



6:8

DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

BECOMING A CHRIST-CENTERED CHURCH FOR ALL PEOPLE

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."**

During the fall and winter of 2020-2021, a group of pastors and truth-seekers from Door Creek Church began meeting to discover what the Bible says it means to **"do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God"** (Micah 6:8).

We studied every passage in the Bible where key words came up; words like "justice," "mercy," "injustice," "oppression," "righteousness," among others. It took six months of weekly meetings to move through Genesis to Revelation. **Apparently, justice and mercy matter to God. So, they should matter to us.**

This devotional was created to help people become more fully devoted followers of Christ by providing a biblical pathway to grow in their understanding and practice of justice and mercy.

We're convinced that the Word of God is far more powerful and helpful than any ideology, slogan or political platform and we're excited to see the Spirit work as we open our hearts and minds to Scripture.

This resource is meant for individuals, families and groups who want to learn how to participate in God's beautiful story of restoration and healing in the world through Jesus and His church.

We invite you to let the Holy Spirit "teach, rebuke, correct and train" us through the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16).

GLOSSARY OF KEY BIBLICAL TERMS

Many have called Micah 6:8 a "one-line summary of the whole law". It contains three directives:

1. ACT "JUSTLY"

The word "justice" occurs 200 times in the Old Testament and is used differently in various places, but the basic meaning is that as image-bearers of God, people are to be treated with equity. Justice means that evil-doers receive their due punishment and the poor and needy are to receive protection and care.

2. LOVE "MERCY"

Mercy occurs 245 times in Scripture and refers to God's never-ending, compassionate love. Mercy is God's kindness and is core to who He is and what He cares about. He extends His mercy to sinners and sufferers and expects His people to do the same.

3. WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD

Walking humbly with God is all about trusting and obeying Him, laying down our tendency to define what is good and true for ourselves.

OTHER IMPORTANT BIBLE TERMS:

INJUSTICE

The practice of withholding justice or fairness from anyone. This includes not just acts of cruelty, but also a refusal to share with people in need.

OPPRESSION

When some people exercise violence, unjust war, physical or spiritual burdens and unjust social and political systems on others for their own gain.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Righteousness has a wide range of meaning, but in its most basic sense it's "doing right by God and others." It's the activity and the state of upholding justice as God intends.

WHAT IS JUSTICE?

WEEK 1

MARC MAILLEFER

KEY VERSE(S)

*"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."*

- Micah 6:8

INTRO

Welcome to 6:8—a study that helps us pursue the good that God requires: justice and mercy.

BODY

The word "justice" seems to show up everywhere. You may have heard of poetic, occupational, criminal, social or environmental justice. More recently, Christians have worked to reclaim the word by using the phrase "biblical justice." But what is it?

Here's what we know: Micah 6:8 is God's Word and when we look at what it has to say about justice, we should prepare to be taught, rebuked, corrected and trained in doing what is right—living a life where our love for God and others continually grows (2 Timothy 3:16).

Pastor and author Tim Keller says, "we do justice when we give all human beings their due as creations of God. Doing justice includes not only righting of wrongs, but generosity and social concern, especially toward the poor and vulnerable...It consists of a broad range of activities, from simple, fair and honest dealings with people in daily life to regular, radically generous giving of your time and resources, to activism that seeks to end particular forms of injustice, violence and oppression" (Generous Justice, p.18).

Mercy points to God's unconditional grace and compassion and cannot be separated from justice. Together, justice and mercy are central qualities in the life of God's people because they're core to God's character.

PRAYER

Father, help us to want to live rightly before you and others. Thank you for Jesus who always lived this out. By your grace and for your honor, grow us to be more like you.

FOR FURTHER READING

Micah 6

KEY VERSE(S)

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things."

- Matthew 23:23 (NLT)

INTRO

How do you think God would introduce Himself to us?

BODY

After God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, He led them into the wilderness where He would show them who He really is.

One day Moses asked God to show His glory—God said He would allow all of His goodness (His glory) to pass in front of Him and when He did, here's how He introduced Himself. "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love

and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty..." (Exodus 34:6-7).

When it comes to doing justice, the stakes couldn't be higher. Why? Because justice and mercy are core to who God is. Jesus said, "sorrow awaits those who neglect justice and mercy" (Matthew 23:23). Ten verses later, Jesus elaborated on that sorrow by saying hell awaits those who neglect justice and mercy. Loving God with all of our heart will always be attested by our love for neighbor which is no less than doing justice and loving mercy.

PRAYER

Lord, we deserved your justice, but in your mercy, you sent Jesus to bring forgiveness as He suffered for our sin. May your mercy compel us to love our neighbor as you have not only commanded us but also demonstrated through the cross.

FOR FURTHER READING

Psalm 11:7

KEY VERSE(S)

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

- Genesis 1:27-28

INTRO

Our world is clamoring with voices trying to define the good life.

BODY

Plato claimed the good life was about being happy, healthy and wise. Buddhism says that it's about emptying our minds of all of life's passions. Aristotle taught it's possessing all the right things. Webster defines the good life as having a lot of money. So, is that it? Money? Somehow, these answers all ring hollow.

Out of the din of culture, the Bible's claim echoes clear and true; we were created to flourish by

living under God's loving leadership and filling the world with others who gladly do the same. Money can't buy the good life, but the good news is that Jesus did, by living the good life we could not. The good life begins by faith in Jesus, the one who always followed God's lead. As we follow him, we too will flourish.

PRAYER

Thank you Jesus, for living the good life so that we could have life to the fullest. May your Spirit in us give us a greater desire and power to follow you, that we might help this world flourish under your loving leadership.

FOR FURTHER READING

Genesis 1:26-31

KEY VERSE(S)

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them..."

- Genesis 1:27

"What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor..."

- Psalm 8:4-5

INTRO

How old were you when you first said "that's not fair"? How much older when you cried, "no one loves me"? When God created mankind in His image, He sewed the threads of justice and mercy deep into our being. Because we live in a world that has been torn by injustice and indifference, the fabric of our souls cry out for justice and mercy.

BODY

Every person you meet has been created in God's image. Every day will bring opportunities

to do justice and love mercy as we humbly walk with God. In the Bible, we see a "quartet of the vulnerable." Widows, orphans, refugees and the poor are all "crowned with glory and honor," yet are the most likely to be bypassed when it comes to justice and mercy. They, too, need God's mercy and justice. Our kindness to them is kindness to God.

Do you see someone lacking resources? Have you crossed paths with someone in misery? If not, why is that? Ask God to open your eyes to your fellow image-bearer who longs for the mercy, grace and justice of Jesus.

PRAYER

God of all compassion, Father of all mercies, open our eyes to see your image in others, and our hearts to live like Jesus did.

FOR FURTHER READING

Genesis 1:26-28

WHAT WE'RE MADE TO BE

WEEK 2

RYAN MORRISON

KEY VERSE(S)

"...put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

- Colossians 3:8-12

INTRO

"What matters is what we were made to be."

- Esau McCaulley

BODY

To "Image" God is to embody His glory and reflect His character.

In the ancient Egyptian world in which Genesis was written, only the Pharaohs could be said to bear the image of the gods. However, the Bible's clear and resounding proclamation is that every human, from the lowliest child to the greatest king, bears God's image. Full stop. This means that every man, woman and child has been divinely endowed with the ability to reveal God's glory and the responsibility to reflect His goodness.

Sin has interrupted this calling, but it will never stop it. The command of God to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8) is simply a call to be God's image-bearers.

Through faith and obedience to Christ, the ultimate and perfect image-bearer, we can press on in our high and holy calling.

PRAYER

Lord, forgive us for the ways we have abandoned our call as image-bearers. Help us cling to Christ, reveal your glory and reflect your goodness everywhere we go. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Micah 6:8

KEY VERSE(S)

"Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"

- Genesis 3:13 (NIV)

INTRO

It's easy for believers to be deceived by Satan. When we're in tune with God, we will recognize and avoid the deceit.

BODY

Genesis 3 tells us a creature called "the serpent" deceived Eve on what God had been clear about. To this day, Satan ALWAYS goes against the truth of God's Word. Satan's lies can cause what we know to be evil, become appealing. This is what happened in Genesis 3:6 when the tree that God had forbidden became "delightful" for Eve. How many times has a lie from Satan caused us to second guess what we know to be true and good?

Adam and Eve's deception has impacted every single person because it makes sin delightful to

our eyes and amplifies our vulnerability to deceit. Our world is plagued with the lies of injustice, suffering and hatred. Yet, God still remains the king of kings and the only one who can save our world. Scripture teaches us that we're called to live our lives in a way that lifts up the Kingdom of God. As we do this, the world will see that the only way to true justice is through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life!

PRAYER

Dear God, help us to be submitted to you. Help us honor you as we build your heavenly kingdom. Give us the desire to seek you in all things. Help us boldly stand firm on your word during trying times. Help us to be servants worthy of your kingdom. Thank you for sending your son to die on the cross for our sins. Amen!

FOR FURTHER READING

Genesis 3

KEY VERSE(S)

"For the Lord your God is God of Gods and Lord of Lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes."

- Deuteronomy 17

INTRO

Remember the days when team captains would pick their teammates? They would call name after name, and the pit in your stomach would grow each time it wasn't you. Why? Because to be chosen meant you were wanted, and to be left meant you were not.

BODY

Many of us still think of being chosen as a sign of superiority, but God has something else in mind.

If you've spent time in the Old Testament, you've encountered Israel—God's chosen people. After God rescued them from slavery in Egypt, Moses told them: The Lord your God "shows no partiality" (Deuteronomy 10:17).

But, wait...*If God shows no partiality, how can He have **chosen** people?*

This is where the Bible's definition of chosen is very different from ours. God didn't choose the Israelites because He preferred them, but because He wanted to change the world through them (Genesis 12:2-3). In Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Moses tells us what being chosen looks like:

1. Love God with all your heart (v.12).
2. Serve the vulnerable with all of your resources (v.19).

In other words, to be chosen by God is to share in His purposes.

Just as God chose the Israelites in the Old Testament, He chooses us today. All who trust in Jesus are part of a new "chosen people...God's special possession...to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

PRAYER

God, thank you for choosing me. Help me humbly transform the world with the same love that transformed me.

FOR FURTHER READING

Deuteronomy 10:12-22

BATTERED & SCATTERED

WEEK 3

DAVID SMITH

KEY VERSE(S)

"But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites."

- Exodus 1:12

INTRO

Life can feel like a slingshot being pulled back to its limits, but the further it's pulled back, the further it will catapult.

BODY

Oppression results in feelings of hopeless and helpless. When people are pressed down by others, it feels as though their life is being tried and tested in many ways that can simply break them down. Victims of oppression seldom feel a sense of empowerment and courage to fight back.

In Exodus 1, we see how the Israelites faced their oppressive enemies and became beneficiaries of God's wonderful grace and power to deliver them out of their afflictions. When glass is whole, it is limited to what it can do. When it has been

shattered, then it is spread out. The Israelites were broken, and because of their brokenness, they grew and spread throughout the land.

Your brokenness is not for your end. Your brokenness is for your increase of spreading your message of hope and deliverance to others. You may be pulled back to the point of breaking, but know that the harder you're pulled, the further you will launch. God will hear your cry and will deliver you.

PRAYER

Father, you see the afflictions of your people. You know our limits of strength and fight. Please be our refuge! The oppressors will not win because we find protection and help in you. Amen!

FOR FURTHER READING

Exodus 1:11-14, 3:7-10

KEY VERSE(S)

"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this."

- Deuteronomy 24:18

INTRO

There's an important message for believers to remember as we live daily for Christ. That message is to never forget where we have come from, the experiences we've had, and the situations God has brought us out of.

BODY

Does one have to be poor in order to receive favor from God? It may appear to be the truth, but it's not quite like that. God is always for the underdog, yes. He has commanded His followers to care for the fatherless, poor, widows and orphans. We are to disburse justice and mercy to all those in need. It's important to remember that although someone is rich in material things, does not necessarily mean they're rich in mind, body or spirit.

The poor are often given the short end of the stick. They are usually forgotten about and made to feel as though they are a burden on society. Jesus identifies with "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40), which includes the imprisoned, the sick, the downtrodden and the cast aside. Over and over in Scripture He demands from us to care for the foreigner and the stranger, and the refugee and alien. Here's what you and I must remember, we were once slaves. We were once oppressed. But now that we have been redeemed, we are to show justice and mercy to others.

PRAYER

Lord, help me to treat those who have been dealt injustices in life with the respect, love and care that you demand from us. Amen!

FOR FURTHER READING

Deuteronomy 24:17-22

WEEK 3

DAVID SMITH

KEY VERSE(S)

"Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality."

- 2 Corinthians 8:13

INTRO

God prefers justice versus injustice no matter who it is demonstrated through. It just so happens that the poor are usually at a disadvantage when it comes to justice in action.

BODY

The tears of the oppressed with no comforter displeases God. God doesn't ask for an exchange for one to be blessed while others are oppressed. He desires equality in all things. God is the ultimate source that can equally provide all people with what they need. When people hoard for themselves, distributing things to please themselves first, injustices result.

The Body of Christ has a mandate to care for the orphans, widows and the poor. We are to treat all fairly and without respect of persons.

God's preference for the poor are not merely good ideas, these are God's ideas. He brings comfort to those who are comfortless. What a shame it is when you are poor and don't have access to resources that should be available to all.

PRAYER

Father, bless our world that there will be equality so all may benefit and see their day of justice. Amen!

FOR FURTHER READING

Ecclesiastes 4:1

AUDIENCE OF INJUSTICE

WEEK 4

MARK DEERING III

KEY VERSE(S)

"Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt. Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless."

- Exodus 22:21-24 (NIV)

INTRO

The golden rule of marketing a product is to know your target audience. As we talk about doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly, it is important to stop and ask—Who's around me that needs justice?

BODY

The Bible specifies the target audience for us. All throughout the Scriptures we find that widows, children, prisoners, the sick, the disabled and ethnic minorities are to be the "target audience" for justice. Why? Because they're most vulnerable to being overlooked and taken advantage of. This is not an exhaustive list, of course.

As we look at God's strong warning to His people in Exodus 22, we see that He commands them (and us) never to "take advantage" of vulnerable people. This means that the possibility of mistreating, oppressing or taking advantage of people God loves exists anywhere you have some kind of advantage, whether it be physical, social, racial, financial, emotional, relational or spiritual.

The reality is that there are many opportunities for injustice all around you, but also that there are many opportunities to do justice and love mercy. Is there anyone who is lacking support that you can provide?

PRAYER

Father, please open my eyes to see the vulnerable around me. May I imitate your goodness to those in my life everywhere I have an opportunity. May all glory go to you. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Exodus 22:21-24

KEY VERSE(S)

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

- James 1:22 (NIV)

INTRO

Sometimes I hate looking in the mirror. I hate looking in the mirror because I know what I'm going to see and be forced to reckon with the person staring back at me.

BODY

This is often how it feels when we read God's Word...We realize God's Word is actually reading us. Followers of Jesus do not have the option to opt out of doing what the Scriptures say.

God's Word really works. As you've been discovering what Scripture teaches about justice and mercy, how has the Spirit been stirring and surprising you?

At this point in the journey through this devotional, it would be wise to do a little more self-reflection, specifically around the topic of blind spots. As we learned yesterday, there

are people all around us that are vulnerable to injustice. How many of those had we been blind to? Is it possible that you have thoughts and attitudes that are creating a blind spot in your own heart towards injustice? Today, take a moment to genuinely ask that God, through His Holy Spirit working in you, would reveal a blind spot in your thoughts and attitudes as it comes to injustice. He'll do it.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I know that you care deeply about injustice. And as much as you care about injustice, you care that I become more like you by doing what you say and not just letting go in one ear and out the other. Please "search my heart and know my anxious thoughts" (Psalm 139). Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

James 1:19-27

KEY VERSE(S)

"There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth. You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine."

- Amos 5:10-11 (NIV)

INTRO

"Many people say, 'I can't believe in God when I see all the injustice in the world.' But here is Jesus, the Son of God, who knows what it's like to be the victim of injustice, to stand up to power, to face a corrupt system and be killed for it."

- Tim Keller

BODY

Followers of Jesus in highly individualist countries like America run the risk of emphasizing personal responsibility over our collective responsibility.

Micah 6, for example, shows God's just wrath, not over personal sin but over systemic neglect and exploitation of the poor. God cares about our hearts. But He also cares about the systems that have tremendous cultural influence. Here's a small sampling of places that Scripture speaks to the importance of systemic justice:

- Employers (Isaiah 58:3, Malachi 3:5)
- Banks (Nehemiah 5:10-11)
- The welfare system (Jeremiah 5:28)
- The judicial system (Deuteronomy 16:18-20)
- Law enforcement (Romans 13:1-7)
- The Church (Acts 6:1-7)

The gospel transforms our individual hearts and also renews our cities and its systems. The institutions that shape our culture have tremendous opportunity to become headwaters from which justice and mercy flow.

PRAYER

Father, help us to see our parts in thwarting systematic injustice. Give us courage to speak up and step out even when it's unpopular. Thank you Jesus, for doing exactly that for us. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Read the passages above.

CHRISTIAN IN NAME ONLY

WEEK 5

RYAN MORRISON

KEY VERSE(S)

"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness..."

- Isaiah 58:9-10

INTRO

Isaiah 58 is a rude awakening for people who think they can be "spiritual" without doing justice and loving mercy. How can we avoid being "Christian in name only"?

BODY

The Israelite calendar was full of fasting days that were all about rest, reflection and repentance. On those days, everything shut down and the people gathered to worship. But there was a serious problem. Employers were dutifully fulfilling their fast-day obligations, but as soon as the holiday ended, managers would rush back into production, forcing their workers to make up for the time that was lost. The result was a toxic work environment where workers were exploited

for profit. Isaiah points out the problem: "your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling because your real god is your bottom line."

Authentic spirituality is always connected to justice. We cannot worship God while we neglect what Jesus called the "weightier matters" of justice and mercy. After all, He came to "proclaim good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). Authentic spirituality means breaking chains for the oppressed. Where there is wage theft, out-of-control incarceration or outrageous interest rates, Christians step in! Authentic spirituality means sharing resources with the poor. Where people are malnourished, under-clothed and displaced, Christians make room in their budgets and schedules to provide what they need.

Don't let your "spirituality" fool you! Let's become the real people of God in Christ!

PRAYER

Lord, show us where we are Christians in name only. Give us your heart for people who are oppressed, abused and discouraged. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Isaiah 58

KEY VERSE(S)

"...I will shepherd the flock with justice."

- Ezekiel. 34:6

INTRO

"It is time to cancel compromise."

- Jemar Tisby

BODY

Would it surprise you to hear that church leaders, like all leaders, don't always get justice and mercy right? Consider the following examples:

- Many church leaders quoted Bible verses to justify the slave trade and condemn interracial marriage.
- Some gas-lit victims of sexual abuse.
- Some ignored the needy in their own neighborhoods.
- Some promised blessings from God to extract money from the emotionally vulnerable.
- Some preach the gospel of a political candidate instead of the gospel of the kingdom.
- Many have remained silent out of fear of their own congregations when they should have spoken out boldly against injustice.

While we are grateful for the many godly leaders in the church, what does God think about our shepherding crisis? The prophet Ezekiel spoke out boldly against the ungodly leadership of Israel "...Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?"

God's people rise and fall with godly leaders. This is why in John 10, Jesus described himself as the "Good Shepherd" who feeds His sheep (vs.9), knows them (vs.14), guides them (vs.16), courageously fights off the wolves (vs.12) and most importantly, "lays down his life for the sheep" (vs.11). Jesus is the true leader we long for and His courageous, gentle, wise and justice leadership is what we desperately need.

PRAYER

Lord, as we follow Christ's lead, let us be Christ-like leaders at work and at home. We ask you to provide church leaders who shepherd your flock with the courage, gentleness and wisdom of the Great Shepherd.

FOR FURTHER READING

Ezekiel 34:7-10

KEY VERSE(S)

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

- Matthew 6:1-2 (NIV)

INTRO

Who doesn't love a good reward?

BODY

Everyone is part of a tribe and every tribe gives rewards.

The Academy Awards give "Oscars" to the best actors. The Michelin Guide gives "Michelin stars" to the best restaurants. The Olympic committee gives gold medals to the best athletes.

The more a person can embody their tribe's ideal behavior, the more they get rewarded. And who doesn't love a good reward?

In Jesus' day, pious Jews were celebrated when they gave to the poor. This makes sense. After all, the ideal Israelite was to be kind, compassionate and generous. But Jesus called out a serious problem—some people loved the social accolades from their tribe, more than the eternal rewards from God.

What does your tribe reward? Perhaps they reward people who think a certain way, speak a certain way or get angry about a particular sin the "other" tribe keeps repeating. Here's a key question: would you dare speak out against something your tribe is doing that is not quite right? If not, whose reward matters most to you?

Jesus wants you and I to know that The Father sees us when we do what is right and He wants us to know that His reward is enough.

PRAYER

Lord, help us be authentic doers of justice, rooting our righteousness only in your love and acceptance of us through Jesus. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Matthew 6:1-4

KEY VERSE(S)

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another."

- Romans 12:15-16 (NIV)

INTRO

"The journey toward healing begins with an awakening."

- Eric Mason

BODY

One night when I was young, our car went into a ditch during a Minnesota blizzard. I tried to sleep in the backseat as we waited for help to arrive. I woke up and told my mom in the front seat, "my feet are cold!" Understandably stressed, she told me that I'd be fine. But eventually my feet began to throb. Crying, I complained again, and my exasperated mom turned the light on to discover that my feet were submerged in freezing water because the rear of the car had landed in a creek.

My mom dismissed my complaint because she couldn't have imagined a legitimate reason for

my pain. After all, the front of the car was fine! Suffering is often sustained by ignorance.

In Christian circles, there's a tendency to gloss over cries of injustice in order to preserve unity. But we must be good listeners, actively pushing against the ignorance that could keep us from doing justice and loving mercy for our brothers and sisters.

Part of living "in harmony with one another" is to "rejoice with those who rejoice." We're to celebrate together when an injustice is corrected, even when it doesn't directly affect us.

We're also to pay attention to one another by "mourning with those who mourn." This means we listen to cries of pain, oppression and suffering, even if we can't understand them.

Are you listening to your brothers and sisters?

PRAYER

Lord, open our eyes and ears so we can live in harmony with one another. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Galatians 2:11-21

KEY VERSE(S)

“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.”

- Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)

INTRO

“Our human compassion binds us one to the other—not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.”

- Nelson Mandela

BODY

Centuries before Jesus ever walked the earth, the prophet Isaiah put words to the deep longing in Israel for someone who would “comfort all who mourn” and “provide for those who grieve” (Isaiah 61:2-3).

Their hope arose from the constant failure of Israel’s leaders to faithfully reflect the generosity,

goodness and justice of their Creator (Genesis 1:26-28).

Time and time again they continued to believe the lies of the serpent that real power must be taken, and that autonomy is better than submitting to the rule of God. We see this today as we look across a world marked by ruthlessness and injustice.

Then Jesus came to be the ultimate human, demonstrating once and for all what humanity was supposed to be all along. When Jesus stared down the serpent in the wilderness, He succeeded where every human has failed (Luke 4:14-21).

Now, He offers a new way to be human to all who would receive His forgiveness and learn to follow Him.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the hope you’ve given us. Help us to remember and hold on to that hope, which is Jesus. As we long for you to make all things new, help us point the world to you. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Luke 4:14-21

KEY VERSE(S)

*"God demonstrates his own love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

- Romans 5:7-8 (NIV)

INTRO

Before Paul was an apostle, theologian and writer, he was Saul; a fundamental extremist who abducted and murdered Christians.

BODY

In Acts 7, we learn that Saul coldly watched as a nationalist mob stoned Stephen to death. In Acts 8 and 9, we see how he dragged mothers from their homes and dumped them in prison for nothing more than the crime of following Jesus. His ruthlessness earned him a reputation as the "destroyer of the gathering."

But in Acts 9, Saul had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus that left him shaken. He became Paul, and for the rest of his life was the picture of repentance. He served those he once oppressed. He poured himself out to nurture the very people he once tried to eradicate.

We feel the force of Jesus' grace on his life when we read his letters. "We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are" (Romans 3:22, NLT).

Paul's conversion stands as a stunning example of the transformation that's possible because of the grace of God. What was true of him could have been true for Hitler, Jeffery Epstein and Osama Bin Laden. It's true for me, it can be true for you too.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you that no sinner is beyond your life-altering grace. Please wake us up to our own sin and give us the courage to pray that those who have sinned against us will meet you and be changed. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Romans 5:6-11

KEY VERSE(S)

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them...and each person was judged according to what he had done."

- Revelation 20:11, 13b

INTRO

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?

- Langston Hughes

BODY

Langston Hughes was an African American poet who wrote candidly of the joys, sorrows and struggles that faced the working, black, middle-class of America. He depicts the heaviness of a dream delayed and captures a deep sense of hopelessness that threatens to overcome a person suffering under oppression.

Oppression is overwhelming and leaves us asking, "how long will this continue?" Meanwhile, God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:8-9), which is why He offers a window of mercy—the possibility of salvation through Jesus.

God is also just. Every oppressor will one day be punished for his arrogance, pride and sin (Isaiah 13:11). The window of mercy will close and Jesus will return to judge everyone who ignored the plight of the vulnerable and God's command to do justice and love mercy. All will be judged for what they did, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10). Christ followers who experience oppression in this life can therefore rejoice in hope knowing that God promises to vindicate them.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me to rest in your perfect goodness and justice, knowing that you see my plight, you care deeply about what happens to me and you will hold my oppressor accountable for their actions against me. Vengeance belongs to you alone, Lord. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Revelations 20:11-15

THE WOUNDED HEALER

WEEK 7

MARSHA BALDWRIDGE

KEY VERSE(S)

"But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed."

- Isaiah 53:5 (NLT)

INTRO

Isaiah 53 is an "in your face" reminder of how our Lord and Savior was despised, rejected, beaten and afflicted. He suffered in silence so that our sins (past, present and future) would be covered.

BODY

Isaiah was introducing the Israelites to their long-awaited Savior who was not at all what they had dreamed about. Perhaps they imagined a handsome, well-built guy standing heads and shoulders above the rest, dressed in the finest of kingly garments.

Instead, Isaiah describes him as "nothing beautiful or majestic" (v.2). One that was despised and rejected (v.3a) rather than glorified and accepted. Because He didn't live up to their expectations, they rejected Him.

This Suffering Servant shouldered our sorrow and wore the weight of our sin, having no sin of His own. This was something the people of that day could not comprehend.

His unjust oppression guaranteed that those who bear the weight of injustice can be healed. How can that be? Because Jesus can relate to the broken hearted (Psalm 34:18). Just as Jesus related through His suffering, so can we. Because of our suffering, we can show empathy towards the oppressed of our day, which can then help with their spiritual healing (Matthew 5:3-12).

PRAYER

Lord, your Son was obedient unto death on the cross. Please help us see how your suffering helps all who suffer and are oppressed. Move us to fully embrace the "same attitude that Christ Jesus had" (Philippians 2:5-8) so we can step up and step out, rather than step back.

FOR FURTHER READING

Isaiah 53

KEY VERSE(S)

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

- Revelation 21:4

INTRO

The Book of Revelation is one of hope—hope that a day is coming when the healing of our bodies, our minds and our souls will be complete.

BODY

Revelation points us to what we can expect when God brings about true and complete justice at His second coming. In Matthew 11:28-29, Jesus, the Son of God, calls all of us who are weary and burdened to come to Him for the rest our souls crave.

There is hope for all who have experienced injustice. There is hope for the refugee who has had to flee war and been displaced from their homeland. There is hope for those who have been hurt and who are yet to see justice.

There is rest for their souls and for yours in Jesus Christ who also suffered injustice and dying on the cross, so that we could be healed.

Charles Albert Tindley, an African American pastor and composer describes how this hope strengthens us in the midst of the lingering questions that we have about the suffering and injustice we endure.

By and by, when the morning comes,
when the saints of God are gathered home,
we'll tell the story how we've overcome,
for we'll understand it better by and by

There is always hope!

PRAYER

Lord, we believe that because of Jesus, a day is coming when our bodies, minds and souls will be completely restored, when all our questions will be answered. Thank you that we have rest in Jesus Christ even as we look forward to a better day to come. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Revelation 21:3-7

KEY VERSE(S)

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

- Galatians 5:25

INTRO

Injustice is perpetuated when the church fails to humbly walk in step with God.

BODY

Change—this is something we all long for. Deep inside, we all long for transformation in our social and political systems. As the Scripture informs us, we can only see true, lasting and positive change through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Any other changes are temporary or prejudiced. God invites us to walk in step with His Spirit and to allow our hearts to be guided by His Word.

Having access to everything God offers is key to us overcoming and conquering this disease of injustice. God offers us a new heart and a new spirit. This is what it takes. Change must happen on the inside first, then work to the outside.

We demonstrate God's justice through our actions, not just through our words.

Words are encouraging, but a fancy slogan or marketable motto will not be enough. Injustice is spiritual warfare. Injustice is wickedness in high places. Injustices are principalities. Injustices are rulers of darkness (Ephesians 6:12).

PRAYER

Lord, we repent for our lack of efforts to walk humbly in step with your Spirit, and our failure to act in justice and mercy with all men. Amen!

FOR FURTHER READING

Galatians 5:15-26

WEEK 7

MARSHA BALDWRIDGE

KEY VERSE(S)

"Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, 'I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much.'"

- Luke 19:8 (NLT)

INTRO

Jesus seeks to save the lost and overlooked regardless of their position, popularity or income bracket.

BODY

Zacchaeus was a tax collector who got rich enforcing heavy tribute from his fellow Jews on behalf of the oppressive Roman occupiers. Luke recounts his unlikely encounter with Jesus.

Zacchaeus climbed a fig tree so that he could see Jesus over the heads of the onlookers as He passed by. To the great surprise of the Jewish crowd, Jesus looked up and told him He was coming over for dinner! Zacchaeus was overcome with joy as he scurried down and took Jesus to his home.

In the presence of Jesus, something changed in Zacchaeus' heart. Zacchaeus confessed his abuse of power and testified before the Lord, that he would make "it" right. Jesus accepted his confession and his plan to right his wrongs and said, "salvation had come to his home" (vv.8-9).

Jesus sees our hearts as He saw Zacchaeus' heart. With our confession of sin and the receipt of salvation, comes an obligation to do the "right thing." Also, as a result of our salvation, we "must" forgive those who have wronged us over the years. Both of these can be difficult to make happen, but Jesus can make true reconciliation a reality!

PRAYER

Lord, please help us to desire to be in your presence continually. Your presence is the only thing that can change in our hearts and reconcile us to one another. With changed hearts, the world can see you through our faith in action. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Luke 19:1-10

KEY VERSE(S)

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

- Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

INTRO

Why should the church care about diversity?

BODY

One of the most astonishing truths of the gospel is that it's for all people. The first followers of Jesus weren't a privileged few who happened to be in the right place at the right time in order to be blessed with the saving grace of God. God's love is for the entire world (John 3:16). His followers were commissioned out to the world to spread the best news ever. What's the evidence of a God who loves all people? It is a church that is filled with all people.

The Church is a garden, not a golf course. A worship gathering should not be a place where everyone looks, talks, thinks and acts the same in neatly manicured rows like grass. Our loving and creative God fills His church with people who reflect His image in a dazzling variety of ways through culture, ethnicity, gender, age and financial status. If God decided that His image is better expressed through diversity, we don't need to tiptoe around our differences. We can celebrate diversity as evidence of God's love and of His continued empowerment—the Great Commission.

PRAYER

Thank you Lord, for the richness of community. Thank you for the multi-ethnic, global movement you're empowering through your Spirit. Thank you for your love for all people! Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Matthew 28:19-20

KEY VERSE(S)

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

- James 1:27 (NIV)

INTRO

"The world does not need a definition of religion as much as it needs a demonstration."

- Martin Luther

BODY

In this Scripture, James describes religion as a sense to put faith into action. Religion is much more powerful and helpful than any statute, ritual, custom, ideology, slogan or political platform. For Christ followers, religion is an outward expression or demonstration of God's unwavering love that dwells deep within our hearts. We need to fully understand that it is His love, grace and mercy that changes our hearts. So, in turn, we show His love, grace and mercy through practical acts of love and care to

the vulnerable around us. Unconditionally, we are generous with our time and money, we feed the hungry, sponsor children, do mission work, speak up when we see injustice and step up and respond in times of crisis.

Christ followers do not love and care for the vulnerable because of a command or religious practice. We love and care for others because the gospel has transformed us so that our life becomes a living demonstration of it. Collectively, as we become more like Jesus, our church becomes a diverse community marked by justice, mercy and humble obedience to God. We become so consumed by God's grace that there is no tolerance for injustice, cruelty and inequality.

PRAYER

Father God, thank you for your unconditional love that compels me to love others the same way. I pray that my actions and my words demonstrate your love.

FOR FURTHER READING

James 1:27

KEY VERSE(S)

"When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all..."

- Galatians 2:14a

INTRO

Picture this: you're back in your high school cafeteria where you usually sit with a group of Christian friends from different churches. Normally, your shared love for Jesus brings you together around a table, but you're shocked to discover that everyone's sitting alone because of arguing and fighting.

BODY

The apostle Peter found himself in a similar situation in Galatians 2. He knew gospel better than anyone (Matthew 16:18). He knew that simple faith in Jesus meant he could come to the table with gentile Christians. But he feared being snubbed by his fellow Jews, who upheld the old ritual purity laws, laws that Jesus made obsolete.

In Galatians 2:11-21, Paul is confronting Peter over his discrimination. "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all..."

As Christians, we often forget that we're still human. It's not a matter of if our leaders will give into fear, or if the church will struggle to do right. It will happen. So, what do we do when we fail? God shows us a road to self-correction. Do we join Peter and separate out of fear, or do we join Paul and courageously call out the need for repentance and justice?

PRAYER

God, give me courage to fight for unity among your people so that this earth looks more like the kingdom of God; one that is for every nation, tribe, people and tongue.

FOR FURTHER READING

Galatians 2:11-13

KEY VERSE(S)

"In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it."

- Isaiah 2:2

INTRO

What do you long for?

BODY

The Hebrew word shalom is translated "peace." It is a common expression of greeting or farewell in the land Israel, but it's far more than that. Shalom captures the deepest longing and hopes of the human heart. God's Shalom, first expressed in the Garden of Eden, was where everything was whole, unbroken and nothing was missing. His perfect peace, love, diversity, justice and righteousness was on display both relationally and organizationally.

Sin shattered this shalom and sabotages our ability to reflect God's character toward each other. Jesus' sacrifice restores shalom in the

hearts of all who follow Him, but we still live in a broken world. We are living in the messy middle where nothing is whole and everything is broken or missing. God promises that one day His Shalom will be fully and finally restored. At the end of all things, Jesus Himself will come and reign as our good and just king. He will establish a new world order marked by justice and mercy for all people (Isaiah 60). War, corruption, injustice and oppression will disappear forever. Jesus will reign over a reconciled, multicultural people from all nations who finally live out their mission of ruling the world as perfect image-bearers of God (Revelation 21, 22).

PRAYER

Lord, you have set eternity in my heart. I cannot fathom what you have done from beginning to end. I long to see your Kingdom restored, and your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Isaiah 2:2-5



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