towards people we consider to be lowly outcasts. He shows the world that these "outcasts" are the kind of people He is so passionate about helping. The world segregates and stigmatizes vulnerable groups like lepers. Jesus flips the narrative and shows us a new order in which He, the King of Kings, embraces lepers and promotes their livelihood and well-being.

Sadly, we sometimes treat people differently based on their social status, influence, and potential benefit to us. People may experience social stigmatization for being sick, physically or mentally challenged, poor, homeless, or simply for their physical appearance or skin color. At times, society regards people as problems, baggage, or outcasts. We simply don't care about them because they don't benefit us.

However, through this study, Jesus is teaching us to flip the narrative. He wants us to show mercy to such people and offer them both social and spiritual support. He wants us to stand with them in love! He wants us to love them, just as He has loved us!

Closing Prayer

Forgive me, Lord, for thinking some people are beneath me. Father, please forgive me for not treating the socially excluded with love and respect. Please help me to be an extension of Your love to those considered to be outcasts in our society. Today, I declare my willingness to support the well-being of those who are vulnerable, socially segregated, or sick. So, help me God! Amen.

Week 7



The Kingdom of God and “The Least of These”

Memory Verse: Matthew 25:40

The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me.”

Key Concepts: The Kingdom of God and “the Least of These”

Introduction

Many people make the mistake of viewing Jesus as a convenient helper for them to lead the lives they already want to live: lives of wealth, comfort, and ease. However, this is not how Jesus is presented in the Bible. When Jesus calls His disciples, He asks them to live for something different, something greater than themselves. Jesus calls His disciples to leave their possessions behind to follow Him. He calls His disciples to enter into lives of discomfort and struggle. He does not call His disciples to lounge with the rich and famous, but to stand in solidarity with the poor, the lowly, the sick, the persecuted, and the outcast. Similarly, Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses,

and follow Him. This requires dying to ourselves and our selfish world-centered ambitions and beginning to live for God. We are not to store up for ourselves treasures on earth, but treasures in heaven. We are to live our lives as citizens of the Kingdom of God. This means submitting ourselves to be used by God to bless the poor, the oppressed, the sick and the downtrodden. This way of life matters to Jesus and He wants us to live it to the fullest.

Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God turned the world upside down. In Luke chapter 6, the Sermon on the Plain, which is similar to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5-7, Jesus pronounces a set of blessings and woes. These blessings and woes are very surprising, even shocking because of whom Jesus pronounces as "blessed" (also translated as "happy") and to whom Jesus issues "woes." We are used to thinking of riches as being a sign of God's blessing, and poverty and misfortune as signs of God's wrath, but Jesus challenges this way of thinking.

Bible Study: Blessings and Woes

Read Luke 6:20-26

- 1) What do you find surprising about the list of people that Jesus says are blessed? Why is that surprising?
- 2) Do you feel blessed when you are poor, hungry, crying, hated, or rejected? How might Jesus' words comfort you and bring you hope?
- 3) What do you find surprising about the list of people to whom Jesus says, "Woe"?
- 4) Do you normally view people who are rich, well-fed, laughing, and popular as people who are blessed by God? What do you think of Jesus' warning to them?

- 5) How does Jesus' teaching turn the world upside down? How does the promise of the coming Kingdom of God reverse the way the world works?

Bible Study: The Final Exam

Some of the most stressful occasions in many students' lives are exams. Students who want good marks study hard to prepare for their exams, in hopes that when they are given the questions, they will be able to answer correctly. How much easier would it make the students' lives if the teacher gave them the questions ahead of time? Then the students could become very focused in their preparation for the exam! This is what Jesus does in Matthew 25! It is revealed that the Son of Man, Jesus, will be the One to return on Judgment Day and "test" the lives that people have lived. Amazingly, Jesus gives us the questions He will ask on this test in advance so we can prepare. Before you read this amazing Scripture, ask yourselves a few questions:

- 6) What actions in life do you imagine Jesus assessing on Judgment Day? What actions are so important to Jesus that He would evaluate people by them?

Read Matthew 25:31-46 (Judgment Day)

- 7) What are the standards by which people's lives will be judged? Are these surprising to you? Why or why not?
- 8) What does Jesus mean by "the least of these"? *
- 9) What types of people are the "least of these" in your community? Who around you are considered unimportant and lowly? *

Note: This may be the most important question of the week!

- 10) The Scripture says whatever we have done for “the least of these”, we have done for Him and whatever we have refused to do for the “least of these” we have refused to do for Him.
 - a. What does Jesus mean by this?
 - b. How does this change the position of the poor and lowly in our world?
 - c. How does this teaching turn the world upside down?
- 11) How well are you doing at loving and caring for the “least of these” around you?
- 12) What do you want to do differently, based on what you learned today?

Bible Reflection: Connecting Jesus with the Old Testament

Now that you have invested time in studying the “justice thread” as it runs through the Bible, you may be able to make connections with concepts you have studied in previous weeks.

- 13) What similarities do you see between Jesus’ teaching in this week’s lesson and what we’ve learned from the Old Testament in previous weeks? *

Conclusion

We tend to think of righteousness in terms of “spiritual” actions like prayer and worship or in church activities such as studying the Word, serving in the church, and tithing. Inasmuch as these things are important in the Kingdom of God, Jesus’ definition of righteousness and His Kingdom goes beyond that.

Jesus defines righteousness as having right relationships with God and with our fellow men and women. As in the Old Testament, right relationship with those in need includes generosity. Jesus sees righteousness as an act of extending His love to the fatherless, poor, immigrant, and those that are socially excluded. Jesus stands in solidarity with these groups and asks that we worship Him by loving them.

Our deeds of love, generosity, and justice for those who most need it is what God sees as true success, not the many things we accumulate for ourselves and our families.

Christ's Kingdom is not about gaining earthly reputation and riches for ourselves. It is about truly loving people through deeds of compassion and justice which bring glory and honor to God!

Closing Prayer

My Father, please forgive me for not prioritizing things that matter to You. Thank You for helping me to appreciate what is dear to You today. I ask that You enable me to focus on things that are Your heartbeat, such as bringing hope, help, and salvation to those that are socially excluded and marginalized. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Leader's Guide

Question 8: Leader's note: "The least" refers to those in the community that are considered lowly and unimportant.

Question 9: As noted, this may be the most important question of the week! Please don't rush through this. Take lots of time for it. Prompt your group if necessary, but give them time to think through this question because it is foundational to application of the Scripture to their lives.

We hope they take particular note of trafficked children. Answers should extend beyond this, however, to anyone in the community who is treated as lowly and unimportant. Help your group to see how important the “lowly” and “least” are to Jesus.

Question 13: Help your group to connect the Old Testament with the New Testament on the theme of justice.

Week 1: Genesis teaches that people are made in the image of God, and thus a crime against a person is a crime against God. Jesus says that whatever you have done for the “least of these”, you have done for Him.

Week 3: The Quartet of the Vulnerable (Widows, Orphans, Immigrants, and the Poor) are groups to whom God requires us to give special care and protection. Jesus proclaims blessings on similar groups in Luke 6 and requires special care be given them in Matthew 25.

Week 5: Isaiah and Amos teach us to worship God by doing acts of mercy and justice. This is similar to the test in Matthew 25.

Week 8



Application: How Now Shall We Live?

Introduction

This is the final week of the Bible Study. Today we have two goals:
1) Review what has been learned and 2) Discuss how the group might apply what they've learned to their lives.

Memory Verse Challenge*

Week 1: Genesis 4:10

Week 2: Exodus 3:7

Week 3: Proverbs 21:15

Week 4: Ezekiel 45:9

Week 5: Micah 6:8

Week 6: Luke 4:18-19

Week 7: Matthew 25:40

Bible Study Review Questions*

Week 1: Creation and the Fall (Genesis)

- 1) What is shalom and how does it relate to justice?

- 2) What is injustice?
- 3) Who was a victim of child-trafficking in Genesis?

Week 2: God of Justice, Rescuer of Slaves (Exodus, Deuteronomy)

- 4) In Exodus, God appears in a burning bush and gives Moses a mission. What is Moses' mission?
- 5) The Sabbath commandment requires us to give a day of rest to our children, our workers, and even our animals. What reason is given in Deuteronomy 5 for why we should practice the Sabbath?

Week 3: Just Laws and Good Government (Deuteronomy, Psalms)

- 6) What is Tzadeqah?
- 7) What is Mishpat?
- 8) Who are the four groups of people referred to as The Quartet of the Vulnerable?

Week 4: Reforming Government: Speaking Truth to Power (Prophets)

- 9) What is the prophet's job in relation to rulers?
- 10) When God gives power to someone such as a judge, king, or government official, what is the purpose of that power?

Week 5: Just Worship (Prophets)

- 11) In the passages we studied in the prophets Isaiah, Amos, and Micah, why is God not pleased with the people's worship?

- 12) According to the prophets Isaiah, Amos, and Micah, what kind of worship and obedience is God looking for from His people?

Week 6: The Holistic Mission of Jesus (Luke, John)

- 13) What are the three elements of Jesus' holistic ministry?

Week 7: The Kingdom of God and the “Least of These” (Luke, Matthew)

- 14) Jesus speaks a series of “Blessings and Woes” in Luke 6. How do these “turn the world upside down”?
- 15) What does Jesus mean by “the least of these”, and how are they to be treated?

Application: Now What?

We have invested 7 weeks in learning about God's heart for justice throughout the pages of the Bible. Now let's discuss ways we can apply what we've learned to our lives!

Let's start with individual application:

- 1) How has God been speaking to you through this study? How do you want to live differently based on what you have learned?
- 2) What injustices in your community do you believe God wants to change? How might God use you?

Let's now move to group application:

- 3) How might this church or group work together to apply what we have learned? What impact could we make on justice issues in our community that would make God smile?

- 4) How can we begin to align our church or group with God's heart for justice?

- 5) What obstacles will we face? Can we trust God to see us through them?

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for opening my eyes and heart to Your heartbeat for justice. Today, I surrender myself to You to be used as Your vessel of justice. Help me to be passionate about what You are passionate about, and troubled by what troubles You. Give me the grace to be a vessel through which You will work justice in this world.

Finally, please help me to also lead others in my family, church, workplace and community to understand and embrace Your heart for justice. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

Leader's Guide

Memory Verse Challenge: Ask members for volunteers who can recite the memory verses. Ask a different group member for each memory verse. Have fun with this! Make sure no one feels shamed or embarrassed. Keep it light-hearted, but give lots of encouragement and praise whenever someone can successfully recite a memory verse.

Bible Study Review Questions: Again, this should be fun for everyone. Give your group lots of encouragement and have the group applaud for everyone. Try to avoid anyone feeling embarrassed. Use this quiz as a review to help people remember what they have learned. Help them feel successful that they have completed the study. Fill in the blanks of what they have forgotten in an encouraging manner

Appendix A: What can I do?



Use your Eyes: If you see something suspicious and you suspect a case of child-trafficking, report it. Your phone call might lead to this child's freedom. See Appendix B for guidance.

To report suspected human trafficking to Federal law enforcement: **1-866-347-2423**. For help from the National Human Trafficking Hotline: **1-888-373-7888** or text HELP or INFO to BeFree (233733)



Use your Voice: Let your voice be heard on this issue. Educate your community about child-trafficking and other justice issues. Let your community leaders and legislators know that you hope this is a government priority. Your voice can be powerful in bringing awareness of this issue and winning the hearts and minds of your community.



Use your Knees: Pray and ask God to end child-trafficking and other forms of injustice. Ask God to hold perpetrators accountable in court, and to rescue every victim. You can join IJM's prayer list at www.ijm.org/get-involved/pray



Open your Heart: Care for the vulnerable people in your community, particularly at-risk children and single mothers. Get to know their names and stories. Eagerly serve them as you would serve Christ. You might be preventing a case of child-trafficking.



Repent: If you have been involved with any of the injustices described in this study in any way, it is not too late for you to do the right thing! You can repent of this sin and do everything in your power to assist every victim you know about.

Appendix B: Indicators of Human Trafficking

Department of Homeland Security Blue Campaign

Recognizing key indicators of human trafficking is the first step in identifying victims and can help save a life. Here are some common indicators to help recognize human trafficking. You can also download or order the Blue Campaign indicator card, which is a small plastic card that lists common signs of trafficking and how to report the crime.

- Does the person appear disconnected from family, friends, community organizations, or houses of worship?
- Has a child stopped attending school?
- Has the person had a sudden or dramatic change in behavior?
- Is a juvenile engaged in commercial sex acts?
- Is the person disoriented or confused, or showing signs of mental or physical abuse?
- Does the person have bruises in various stages of healing?
- Is the person fearful, timid, or submissive?
- Does the person show signs of having been denied food, water, sleep, or medical care?
- Is the person often in the company of someone to whom he or she defers? Or someone who seems to be in control of the situation, e.g., where they go or who they talk to?
- Does the person appear to be coached on what to say?
- Is the person living in unsuitable conditions?
- Does the person lack personal possessions and appear not to have a stable living situation?
- Does the person have freedom of movement? Can the person freely leave where they live? Are there unreasonable security measures?

Not all indicators listed above are present in every human trafficking situation, and the presence or absence of any of the indicators is not necessarily proof of human trafficking.

Appendix C: Further Study

Biblical Justice

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Bales, Kevin. *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

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U.S. Department of State. *The Trafficking in Persons Report* (published annually).

Biographies of Christian Justice Leaders

Allen, John. *Desmond Tutu: Rabble-Rouser for Peace: The Authorized Biography*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008.

Metaxas, Eric. *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery*. New York, Harper Collins, 2007.

Websites

International Justice Mission www.ijm.org

The US Justice Department www.justice.gov/humantrafficking

Homeland Security www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign

Child Welfare www.childwelfare.gov

Human Trafficking Hotline humantraffickinghotline.org

San Jose PD Task Force

<https://www.sjpd.org/about-us/organization/office-of-the-chief-of-police/human-trafficking-task-force>

NOTES

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