

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## Seeking justice in a Christlike way



### 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



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

Why is justice so important in God's mission?



### Understanding the information (20 minutes)

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

The fourth mark of mission frames this as, "To seek to transform unjust structures of society...to challenge violence of every kind...and to pursue peace and reconciliation."

In the Old Testament first people are given the task of protecting and developing God's world. The people of Israel are called to be a blessing to the nations. They are to pursue two things - righteousness and justice. A world which looks like this results in peace or "shalom" for everybody, and everything. Shalom is more than the absence of conflict – it is a word that speaks of complete wholeness.

God's heart is for justice. Through Amos He tells His people, "Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your instruments! But let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5.23-24). Seeking justice for all was to be a defining feature of God's people, which set them apart.

Because they had received God's righteousness, the only reasonable response was to seek justice for other people – to love their neighbour as they loved themselves. "With what shall I come before the Lord? He has shown you, oh people, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:6,8).



When there is righteousness, people are in right relationships with God, each other, and the world.

When there is justice, as the statue on top of the Old Bailey shows, there is impartial fairness (shown by the blindfold), truth (shown by the scales), and order in which everyone is protected (shown by the sword).

Things are tied together well (the root meaning of the word). People and things can get what they deserve.

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.

Or the more politicians treat people in an economically just way, ensuring they get what they deserve financially, the more relationships in society are put right.

Justice is more than charity. As disciples we may well be used to supporting charities to help those in need or to care for the earth. But this story illustrates the difference between acting with charity (or mercy) and ensuring there is justice.

A village was overtaken by enemy forces. All the warriors who inhabited the village were gathered together and imprisoned by the conquerors.

Amidst the villagers were four philanthropists who became aware of the prison conditions that their compatriots were enduring. The first philanthropist went to the prison and said to the captors, "I understand that my brothers are without clean water. I want to take all my riches, and use them to purify the water, so that my brothers will have clean water, that they will not get sick." The captors agreed and granted the man this right. He walked away, glad that he had been able to show this act of charity for his brothers.

The second philanthropist went to the prison, and approached the captors, saying "I understand my brothers are sleeping on rocks. I want to take all my riches, and provide bedding for the men, so they may rest comfortably in prison." The captors agreed, and the man left, feeling that he had fulfilled his purpose in aiding his brothers' plight.

The third philanthropist went to the prison, and spoke to the captors, saying "I have heard that my brothers have no food. They have only bread and water. I have a large farm and want to harvest all my crops to see that the men have good food to eat while they are in prison." The captors agreed, and the philanthropist left, knowing he had done much good in helping his brothers in prison.

The fourth philanthropist though heartened by the acts of the other three, was disturbed that his brothers remained unfairly imprisoned. So he found the keys to the prison, and one night, he slipped into the prison and freed all his brothers from their captivity.

The four philanthropists show us the difference between mercy and justice. The first three engaged in acts of mercy. They certainly came to the aid of their brothers and made their difficult circumstances more comfortable, but they did nothing to change the unjust situation.

The fourth philanthropist acted to change the unjust situation, not just the circumstances. He acted to pursue justice and not simply mercy.

Discuss: Are you more drawn to justice or charity, to right relationships or right order? Why?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Nehemiah 5: 1-12 in which Nehemiah establishes God's shalom in the community.

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/bg9swHD4wXA>  
What struck you as important in the video?



## Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

Structures and institutions. While I can live justly and in right relationship with my neighbour on a day-to-day basis, the fourth mark addresses “unjust structures of society”. The calling on God’s people was wider than individual justice, and their own community. God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah saying, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29.7).

There is a sense in which justice and peace for some can only be found when there is justice for all. Failure to seek justice in the wider structures or policies of society can also have catastrophic results.

As complex as some of the bigger issues of our day can be, the more we are able to engage in seeking justice at a structural level through campaigning or political involvement the more likely we will be able to influence change which reflects God’s kingdom.

# Optional further material and questions

Good anger. The fourth mark calls us to challenge all forms of violence. Jesus called disciples to be peacemakers and lived non-violently, meeting violence not with further violence but by absorbing it into Himself – most obviously on the cross.

In the Beatitudes which describe the heart of a disciple, when Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9) the phrase combines the manner in which we seek peace as well as what we do. A good translation might be, “Blessed are those who seek peace in a peaceful way.”

Nevertheless, genuine change can be fuelled by the right kind of anger. St Augustine even argued that it is necessary. “Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.”

Jesus famously demonstrated this “righteous anger” by turning over the tables in the temple. He was acting out a “parable” about God’s judgment on the way people used religious rituals to exploit others. He echoed God’s anger at injustice which is frequently expressed through the prophets.

Peace and justice making, as well as keeping. Edmund Burke famously said, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing.” Peace and justice require initiative.

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)

actively seeking justice and peace is not just about putting what is wrong right, but often about establishing new ways of living and working.

Robert Lavelle was an estate agent who wanted to help his customers to secure mortgages, so he took over a Pittsburgh bank in 1957. It had assets of \$67,000. Lavelle was determined to lend money in a Christian way. He wanted the bank to be a blessing to the poorest people in the neighbourhood. To start with, he refused to join in with common banking practices of lending money to people who are ‘high risk’ at the lowest practical rate of interest, to draw them in to a commitment they may easily fail to keep.

The mission of his merciful bank is to approach people respectfully and through warm encouragement and patient financial counselling, to help them become good risks. Lavelle’s mission is to help poor and needy people to own their own homes, believing that this will change whole neighbourhoods.

## Optional further material and questions

Since its inception the bank has seen its working capital increase from \$67,000 in 1957 to almost \$21 million in 2004. Curiously he started this unusual bank many years before he became a Christian. He says that he only really became a Christian at the age of 47. As well as refusing to privatise his faith, Lavelle challenged unjust structures by establishing ones which reflected the shalom of God's kingdom.

Discuss: What might peace making look like where you are?

### 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)

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of your world as your love would have it:  
a world where the weak are protected,  
and none go hungry or poor;  
a world where the riches of creation are shared,  
and everyone can enjoy them;  
a world where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect;  
a world where peace is built with justice,  
and justice is guided by love.  
Give us the inspiration and courage to build it,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.





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## Additional notes

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