

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## Bible Themes 7: Freedom and Justice.



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: This session is one of several on great themes that run through the Bible. In the book 'The Drama of Scripture' the authors write this: "Imagine that the Bible, with its 66 books, written by dozens of human authors over the course of more than 1000 years, is a grand cathedral with many rooms and levels and a variety of entrances....You can, for example, enter the Bible through one of the gospels....If you want to gather a sense of the cathedral as a whole, you face an important question: where is the main entrance, the place from which you can orient yourself to the whole? The cathedral of the Bible has many themes." By looking at its themes we can begin to get a sense of how to "enter" the Bible.

### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Why do you think being free and living justly go together for disciples?



### Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

The rescue of the Exodus is a **repeated theme** of the Bible. There are at least 24 references to it in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Exodus helped the people of Israel understand who God called them to be and the Passover meal was the way God enabled them to pass on that identity. Various symbols and foods are used to tell the story.



For Christians, both the Exodus and the Passover meal help us to understand the **eternal freedom** more fully which we have in Christ. Jesus talks about his "exodus" to Moses and Elijah in Luke 9, referring to his death and resurrection. He is called the "greater Moses" (|Hebrews 3). Early Christians understood that while the people of Israel were rescued from human oppression, in Christ God had freed people from **deeper kinds of slavery** – freedom from sin, from the fact that they could not keep God's law in their own strength, and the forces of death and evil.

This was most powerfully demonstrated at the last (Passover) supper, when Jesus took the broken bread and drank the wine. Early Christians saw this as Jesus saying, “The bread which reminded you of slavery in Egypt, is now my body. Before, when you drank the cup, it reminded you of your delivery from Egyptian bondage. Now it will remind you of your delivery from the bondage of sin and death. Do this in remembrance of Egypt but also now in remembrance of me.”

Paul, who has been called the “apostle of freedom”, unpacks how in Christ (though Christians still experience some of the “slavery of sin”) the issue has been settled for good through the cross – sin, death and evil have been ultimately defeated. It is through Christ that the freedom that was originally intended for us can be restored. “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36)

Through His Spirit Christians now have genuine freedom to choose a new way of life: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (2 Corinthians 3:17) In the same way that Jewish people are called to remember their freedom through the Passover, and live into that identity, our continuing remembering of the Last Supper through Holy Communion or Mass can shape us as free people.

In order to **experience** their new freedom, God gave His people the sabbath. (Exodus 20: 8-11). It is the longest of the ten commandments, and as one writer puts it, is a rejection of slavery, then and now:

“There had been no Sabbath in Egypt, no work stoppage; no work stoppage for Pharaoh who worked day and night to stay atop the pyramid. There had been no work stoppage for the slaves, because they had to gather straw during their time off; no work stoppage of anybody in the Egyptian system, because frantic productivity drove the entire system. And now (God) nullifies that entire system of anxious production.

There are (now) limits to how much and how long slaves must produce bricks! The limit is set by the weekly work pause that breaks the production cycle. And those who participate in it break the anxiety cycle. They are invited to awareness that life does not consist in frantic production and consumption that reduces everyone else to threat and competitor....You are in the image of the creator God who did not need to work to get ahead. Nor do you!” (Walter Brueggemann)

## Freedom and Justice

While contemporary culture may tend to understand freedom as the right to be who we want to be (expressive individualism) the story of the Bible offers a different vision. For the Jewish people escaping from Egypt, the rescue was both **from** something, but also **for** something – the freedom to be God’s people in God’s land. As ‘The Drama of Scripture’ unpacks, this was so they could continue to be a blessing to the nations,

“Israel is to be a display people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people. As the Israelites obey God, **they will demonstrate what life under God’s reign looks like.** The nations will be able to catch a glimpse of God’s plan for all peoples....It is to be such a full and rich human life that the nations of the Earth will be drawn to it.”

There is a constant theme in the Bible that we respond to freedom by putting God's life on display. In order to do this, as "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation", set apart for God's purposes, Israel was not only given instructions for worship, but they were also given laws in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, through which this life might be demonstrated.

Importantly, the laws were given **after** God had re-established His covenant with His people at Mount Sinai. In other words, they were to obey them in response to God's love for them, and not to earn it. These laws:

Placed a value on human life and dignity. Some of the laws of that time valued property above people – making the punishment for stealing greater than that for murder. Israel's law always places the value of people above that of property believing that only people, of all God's creations, have been made in His own image.

Placed a value on the land and on every area of life. As the people of Israel move into the Promised Land Joshua describes it as a "good land" (Joshua 23:15) – a place like a second Eden, which the people cannot exploit. The detailed laws they are given show how to manage the land properly but also show how concerned God is for every area of life.

Placed justice at the heart of God's people. The belief that all are made in God's image results in peace or "shalom" for everybody, and everything.

Seeking justice for all was to be a defining feature of God's people, which set them apart. Because they had received God's freedom, the only reasonable response was to seek justice for other people made in God's image – to love their neighbour as they loved themselves.

Discuss: How can we both remember and experience the freedom God wants to give us?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Amos 5 which describes God's heart for justice.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does this passage teach me about people?

How does this passage call me to obey God?

What might I do in response to this this week?

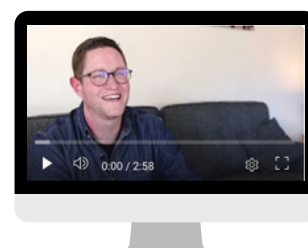


## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/an372k4oQJg>

What struck you as important in the video?



# Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

As the Bible Project points out, the kind of justice God's people live by "...is a unique Jewish-Christian contribution to the history of human civilization. For contrast, the entire Greek-Roman political system was built on the concept that all humans were not created equal. Aristotle argued that only rational humans (which did not include slaves) were equal. Therefore slavery was deemed just and right."

The Bible often uses the words justice and righteousness interchangeably, because the two help create each other. If, for example, people live in right relationship with the land, they will not exploit it in an unjust way.

This is captured in the Hebrew word for justice (mishpat) which can refer to two things. The first is dealing with what has gone wrong with just punishment (retributive justice). But the second is a much more active meaning – working to restore what has been broken (restorative justice).

This second meaning is the most common – God's people are called to speak up for those who have no voice and rescue the disadvantaged. "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." (Isaiah 1:17)

In the Old Testament there are two main things that distinguish God's people: being a worshipping community and being a community of justice for all – even the outsider. "Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you." (Deuteronomy 16:20)

As the story progresses, it is clear that the main mark of God's people was to be concern for justice for four particular vulnerable groups (the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor), more than religious worship. "Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5: 23-24)

Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and the goats to illustrate God's heart for the oppressed. (Matthew 25:31-46). He points out the hypocrisy of those who continue their religious duties but use them to cheat the poor (Mark 7:1-10). He tells another parable to promise, "...will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly." (Luke 18:7-8)

Ultimately Christ lived with righteousness and justice but died on behalf of the guilty. Through Him, God's people are declared righteous before God not because of anything they've done, but because of what Jesus did for them. The Christian response to this righteousness God gives us in Christ is to continue this story seeking a world in which we are compelled and given power to act on behalf of those who are oppressed.

Discuss: What might compel us to seek justice?

## Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

Lord of all life,  
help us to work together for that day  
when your kingdom comes  
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.  
Look with favour on your people,  
gather us in your loving arms  
and bring us with all the saints  
to feast at your table in heaven.  
Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.



From Eucharistic Prayer E.





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### Additional notes:

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