

JUSTICE

A Biblical view of Justice

NO JUSTICE
NO PEACE

By Alison Lublink & Andrew Benson



Part 1: What is Biblical Justice?

Read: Micah 6:8, Romans 12:9-21

Ponder:

Lately we've seen a lot of headlines in newspapers demanding justice for someone; people that have been wronged; people that have been treated unfairly; people that have been murdered. At its root, justice means being fair and reasonable. But how we each define that in any given situation can vary greatly. So what does the Bible say about justice?

The Hebrew word for justice is "mishpat." It's found over 200 times in the Old Testament. It is usually used to mean to treat people equitably. "Mishpat" is used when referring to caring for widows, orphans, immigrants, the poor - those that are vulnerable. Essentially, any group that has no power.

Throughout the countries in which BethanyKids operates, we come across a lot of people that have no power. In Uganda, Evras, a little 5 year-old boy, was struggling with complex emphysema thoracis secondary to pneumonia, which was severely affecting his left lung. He had two operations at a local hospital, but continued to suffer with poor post-operative care. His family had no power to do anything

else for him. However, BethanyKids was able to intervene and get Evras proper care at another children's hospital, and pay for his surgery. After three long months of suffering, he had finally returned to being a happy and healthy child.

We are called to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. If we can do these things, how much greater our world would be.

Discuss:

1. How do you define "justice"?
2. The groups that fell under "mishpat" in the Old Testament included widows, orphans, immigrants and the poor. What groups would fall under "mishpat" today?
3. Can you think of any news stories and/or protests recently that have called for justice? Why do you think the word "justice" is being used?
4. How can you start to be more just in your everyday life?

Pray: God of Justice, give me a heart that is tender to those who are vulnerable. Allow me to speak up for those who have no voice, and to champion the causes of those that experience injustice. Do not allow me to become complacent in my faith.

Do: This week as you listen to the news, be aware of the stories that feel unjust. Consider why these injustices are happening. Is there something you can do? Think about looking for a way to participate in "mishpat" locally.



Part 2: Justice as a Reflection of God's Character

Read: Psalm 68:4-5, Matthew 11:1-6

Ponder:

What influence does the character of God have on your daily life? There are moments in our lives when suffering, injustice, or even despair, seem as though it will forever be part of our lives. When particular issues or illness have been part of our lives for so long, we can find ourselves eventually settling into a reality that this is how it is, thinking, *I have to learn to live with this and move forward*. And to be fair, there is something special about arriving at such a place. Anytime we share the road with Jesus, there can often really be no wrong turns.

Hope can sometimes be quickly followed by doubt. When the possibility of our situation changing for the better arises after we've settled into *this is my forever*, we can ask ourselves questions like, *Is this for real? Could this be happening?* Stepping into hope requires us to walk directly into our fear.

When we read scripture like in Psalm 68, it seems believable for everyone else but ourselves. Doubts and fears can cause

us to keep to ourselves and not reach out. We sometimes would rather not know for sure than to explore and be wrong. Faith requires us to put our trust in God into action, regardless of the outcome.

Kansiime Ruth's last child was born with anal rectal malformation (ARM). Her husband abandoned her and their children because of the condition as he perceived this as a curse upon the mother. She had to carry-on as a single mother bearing all the insults and stigma from the community, including her own family members.

Despite having a small scale business, the financial burden of having the necessary surgeries for her child was too heavy. With the assistance of *BethanyKids*, the surgery was made possible and was a success. Ruth no longer has to suffer stigma from the community because her child's condition was corrected.

God takes up the cause of the vulnerable. We should care about others because God cares about them. Psalm 68:4-5 describes God as "Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows." As Christians, it can sometimes be challenging to know what to do when faced with suffering. Questions lead to more problems, and the more we know, the more we know we *don't* know. Perhaps the right starting place is for us to understand the character of God; who he is. After all, God is love.

Discuss:

1. How would you describe God? Why do you describe him that way?
2. What immediately comes to mind when you hear the words "father of the fatherless"?
3. What are some ways others have encouraged you to overcome doubts and fears in your life?

4. As Christians, we often pray for those we care about. Are there ways we can already be an answer to those prayers?

Pray: God, teach us how to care for those around us. Reveal to us how you are already at work among us, taking up the cause of the vulnerable. Help us, Lord, to examine our hearts and be more like you. Help us let go of what would keep us to ourselves and instead give us a willing heart to be kind and patient.

Do: Try to see the world around you from a different point of view this week. Maybe that means taking a different route home or stopping by a local shop or park that you haven't been to. Or perhaps sit with someone you don't know well and listen to their stories. Hopefully, more each day, we can see the world as God does.



Part 3: Justice Means Mourning with Those who Mourn

Read: Jeremiah 6:26, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Ponder:

Phionah, a nine-year-old Ugandan child, was born with anal rectal malformation. Her father abandoned her family when she was only five years old. He could no longer cope with the stigma of the community because of her condition. The father left them in their home without notice and had never returned.

Eventually, through the help of a local church, Phionah made the long journey from her home to a hospital where she could have the surgery she needed. Still, her mother could not afford basic needs for herself and her two children. They heard about *BethanyKids* through a radio announcement. Phionah was able to be cared for by *BethanyKids*, which provided meals and other basic needs for the family during their hospital stay and transport to their home.

The use of sackcloth and ashes is seen in numerous places throughout the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and often represented a public sign of mourning or repentance and humility before God. Sackcloth and ashes were viewed as an outward sign of one's inward condition. It is symbolic of a change of heart and the sincerity of one's mourning and/or repentance. Of course, it can be easy for us to have the appearance of compassion without actually being compassionate. God knows our hearts. To be compassionate over knowing how to do a compassionate act brings about a sense of togetherness in suffering, as if we lost something of incredible significance ourselves. This is a very intimate sharing. It is one thing to join with others in their grief; it is a whole other thing to allow someone to enter into your suffering in this way.

There is a deep sense of community that takes place when we allow suffering to be shared. It requires vulnerability, trust, and a willingness to seek authenticity. Sharing in our suffering means that we are accepting God as the ultimate comforter. Our encouragement and comfort come from God. We experience his Grace together and invite God to heal us. This serves as a reminder that as followers of Jesus, we are a community of believers. Phionah's local church, along with the *BethanyKids* staff in Uganda came together to mourn with her and take care of her.

When we think of community, gathering together, often what immediately comes to mind is celebrations, good times, positive atmosphere. There is a genuine and open invitation to participate in their lives in a lighthearted fashion for many people. During our darker days, we feel less willing to expose our weaknesses, our hurts, the reality that we don't know what to do. This is where sharing our dreams and our doubts take an equal place in our lives as a community of God.

Discuss:

1. Allowing people to mourn with you can open yourself up to many emotions, fears, anxiety. What hesitations do you have about this level of vulnerability and intimacy?
2. In what ways do you see Jesus modeling this behavior in terms of mourning with those who mourn?
3. What is your perception of mourning and suffering in the culture around you? In what ways do people experience the process of mourning? Or do you feel people avoid it?
4. Can you share a story of mourning from your own life experience? What was helpful at that time? Unhelpful?

Pray: God, give us the courage to open our hearts to those around us. Please give us the strength to embrace the season of mourning when it comes upon us. Grant us wisdom to listen to those who are mourning. Guide us in the ways of your love. Amen.

Do: The next time you hear that someone is mourning over something (big or small!), offer to go for a walk with them, or drop off a meal, or run errands for them. Sometimes we just need people to come alongside us.



Part 4: Justice Requires Relational Equity

Read: Isaiah 1:17, Matthew 7:12

Ponder:

It can be very difficult to be equitable to all people, all the time. As humans we can let our own biases get in the way of what is equitable. We live in a world where we teach children to have a favourite colour or favourite food or favourite friend; we are pushed to choose one thing over all the rest all the time. But why? What purpose does this serve except to be more critical of everything and everyone.

As a reminder, equitable is not the same as being equal. Being equal means that everything or everyone is treated the same; being equitable means everyone is treated fairly.

In Hebrew, the word "tzadeqah" is used to convey "righteousness" or "charity." It usually translates to "being just" or "being righteous." It refers specifically to relationships; and not just romantic ones, but the types of relationships we have every day. We are being called to act righteous - just, fair - in how we conduct each of our relationships.

The age-old saying "do unto others as you'd have them do unto you" is taken from Matthew 7, one of our passages from today. It's something we admonish children with, but we don't often think of it as a command from Jesus.

Nasufa is a nurse that is currently working on the pediatric surgery ward in Uganda. She has a young boy who was sick at one point, and admitted to a local hospital. But while he was in the hospital he was not well cared for. As would any mother, Nasufa was angered. But as a nurse she decided she could treat the boy herself.

Ironically, Nasufa discovered that one of the health workers who had not cared well for her son had also been admitted to the hospital where she was working. While she could've given him the same lack of treatment, she did the very opposite. She attended to this person with kindness. He apologized to her for being rude and failing to properly treat her son.

From that day on Nasufa made up her mind to give the best care she could to all the children she comes across. She always does as much as she can to alleviate the pain that children go through. This gives her the hope that her care can provoke others to do the same to others.

Nasufa knows what it means to treat everyone equitably, and she lives it out in her own life. This is true justice. In fact, she was awarded the best nurse of the year 2019 - and for good reason.

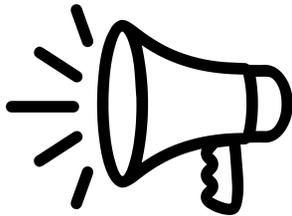
Discuss:

1. Let's pretend you've got a classroom of students. Each student receives 2 brand new pencils. This is equality. But, in the same classroom you have a student that is unable to use pencils because they have a broken hand. So, it is equal to give them the pencils, but it's not equitable (fair, just). What would be an equitable alternative in this situation?
2. What are some opinions/beliefs that you hold strongly to that you think there is a right or wrong answer/action for (religion, politics, economics, etc.)? Now, pretend you are someone who believes the exact opposite. What would it be like to be someone who receives your opinion? How might that hurt someone? How can you do better at being equitable despite your beliefs?
3. Now, take one of those beliefs that you hold strongly to, and research the opposing opinion. This isn't meant to convince you of the other side, but rather to help you understand it. Take note of something that you can take away from your research to help you better react/respond equitably to people that are different from you.
4. Take a moment to look through the contacts, text and call history on your phone. Who have you communicated with recently? How about your social media outlets - who are you following? Be intentional about connecting with people who are different from you.

Pray: Holy God, you are righteous and you are fair. Guide me this week to be more equitable to all I encounter. Allow my words, actions and thoughts to be unbiased, unprejudiced. And where I falter, allow me to humbly commit to try again and again.

Do: Take time to give voice to those who have not been heard. Commit to work behind-the-scenes to support people

who are marginalized. Donate money or time, quote their works if you are writing, promote their ideas, etc.



Part 5: Justice Needs Advocates

Read: Proverbs 31:8-9, Luke 10:30-37

Ponder:

The story of the good Samaritan is a famous Christian story. It is even known by many who would not consider themselves a Christian. What has often struck me about this story in the gospel, according to Luke, is how the Samaritan helped with what he had available. Helping others and daring to share what we have for the sake of doing the right thing changes how we view what is ours to keep for ourselves. This is a kingdom mindset we adopt as followers of the Jesus way. We all receive a calling to care for others, respond to those in need, and put love into action.

Many injustices result from deep-rooted, layered, complex social structures. Consequently, there is often the need for a complex and holistic response to address the needs of those facing injustice, suffering, and unkind situations in life. Something that can hold people back is the over-professionalization of helping people. To be fair, there is

a need for professional assistance, education, and advocacy for systemic change. What about our individual and collective ability to advocate and take action against injustice? Is there a need to change hearts as much as there is to change laws and policies?

We can find a wellspring of encouragement in knowing that we can do something about injustice. Is it possible that the burdens of our heart, the things we see around us that are wrong, are hints of what the Holy Spirit might empower and equip us to make right? At the very least, play a small role in bringing about justice?

Melody is a 16-year-old Ugandan girl who developed large masses in her chest. She was stigmatized at school because of this and experienced a lot of pain, and had difficulties sleeping. This condition continued progressing for two years. She started withdrawing from her peers, and her performance at school started deteriorating. Her parents took her to several hospitals, and most surgeons could not handle the case.

The family was desperate for help and reached out to television and radio stations to find help for Melody. Upon hearing of the news about this family's situation, a couple took up the issue themselves to advocate for help on Melody's behalf. This is when they found Dr. Situma who works with *BethanyKids* in Uganda. This couple has been there for her, providing support to Melody and her family after the surgery. This story is one of many great examples we have heard that show us how we can step into a situation and do what we can to be advocates, with what we have, no matter how little or how much. Some would call this being the "hands and feet of Jesus" in our world.

Discuss:

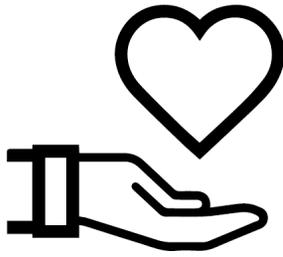
1. The Bible doesn't tell us anything about the people where the Samaritan man brought the injured stranger.

What do you think this would have meant to them to see such generosity and compassion? Even to say he would return?

2. Have you ever felt overwhelmed and unequipped to respond to a desperate situation? How does this story from Luke encourage you?
3. Can you think of any injustices in your community that your church can respond to? What would that look like?
4. It can be easy to look negatively at the people in this story that walked by without helping. If we are honest, likely, we have all done this at some point in our lives. What are some ways to repent and overcome the guilt and shame that can sometimes rise inside us?

Pray: God leads us in the ways of love. We acknowledge that sometimes we don't know what to do or feel like we aren't good enough to help. Please give us your confidence. Open our mouths for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Give us the wisdom to judge righteously and defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Do: Research the different groups or organizations in your area that are helping people. Find out how you can get involved or share with others what is happening in your neighbourhood. Many times, people genuinely want to help but don't know where to begin. The first step can sometimes be the biggest challenge.



Part 6: Justice Includes Generosity

Read: Proverbs 21:3, Matthew 6:1-2

Ponder:

When you think of generosity, what comes to mind? For me, it seems to evoke a sense of giving more than is required. Usually we focus on being generous at Christmas, or when we see that someone has gone through a hard time. Usually our generosity comes in the form of money or things. This isn't bad. In fact, it's incredibly helpful; however, it's not the totality of being generous.

In our passage from Matthew, gifts to the poor are referred to as "acts of righteousness." With this in mind, if we don't give of our resources, we're not just being stingy, we're being

unrighteous. In fact, in the book of Job, when people don't help others, it's considered sin. Radical generosity is one of the main hallmarks of living justly. It's a pretty intense thought. Are we being righteous in our generosity?

In Uganda, BethanyKids is blessed to have Laura Ajdiru as both a physiotherapist and chaplain. Laura lost her parents at a young age. She was raised by her growing siblings, who hardly knew anything about parenting and bringing up children. They tried their best, but as a result of their inexperience, Laura grew up without being given as much attention as she required, having no one to tend to her emotional needs in life. This caused her to have episodes of depression during her school days because she didn't have a shoulder to cry on.

Later on, at University, Laura met a family who gave her more attention than she had ever known and also introduced her to Jesus Christ. Having a personal relationship with the Lord changed her life. She now knows the difference it makes to give time to others, generously withholding nothing. Working with BethanyKids has enabled her to fulfill her desire of giving people time to attend to their emotional needs and to have a positive effect on their lives.

So as you go about your daily routines, are you giving generously of your life? Are you being righteously generous with your time?

Discuss:

1. What are some ways that generosity can have a positive impact on others?
2. What is one consistent "frivolous" expense that you prioritize in your life? For example, coffee at Starbucks, or take-out on weekends. How could you take that and turn it into something more generous as opposed to self-serving?

3. Who are some people in your life that come to mind as soon as you think of "living generously"? Maybe it's someone that donates a ton of time to others; maybe it's someone that is fundraising for important causes; maybe it's someone that is unfailingly kind in all situations. Make a list of what makes them generous and try to see how you can learn from their generosity by applying it to your own life.
4. Think about the life of Jesus (you might want to flip through the gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - in the bible). How was he generous? See how many examples you can list. Do you notice any patterns? Is there a specific takeaway you could glean from looking at his life?

Pray: God you are good and generous in all things. I am grateful for the way you generously provide for me, even when I struggle to see it. Please help me to have a generous heart that overflows into my life so that my generosity might reflect your justice and righteousness.

Do: Make a list of all the things you are grateful for. Now look at that list and consider how you can share that gratitude generously with others. For example, if you are grateful for all the food in your kitchen, perhaps make meals for those who have less. If you're grateful that you have a healthy body, perhaps you can help a neighbour with something physically demanding.

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