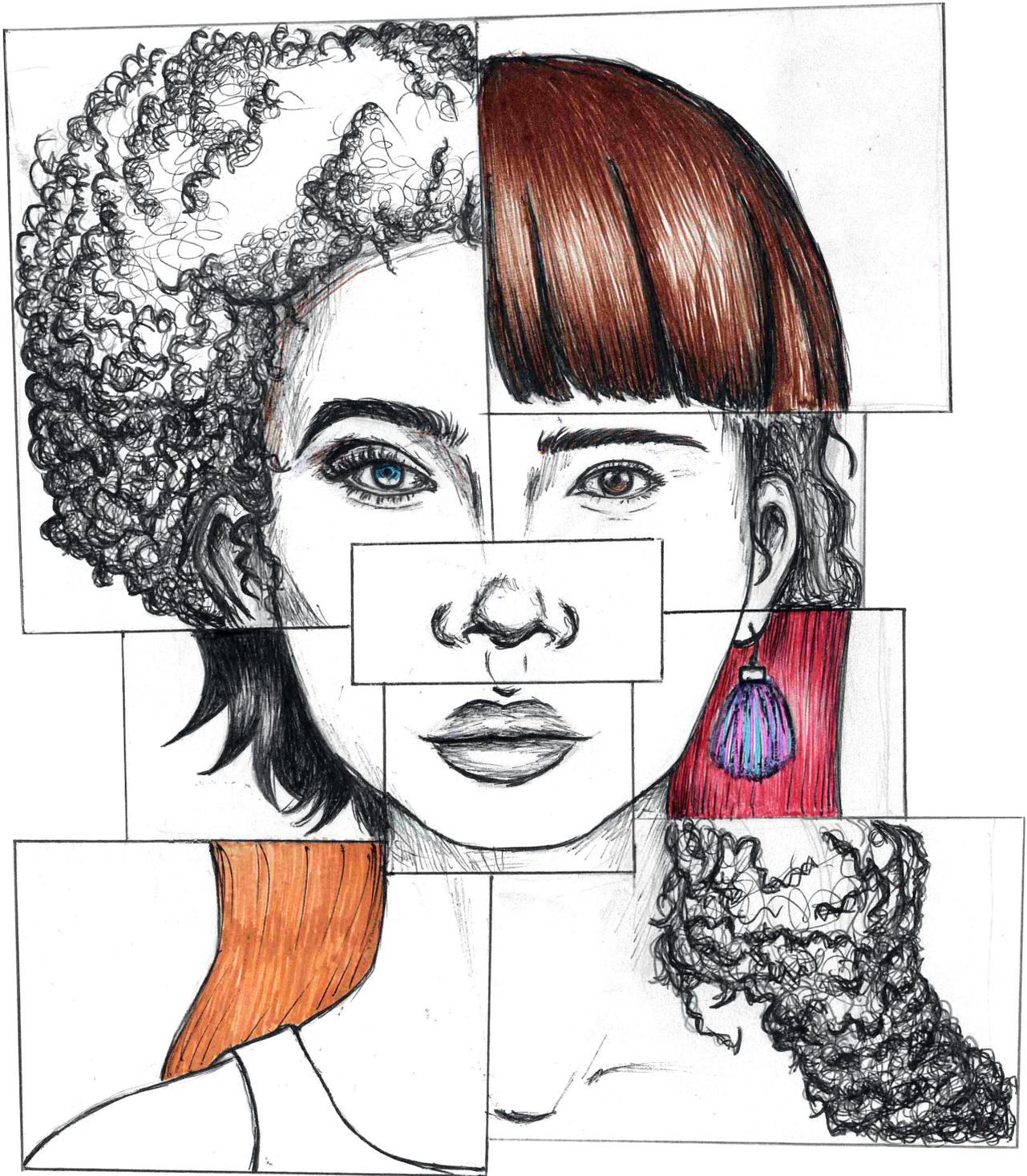


Let Justice Roll

IHQ WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDIES



Let Justice Roll

IHQ WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDIES



INTRODUCTION

DEAR SISTERS IN CHRIST,

I am super excited to be able to present to you our second in five International Women's Bible study series that I am anticipating will inspire, encourage, motivate and convict us to be women of action. I strongly believe that God is calling women of faith to rise up in courage, to address the reality of the traumatic challenges and concerns facing women and girls today in every part of our world. We must do more than talk about the issues! We must courageously voice them, understand their devastating impact, and then become an active participant in the fight to eradicate them.

In General Brian Peddle's Call to Mission to the international Salvation Army, Salvationists are urged to 'Take Responsibility' which includes a 'Call to Costly Compassion'. He writes:

'We must defend others, seek justice, express generosity and participate in redemptive actions.'

It is in response to this challenge that this Bible study series, 'Let Justice Roll' (Amos 5:24) has been developed. This is a great resource for women and girls of all ages to gain a deeper understanding of what the Bible declares about social justice, the unjust realities of our fallen world and Jesus' invitation to join him as a disciple of justice.

'Let Justice Roll' is a collection of 24 Bible studies developed by 24 women from different parts of the global Salvation Army. These women are passionate about social justice, and their writings will inspire and challenge you to clearly see the world through the eyes of Jesus, feel his passion and heartbeat for justice and then boldly imitate his actions in addressing the injustices that surround us today.

The world is filled with hostility, racism, extreme poverty, interreligious conflicts, economic inequality, sexual and domestic abuses, and spiritual emptiness. It is time to embrace a deeper understanding of biblical justice so that we can reflect Christ's compassion, character and conviction as we live out his teachings in a globalised, interconnected, yet often impersonal world. It is time for us to join the fight and be the voice for those whose voices have been silenced by injustice.

We will do our best work for the world's most vulnerable people when we tackle the unjust systems that keep them in poverty and bondage. Jesus continually calls us, his disciples, to be defenders and advocates for justice in our world. How are we responding to his call?

These Bible studies are not intended to be exclusive to women's ministries groups. They have been designed to be utilised in groups of all ages, cultures, nationalities, languages and genders. You may decide to use these Bible studies for your personal devotions, but however creatively you choose to use them, we are praying that God will bless and use this tool in ways far greater than we could ever dream or imagine.

My urgent prayer is that we will 'wake up' to God's call upon our lives to move beyond simply perceiving injustice to fighting and defeating it! God help us all, and may he powerfully bless and use these Bible studies for his honour and his glory!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosalie Peddle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Commissioner Rosalie Peddle
World President of Women's Ministries

THE TRUE SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK

EZEKIEL 34:1-16

ANNE MAKUMI

'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?"' (Ezekiel 34:2).

A shepherd is simply defined as a person who tends and rears sheep, but who do we consider to be a shepherd in our country, our church, our family or our community setting?

This shepherd is a person who protects, guides and watches over people under their authority with the same keenness as they would with a flock of sheep. In society, the shepherds are those who are in authority or power; the rulers, leaders from the highest of levels to the lowest of levels.

They guide their 'flock'; their citizens, church congregants, members of their community and family. They always have the best interests of their flock at heart.

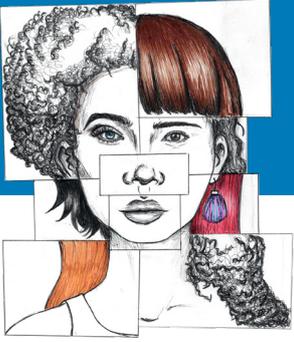
The shepherd is expected to guide and rule in order for the flock to flourish by establishing justice, as it is said in Ezekiel 34:16, 'I will shepherd the flock with justice'.

In Ezekiel 34:10, the Lord declares the shepherds of Israel as his enemies, for they only took care of themselves and did not tend their sheep that were entrusted to them by the Lord. Additionally, the rulers were selfish and greedy, clothing themselves with wool of choice animals and feeding themselves with milk and meat from the finest sheep, but still not tending to the sheep. Verse four singles out the injustices against the flock by their shepherds: 'You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.'

Consequently, we can see that the shepherd's neglect in their ruling does not lead to flourishing of the flock. Instead, the sheep wander on the mountains and high hills with no one to search for them and they are scattered all over and become vulnerable to the wild beasts who eat them – of course a big danger for the flock! The shepherds are also seen to have failed to follow the Mosaic Law of being open-handed to the poor in the land and attending to their welfare (Deuteronomy 15:7-11).

Social injustices such as modern slavery and human trafficking are ever so present in our world today and affect many. Although the full scope of the problem goes undetected due to its nature of being hidden in plain sight. This invisible slave trade of women scattered all over the world, trapped in sex trafficking and forced labour, are part of a flock who have been led astray by unjust shepherds. We also see this injustice in the increasing statistics of women who are sexually assaulted or harassed. In recent popular culture, we have witnessed the 'Me Too' movement. This movement exposed, and continues to expose, the sexual abuse committed by powerful men. In Hollywood, many female professionals in the film industry brought allegations against Harvey Weinstein. The abuse of authority and power seen in the Me Too movement is another example of the actions of modern-day unjust shepherds.

'THE FULL SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM GOES UNDETECTED DUE TO ITS NATURE OF BEING HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT.'



DISCUSS:

- * In which areas of your life are you entrusted as a shepherd for God's flock?
- * Is your flock flourishing in every area of their life under your authority and guidance?
- * Identify social injustices that exist in the lives of your flock that you would want to correct.

THE TRUE SHEPHERD

The True Shepherd is God and all other shepherds are under his authority. Although he had initially entrusted the shepherds of Israel to tend his people, he declares that he will now shepherd his own people, as the shepherds of Israel had let him down.

We see here that oppression and injustices towards God's flock brings disunity within the community. When the Lord takes back the responsibility of shepherding his flock, he promises to regather his flock from where they are scattered and guide them on to the Promised Land.

God reverses and corrects all the injustices that had been inflicted on the flock ('but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice' v 16). God shepherds from a point of view of justice and sets us a perfect example. As his flock, and as earthly shepherds for his flock, we must ensure that justice flows through us. We can be the vessels of change through which justice will roll. For instance, we can offer fair wages or act as our communities' keepers through evangelical work. We can raise awareness on social injustices, speaking up on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves. We can use our awareness to educate others and utilise safe reporting channels.



Lord, make me your instrument through which justice can flow to the flock you have entrusted me with.

ANNE MAKUMI

KENYA EAST TERRITORY

Anne is the Anti-Human Trafficking Project Manager at The Salvation Army Kenya East Territory. She was also a member of The Salvation Army's International Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force that was set up to encourage and resource a greater response in order to combat human trafficking. She holds a master's degree in Science from the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and has immense cross-cultural experience of working both for the government and non-governmental organisations in areas of human interest and health research.



LOVE EXPRESSED IN DEEDS

ROMANS 12:9-21

MAJOR ANUGRAH M. MASIH

'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good' (Romans 12:21).

How can justice roll when people are full of hatred; when women and girls are sexually abused, assaulted, raped and murdered; when people are starving; when there is unequal distribution of economic resources and political powers; when nations are arming themselves with nuclear powers and weapons?

Romans 12:9-21 provides a practical way of living a right and just life: 'Overcome evil with good' (v 21). But this is only possible if all our actions are motivated by love. 1 Peter 4:8 assures us, 'Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins'. Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in approximately AD 58 while he was in Corinth. Paul had not yet visited Rome when he wrote the epistle, but he had a great desire to visit Rome (Romans 1:11). He visited the city three years after writing this letter. Paul knew of the dispute between Gentile and Jewish Christians in the Church of Rome. Jewish Christians believed that in order to become Christian, Gentiles had to become Jewish first by practising all the rituals of Mosaic Law, especially circumcision. In order to bring unity in the ecclesia of Rome Paul provided a series of rules and principles for the Church of Rome to live in society rather than following the ritualistic practices. If we apply these verses to a modern-day context, we can begin to establish a world where justice rolls!

Let's explore Romans 12:9-21 under the theme 'love expressed in deeds':

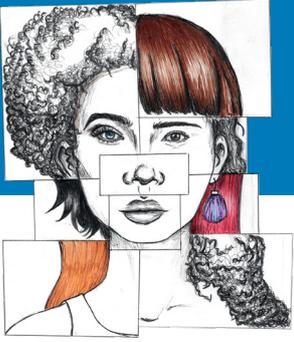
1. Sincere Love: Romans 12:9-12

Love is an important attribute of our Trinitarian God which he has bestowed upon us also. Love is indispensable (1 Corinthians 13:1-13), love is the supreme of all virtues and is one of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). In these verses Paul encourages the Christians to pursue sincere love, hate evil and to do good in their relationship with other believers. Through loving deeds we can create right and just relationships with others, with God and with the entire cosmos. In the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) Jesus teaches us that in order to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind, we must also love our neighbour as ourselves because as humans they reflect the image of God. Our neighbour is the person who is in need and seeks our help. While we are living in our societies, churches, multireligious countries and multicultural contexts, let us see the image of God in those who are suffering. Let us value and respect each other as we expect to be loved and respected by others.

2. Our love towards our society: Romans 12:13-18

Philippians 2:5 helps us to focus on loving the people in our community by our good deeds: 'In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.' We may wonder about the mindset of Jesus, and we will find it in the preceding verses.

'LET US VALUE AND RESPECT EACH OTHER AS WE EXPECT TO BE LOVED AND RESPECTED BY OTHERS.'



DISCUSS:

- * Let us evaluate our lives. Are we really imitating Christ Jesus? Do we have the same mindset that Jesus had?
- * It can be hard to forgive our enemies and to love our persecutors. Where can we find strength and a spirit of forgiveness and love?
- * What does it mean, in our individual lives, to have the self-emptying love of Jesus?

Being the follower of Jesus Christ, Paul urges the congregation of Rome to have the characteristics or mindset of Jesus. Today he is urging us too, to equip ourselves with these qualities to bring forth the Kingdom of God which is just and righteous. These characteristics include:

1. Sharing
2. Practising hospitality
3. Blessing your persecutors
4. Avoiding cursing
5. Rejoicing with those who rejoice
6. Mourning with those who mourn
7. Living in harmony with one another
8. Avoiding pride
9. Associating with people of low position
10. Not being conceited
11. Doing what you want others to do to you.

Let us imitate Christ Jesus. In the Nazareth manifesto (Luke 4:18-20) Jesus declared the purpose of his coming to the earth. He lived according to this declaration during his three and a half years of earthly ministry. He proclaimed good news to the poor, healed the blind, lame, and lepers, released the demon-possessed, raised the dead, comforted the mourners, blessed those who persecuted him. He became the voice, advocate and defender of the oppressed, downtrodden and poor. He crossed the boundaries of gender and forgave those who insulted and persecuted him.

3. Our love towards those who persecute us: Romans 12:19-21

Once we were sinners there was no way to eliminate the sin and to restore our broken relationship with God. Because of his love and gracious compassion God sent his only begotten Son. That Son took all our transgressions on himself. Philippians 2:1-11 tells us that Jesus emptied himself. The Greek word *kenosis* means emptying oneself, and this is what Jesus Christ did. Because of our transgressions he was persecuted. People mocked him, spat upon his face, took off his clothes and cast lots on his garments. But he did not seek revenge on those who persecuted him during his trial, on the way to Calvary and on the cross. Instead he prayed to his heavenly Father, asking: 'Father forgive them because they do not know what they are doing.' Although he was fully human and fully God, he considered himself the faithful servant of God and remained faithful to the point of death and provided salvation too.



God of love, we ask you to eliminate all the bad deeds from our lives and we ask that we may reflect all your characteristics and your image. Amen.

MAJOR ANUGRAH M. MASIH

INDIA NORTHERN TERRITORY

Major Masih is a fourth-generation Salvationist and officer, serving as the Secretary to the Territorial President of Women's Ministries, based in New Delhi. She says: 'My Mother consecrated me for God's service when I was in her womb and later in my teens God called me personally to be his servant. I am fond of reading books and singing. In 2019 I finished my Bachelor of Divinity degree. God has blessed me and my husband, Major Amrik Masih, with two daughters, Angleena, 15, and Catherine, 12.'



KINGDOM HEARTS

MATTHEW 6:1-15 AND MATTHEW 7:1-12

LIEUTENANT CHRISTINE TURSÌ

You may not like this, but the truth is that these passages are not about the injustice and darkness in the world and our calling to do something about it. They are about introspection and godly intervention because we do not only live in a messed-up world, we are messed-up too. However, the good news is that God does not say that we are too broken to help him build his Kingdom on earth. Instead, he says, let me start by building my Kingdom in your heart, the rest will flow from it (Proverbs 4:23). Isn't that amazing news? Heaven on earth can start with you and me!

Now then, where do we start? By allowing God to search our whole heart, even its most remote corners where we keep our wishes and dreams, our true intentions and motives. This is where ego might reign and whisper: 'Look at all I have done! Are people seeing my efforts, my righteousness, my fight for justice, my love for all people? Where is my reward?'

If we are not careful, that whisper grows so loud it becomes the only thing we hear and work for. If we do not let God step in, our ego will lead us towards the utter destruction of everything we are and do, even if we really did do it to please God at first. Our ego will mess up our motivations, our priorities and intentions, it will mess up our heart and lead us away from God. Without even realising it, we will no longer be building God's Kingdom on earth but our own, and for that kind of self-serving kingdom there is no eternal reward (Matthew 6:1).

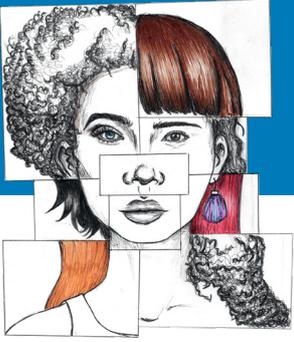
What does Jesus – the One who looks into our hearts – say to prevent this? He says: Do not give any amount of money for people to applaud your generosity (Matthew 6:2). Instead, give everything you have because you have understood that it is the proper response to everything I gave you (1 John 3:16).

Do not pray the most eloquent and well thought-through prayers for people to praise your spirituality (Matthew 6:5); ask, knock, seek because you love *me*, you long for *me* and *my* Kingdom (Matthew 6:6). I know your heart, I know what you need even before you ask me (Matthew 6:8), since I love you, I will give you all you ask for (Matthew 7:11).

Do not judge others or point out the injustice in their life before checking your own life and heart (Matthew 7:1-4). Make this the rule of your life, 'do to others what you would have them do to you' (Matthew 7:12): you would not want them to judge you or to love you with an agenda, you would not want them to use your sadness or suffering for their own purposes, right? Therefore, love them, simply love them, because you love me and because I have loved you first (Matthew 7:12; 1 John 4:19).

Does this humility mean that no one can know of our fight for social justice? No. In fact, we need to talk about our fight against social injustice so that we can raise awareness, motivate others and raise funds. Yet, before we press 'publish' on a blog we have written, before we start a conversation or plan a project of action, let us ask God to check our motives, objectives and intentions first. What do we hope to achieve? Do we want fame and approval?

'WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT OUR FIGHT AGAINST SOCIAL INJUSTICE SO THAT WE CAN RAISE AWARENESS, MOTIVATE OTHERS AND RAISE FUNDS.'



DISCUSS:

- * What are your motives and your intentions in the fight for social justice? Are you building God's Kingdom? Do not worry if your answers are not the greatest? God can fix that. Ask him to do it.
- * With our peers, how can we help each other keep our egos in check and humbly build God's Kingdom instead of our own? How can we journey together, follow Jesus together and be Kingdom builders together?
- * Study and pray the Lord's Prayer. Allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse your heart, to fill you with his motivations, intentions and priorities. Share dreams and visions for the place you live in and allow yourself to be led by the Spirit.

For the hashtag we invented to trend? To have a picture of something we said or did be shared all over the world, or our names to be remembered by generations to come? Or do we simply want to love God and people wholeheartedly?

To be able to do the latter, we need to become new people first. Kingdom people with Kingdom hearts. That can only happen if we stop focusing on ourselves and start focusing on Jesus. That is to say, we should die to ourselves and live for him. That is what the whole Old Testament and, really, the whole Bible points to. It is also what Jesus is saying in these passages: Do not be the king of your own life. Instead, let me be the King and my Kingdom will come, my will be done, in your heart and on earth as it is in Heaven (Matthew 6:9-13). When that happens, we will be able to love others wholeheartedly and justice will roll like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5:24) because his Kingdom will be built, but not in our own strength. And that will really, truly, be Heaven on earth.



Lord, you see my dreams and struggles; make me new, help me be a person you can use to love others, to fight injustice, to build your Kingdom on earth. Give me a Kingdom heart.

LIEUTENANT CHRISTINE TURSI

GERMANY, LITHUANIA AND POLAND TERRITORY

Christine Tursi is a lieutenant trying to spread God's Light in a very dark neighbourhood of Hannover, Germany. She is a Messenger of the Gospel, a fighter for justice, a Salvationist at heart, but more than anything she is a follower of Jesus.



JUST LOVE

HOSEA 2:16-23

MAJOR MARGARET DAVIS



I love a good love story. Sweet accounts of couples experiencing the stirrings of affection, declaring their love, overcoming adversity and living happily ever after. It warms my heart. Because God is love, he has wired us for love – to receive it and to give it – to pursue it – to fight for it and to enjoy it. The perfect expression of love comes from God; he sets the ultimate standard (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Because of our humanity, we practice love that falls far short of that standard, oftentimes resulting in heartache, suffering and oppression. The systems of this world also exist under a misconception of love which fails to meet God's holy standard. As a God of justice, we can agree that it is his will for this to be set right. In our Scripture passage, we will consider this theme of justice and its foundation in the perfect love of God.

The prophet Hosea ministered in the 30 years prior to the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. His prophecies were directed primarily at the people of this kingdom who had abandoned their devotion to God and fallen into idolatry, worshipping the Baals, the gods of Canaan. This devastated the heart of God, and he used the story of Hosea and Gomer to illustrate to his people the depths of their betrayal and the consequences of their sin.

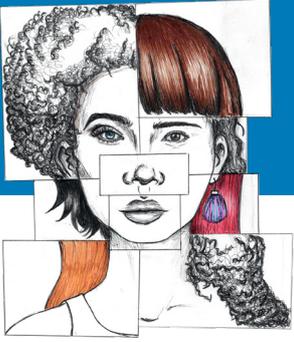
In the first chapter of Hosea, God commands his prophet to marry Gomer, a promiscuous woman, and to have children with her. The three children born during the time of their marriage were deemed children of unfaithfulness, emphasising the extent of her infidelity. They were given names signifying God's righteous judgement as a result; 'God sows', 'not loved' and 'not my people'.

Because of God's extraordinary love, however, the story did not end there. His desire was not for the destruction of his people, but their restoration. He is the God who makes things right! In chapter 3 we see that Gomer has left Hosea and their children and is living in sin with another man, despite the warnings received. Nevertheless, God tells Hosea to go and get his wife, which he does, purchasing her for 15 pieces of silver, five bushels of barley and a measure of wine, as she had now fallen into sexual slavery. She willingly returns to his house and the marriage.

Hosea 2:16-23 shows us the wonderful results of Gomer's decision to return to her husband in faithfulness. 'When that day comes,' says the LORD, 'you will call me "my husband" instead of "my master". (Hosea 2:16)

This is the first reference in Scripture to God as a husband to his people and the contrast between 'husband' and 'master' is not to be missed. Baal in Hebrew is translated as 'husband' as well as 'master' and 'lord'. The relationship between God's people and the Baals was one of harsh master to slave, however, God as their husband would relate to them with affection and true intimacy, ensuring safety and providing

**'HIS HOLY SPIRIT
CAN EMPOWER
US TO LOVE AS
HE DID; RESCUING
THE PERISHING,
THE ABUSED, THE
MISUNDERSTOOD
AND THE LOST.'**



DISCUSS:

- * On a scale of 1 – 10 how would you rate your level of devotion to God at this moment?
- * Are there any things or people that could be considered idols in your life, taking away from the prominence of your relationship with God?
- * To whom do you need to extend 'just love' (mercy and forgiveness)?

for their every need. Those who served the Baals were subject to a toxic culture of licentiousness (Hosea 4:14), rituals of self-mutilation (1 Kings 18:28) and even human sacrifice (Jeremiah 19:5) – all perversions of the love, intimacy, and sanctity of life ordained by our holy God.

So, with a heart of mercy and forgiveness God offered restoration to Gomer in the declaration found in our key verse:

'I will betroth you to me forever;
I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
in love and compassion.' (Hosea 2:19)

What a beautiful promise! Despite her rejection of Hosea and her betrayal of their marriage vows, God promised to welcome her back and begin again what would be a loving relationship that would last throughout eternity – a covenant that would never be broken.

Further, the relationship would be characterised by righteousness, justice, love and compassion. These traits exemplify the holy character of God – he cannot love in any other way! All that Gomer had experienced at the hands of the Baals would be corrected and made right by the One who loved her as she was made to be loved – in holiness and purity. His holy requirement of fidelity would also be realised in this mutually loving relationship.

Through the story of Hosea and Gomer, God was calling his people back to complete devotion to himself. Half-hearted love in this relationship equated to spiritual adultery and was simply not good enough for a God who is jealous for his people (Exodus 20:5). His desire was for his people to return to him with their whole heart (Joel 2:12). The acceptance of his love and his way would rescue them from the oppression of sin and bring forth his divine justice in their lives and in the world.

His message to us today is two-fold: 'Receive my just love and share it with others.' His Holy Spirit can empower us to love as he did; rescuing the perishing, the abused, the misunderstood and the lost, and planting the seeds of justice in a world groaning to be set right.



Lord, thank you for your unconditional, extravagant and everlasting love. I claim you as the lover of my soul and my husband forever. Help me to love others as you have loved me. Amen.

MAJOR MARGARET DAVIS

USA EASTERN TERRITORY

Margaret and her husband David currently serve as the the divisional leaders of the Massachusetts Division in the USA Eastern Territory. Previous appointments have included corps, divisional youth leadership and women's ministries, and the College for Officer Training. She loves music, history and travel. Margaret and David have two adult daughters, Brittany and Alexa, who are both working in the field of social justice.



DEFENDING THE POOR

JEREMIAH 22:13-18

DR JOY AGPAOA-ORTEGA

“He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?” declares the Lord’ (v 16).

Many people in our world suffer from injustice and are hurting and broken, hopeless and discouraged. Some people work so hard but do not receive a fair wage; they are marginalised and victims of injustice. Our Father in Heaven tells us to do what is just and right: *let justice roll*.

WHAT SCRIPTURE SAYS

In Jeremiah 22:3, God instructs the wicked kings, 'Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence... and do not shed innocent blood'.

Our study passage reflects God's hatred for the acts of injustice carried out by King Jehoahaz (also known as King Shallum), the son and successor of King Josiah. The young king disregarded the reforms of his father and oppressed the poor 'making his own people work for nothing' (v 13).

The wickedness of King Jehoahaz represents the prevalence of social injustice at that time. The rich trampled on the rights of the poor and justice was withheld. God in his anger used captivity to teach his people important lessons about righteousness and justice. From this we can learn:

1. God is against wickedness, injustice and wrongdoing, particularly when carried out by those in authority.
2. God favours the marginalised and defends the poor.
3. God punishes the oppressor to the full extent, so to teach us that justice is associated with doing what is right and just.

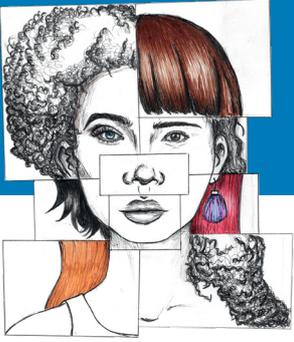
A MIRROR OF REALITY

In response to every act of oppression, unfair treatment, discrimination and social injustice is the mercy and love of God. The poor are never alone. God clearly states in verse 16 that he will defend us and he will be the God of fairness and equality among his people.

Our strong determination and love for doing what is right and just can make a big difference in society. Righteousness establishes integrity and creates acceptance, regardless of our origin, status, individuality and personality.

Should we harden our hearts and cover our ears to injustice? Are there times that God allows injustices to happen? Scripture says that God's anger is directed towards the oppressor and the wicked. He does not want such irregularities to become the status quo.

'OUR STRONG DETERMINATION AND LOVE FOR DOING WHAT IS RIGHT AND JUST CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN SOCIETY.'



DISCUSS:

- * How did God manifest justice among his people in the Old Testament? Compare this to how we seek justice today.
- * What injustices do you observe in your community?
- * How did you respond to a personal experience of injustice?
- * Have you observed any injustices in your corps? How did you deal with the situation?
- * What new insights have you received through this study?

When we face the challenge of being oppressed and treated unfairly, do we seek revenge upon the unjust? What course of action do we take? Do we do what is right and just? Even when no one sees us? God wants us to open our hearts and minds and be careful of our actions towards others.

Knowing that God is supreme in our lives, let us do what is right and just. He wants us to possess the characteristics of Jesus who never failed to provide justice to the poor against the Pharisees and Sadducees.



Our father of justice, it is my prayer that justice becomes my priority. Teach me to do what is right and just and to be the perfect instrument of how justice will be rolled out within our family, friends and the entire community. Amen

DR JOY AGPAOA-ORTEGA

THE PHILIPPINES

Joy soldiers at Palmera Corps in Bulacan. She is the daughter of retired officers and is a licenced physician and diabetologist practising internal medicine.



LEARNING TO DO RIGHT

ISAIAH 1:15-18

CAROLINE HMINGTHANZUALI



'When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood! Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. "Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool".' (Isaiah 1:15-18).

'CHRIST...WOULD HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED HER AS A PERSON WHOSE WORTH WAS TO BE RESPECTED.'

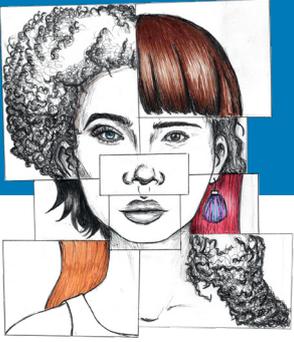
Our study passage takes place during the reign of the Judean king, Uzziah. In the absence of aggression from its neighbouring kingdoms of Egypt and Assyria as well as from the northern kingdom of Israel, the kingdom of Judah made headway in trade and economy. A growing urban elite enjoyed the increasing wealth of the nation while the lower classes and rural dwellers were left out from the gain. The rich and powerful exploited the weak through land expropriations, increased taxes and other forms of oppression. It is in the backdrop of this glaring inequality that the prophet Isaiah cried out the voice of the Almighty.

Despite turning a blind eye to the plight of their fellow citizens, the rich and the powerful were nevertheless dutiful in paying homage to God as they continued to pray to him and worship him. The God who is just and merciful detested this hypocrisy and spoke out against it through Isaiah. He was not satisfied with their devotion to him when their action did not manifest love and kindness to those that were immediately around them.

In my years of working with women in difficult circumstances, I came across the case of a woman in her late thirties who was admitted to the government-run shelter I was associated with. She was an illegal migrant from Myanmar who had only one blood relation in Aizawl, India, a cousin whom she would rather not ask for help. To add to her disadvantage, she happened to be a single parent to an eight-year-old girl and a newborn son whom she had to give up for adoption at the insistence of her cousin. The Salvation Army was called upon to help with her reintegration. She was separated from her daughter who was admitted to the girls' home run by The Salvation Army as decided by the adoption authority. It was evident that the decision was arrived at based on the alcohol-ridden past of the woman and not on her present sobriety.

Her case has often made me wonder if we failed her as the Body of Christ. Did we fail to be her voice in her helplessness? Did we stand up for her in her bid to hold on to her child? Did we judge her for her past and miss her present determination to be a good mother? Did we give her the opportunity to be one and help her on the way? Honestly, I don't think we did. Was the help that we gave her what we thought she needed rather than what she would have wanted? Probably. If it was Christ who had responded to her need, he would have acknowledged her as a person whose worth was to be respected.

Maybe we need to revisit the reasons why we carry out our social services as a compassionate Army. Is it the love of Christ which compels us to carry out such services or are we merely making a humanitarian response to the need we see?



DISCUSS:

- * What are the immediate injustices that I see around me?
- * Am I a part of those injustices?
- * Where do I stand in relation to them?

Through his prophet, God spoke to the people of Judah saying, 'Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow' (vv 16-17). These verses imply a conscious turning of will, resulting in a decision which is to be followed by actions that seek justice, empower, uplift, advocate and defend the plight of the weak and the voiceless.

In verse 18, God the ever-merciful offers an opportunity for reconciliation to the very people whose actions he so detested. Through the prophet Isaiah, he foretold the atonement he so generously prepared for our sins through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. If only we would seek his will and make a conscious decision to turn away from the things that hurt him.

Let us be reminded that the God who is unchanging is irked by the injustices in our midst today as much as he was in the days of Isaiah. The people to whom these verses are addressed have, however, changed. It is now to you and me that these sacred lines are spoken. As Christians, our actions are to spring from a depth which is deeper than our humanity. In 1 Corinthians 16:13, Paul asked the believers in Corinth to be on guard, to stand firm in faith, to be courageous and strong and to do everything in love. In the same breath, 1 John 4:8 tells us that God is love. Therefore, for Christians, our desire for justice and the actions which ensue from it are to spring from our love for God who is himself love.

Can fallible humanity consistently live up to this call for justice because of our love for God? Yes. John 15:9-10 says: 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.'



Father, may your thoughts be my thoughts, your will be my will, your actions be my actions, your courage be my courage.

CAROLINE HMINGTHANZUALI

INDIA EASTERN TERRITORY

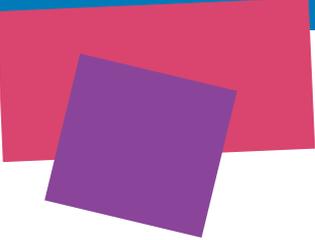
Caroline lives in Aizawl, Mizoram, with her husband, K. Zohmingthanga and their two sons (aged 12 and 10 years) and daughter (aged 7). She is a government official at the Department of Social Welfare and Tribal Affairs and has experience in working with drug users, sex workers, persons living with HIV/Aids, the disabled and senior citizens. She is a soldier at the Aizawl Bazar Corps and is a member of the CHAN Council (Community Health Action Network), The Salvation Army's response to HIV and human trafficking issues in the India Eastern Territory.



PERSISTENT JUSTICE

LUKE 18:1-8

CATHERINE KAPALO



'And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And 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. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"' (Luke 18:6-8).

The issue of social injustice is not anything new. The fight for social justice can be traced far back to the Old Testament, then during the time of Jesus and it continues now, even in our modern day. Part of the problem is that no one is exempt from experiencing social injustice. We are all affected by it in one way or another. This is one of the resultant effects of our fallen nature.

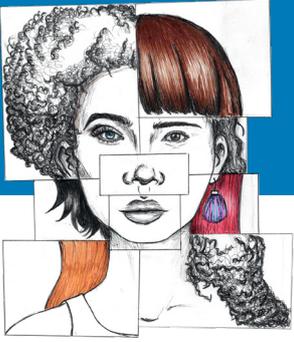
The reasons for social justice may vary according to culture and traditions, but no one can entirely escape the pain behind this experience. Its effects are colour blind. It doesn't matter where you come from or what the colour of your skin is. Sadly, no matter how much the world has tried to advocate and stop this evil practice, our societies still have so many people affected both directly and indirectly. It is true to say that the majority of victims of social injustice are women and girls, but only a few of them manage to report their cases while many others just don't speak about it due to fear or some other control. These people keep quiet, suffering and sometimes dying without being noticed.

This brings us to Jesus' question in Luke 18:7-8, 'And 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.' This is good news indeed that God does not forsake the many silent suffering victims of social injustice. But before we get deeper into this study on Jesus' message in Luke 18, it is necessary that we understand what justice is all about.

**'EVEN IN THE
FACE OF SYSTEMIC
INJUSTICE, JUSTICE
CAN BE DONE.'**

Social justice is a concept of fair and just relations between the individual and society, as measured by the distribution of wealth, opportunities for personal activity and social privileges. In Western as well as in older Asian cultures, the concept of social justice has often referred to the process of ensuring that individuals fulfil their societal roles and receive what is their due from society. We can also say in simple terms that social justice means fair and just treatment to all people irrespective of race, gender, age, religion, nationality, education, or mental or physical ability.

Our God is very open. He wants all his people to be like him in word and deed. He wants us all to reflect his character and equally enjoy life as it should be. He is surely our role model for justice! In the Parable of the Persistent Widow, however, we see the opposite of our just God. We meet an unjust judge who is corrupt in his service, reluctant to listen to the woes of a vulnerable woman, a widow. This judge's job is to solve injustices – something he is not doing well or willingly – but he does eventually do justice because of the perseverance of the widow. This woman stands up to corruption, knowing that she had fairness and truth on her side. If persistence pays off



DISCUSS:

- * What does this parable teach us about the importance of prayer?
- * Read Luke 18:7-8 again in comparison, perhaps from different Bible translations. What does Jesus say God will or will not do? What warning does this give to Christians if we keep quiet whilst our societies are suffering injustice?
- * List some examples of situations in which we need to allow justice to flow.

with an unjust judge, how much will it pay off with our just Lord? This parable teaches us that even in the face of systemic injustice, justice can be done. However, we must recognise that it is only God who can bring about justice in our unjust world, and not us.

It is easy to be distracted from our fight against injustice. We can become easily enticed by the good gifts we receive from people, we become tempted to envy top positions in life, we might become spiritually too dynamic to move along with others, and all of this can lead us to neglect the most important things of God. We can easily be overtaken by greed, pride and lack of contentment which leads to moral decay and spiritual death. But the first verse of this Parable (Luke 18:1) teaches us that we should not lose heart, but instead we should continue to seek out justice persistently and 'pray always'. As the widow displays in her story, persistence pays off when it comes to seeking out what is right and just. When we get distracted by the world around us, and become comfortable with its corruption, we should remind ourselves of this parable.

Through Jesus we can make a difference, live in peace with each other and enjoy his unfailing promises. Issues of justice are best handled when we are Spirit-led and walking in the truth and light. We must not forget that love for others is necessary as we serve each other. We need to carry out this message of love and live it out as we strive to tackle injustice. We should be people who are able to walk the talk – knowing that God is on our side, and that he is happy with those who listen and put things into practice.



Dear God, empower and help us by your Spirit to be followers of Christ who can carry out justice in this world. Help us to take notice of those who approach us for help and forgive us for turning our backs on them when we should have welcomed them instead. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

CATHERINE KAPALO

MALAWI TERRITORY

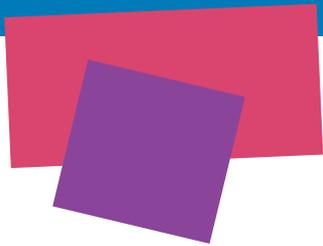
Mrs Catherine Kapalo is a Salvationist who serves as corps sergeant-major for Lilongwe Corps. Catherine works as Gender-based Violence and Human Rights Community Policing Coordinator for the Malawi Government. She was the first woman to be sponsored by the government of Malawi to pursue her engineering studies in India.



THROUGH GOD'S EYES

PROVERBS 31:8-9

MAJOR KAREN ETCHEVERRY



'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy' (Proverbs 31:8-9).

I read this passage of Scripture and question: why are we being asked to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves? Why is it an imperative? Why should we be ordered to do so? Why are we not given a choice? Probably because it is not natural to stand up for those most in need.

Take a look at this picture, drawn by William Ely Hill in 1915. Who do you see? Do you see a woman, young or old? What does she look like? Can you see both? Well, any answer is correct! It all depends on the angle you take and how you approach looking at the image.

Now, ask yourself: How do you look at others? Through my eyes, the other one is different and therefore destabilises me. All it takes is another skin colour, another journey of life, another expression, another character, for another person to be seen as detestable, harmful, or someone to be scared of and run away from.

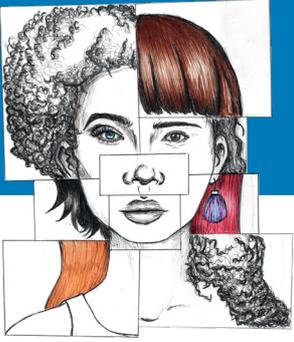
Let's think about how God sees us all, regardless of the things that divide us. God's gaze on us is one of admiration. God looks at each of his creatures in a way that nothing can taint. Each of his creatures is part of his plan and 'God saw that it was very good' (Genesis 1:31).

To treat people fairly, you have to change the way you look at them. It's as simple as that. If I see someone and consider them old, or destitute, or poor, or needy, or weak and weary, God sees this same person as young, rich, precious, and very valuable! I must seek out God's gift in each person. I must seek to look at the other person with God's eyes, to see God's love for them first of all. Then I no longer see Proverbs 31:8-9 as an order, but I realise that I have the same concern for justice as God!

This passage from Proverbs leads me to feel the same compassion that Jesus felt. It becomes so powerful in that you have no alternative but to speak up for others. And finally, what is at first an unnatural command to speak up, becomes part of your nature. Of course, you will still have to face your fears, leave your comfort zone, and take risks. All of this takes courage, but it can be done with God's help. It's up to us to find the little things we can do that will contribute to a bigger change.

Looking back on our actions in our corps in Strasbourg, France, I would like to share a few life stories. Three of our service users, 'G', 'M' and 'N' refused to fit in. They ended up on the street and no one wanted to defend them. They were very demanding, did not speak our language and made no effort to try. They also had a deep paranoia towards any administrative service, which made offering help challenging. After several months of getting to know each other and working with different social services we were able to assert their pension rights. It was a long journey, with plenty of opposition, but ultimately it was fruitful. We stood up for them and defended them.

'IT'S UP TO US TO FIND THE LITTLE THINGS WE CAN DO THAT WILL CONTRIBUTE TO A BIGGER CHANGE.'



DISCUSS:

- * Think of an unhappy and poor individual. How do you look at them? How does God look at them?
- * In your street, neighbourhood and church, who could you defend? How?
- * How could your church speak out or continue to speak out to the authorities on behalf of the unfortunate and poor?



Drawing by the cartoonist William Ely Hill, 1915, public domain

In another case, the 'L' family had just gotten their legal situation sorted and they needed an apartment. They didn't have a good ownership of the language and had few resources available to them. A Salvationist guided them in these steps, looking at classified advertisements in the newspaper every day, accompanying them for apartment visits, helping them fill out documents, acting as guarantor, even helping to pay the deposit. She spoke up for them, as they couldn't speak for themselves.

For 'L and S' it was very simple. We knew them well individually through their volunteer work at the corps for more than two years. When they applied for their first jobs, we took a stand for each of them, and then we spoke up to attest to their efficiency, reliability and value.

'V' is an elderly person who no longer has a family. We took care of all the administrative procedures for her move to a retirement home, but it was also necessary to support her budget, social assistance and make contact with her bank. We defended her when she was abandoned.

It is not an easy path, and I often need to go back to this text. It reminds me of the indispensable words of justice that the unfortunate and poor need. The word of one person is enough to change how a victim feels deeply. Even in front of a crowd, it is enough for a person to say that a situation is unjust for the victim to no longer feel alone. We can be that voice of compassion and justice.



'God, grant that I may pronounce the same judgments as you; give me your sense of justice. When I must judge the poorest, let me be loyal and faithful to the law. Let the mountains bring them peace, and the hills justice' (Psalm 72:1-3).

MAJOR KAREN ETCHVERRY

FRANCE AND BELGIUM TERRITORY

Major Karen Etcheverry is a corps officer in Strasbourg with her husband Joël. Her parents were officers but accepting that the Lord was asking her to become an officer was not easy. Yet, from the moment she let go and accepted the way of God, her whole being was touched and peace invaded her. Twenty-five years later, this peace is still as present and helps her to live each day, the good days and the more difficult days.



OUR WORD, OUR WALK AND OUR WORK

JAMES 1:19-2:26

MAJOR SHARI RUSSELL

'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).

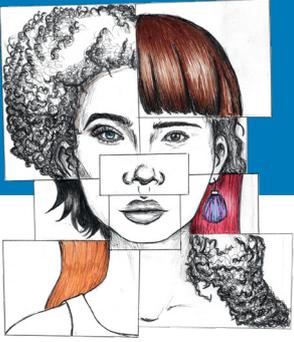
As Christians we have the incredible privilege and calling to be part of God's work in the world. He is at work in our lives and our communities; with both the powerless and the powerful. Our calling is to join his work and to reflect his grace, values and holiness to a lost world. Our selected Scripture from James identifies three ways we can live out this calling: through our word, our walk and our work.

Firstly, let's look at 'our word'. James 1:19-20 begins with a reminder of how our words impact our witness. He shares three life rules: be slow to speak, quick to listen and slow to become angry. In James 1:22-24, we find a contrast between those who only hear the word with those who hear and obey. In verse 23 the word 'look' (*katanoēō*) means to consider attentively, and in verse 25 the word for 'looking intently' (*parkypto*) means to carefully inspect. Both words carry a similar meaning. Neither means a passing glance. The comparison then is on the impact of the gaze which is either forgetting or obeying and continuing in the Word. The word 'worthless' (found in James 1:26) means 'devoid of force, truth, result; useless, of no purpose.' How might not controlling our tongue render our witness worthless? What do James 2:12 and James 3:1-12 go on to say about our words and speech?

Secondly, let's look at 'our walk'. James 1:21-25 reminds us to look honestly at ourselves and those hidden areas of our lives. The instruction to 'accept the word planted in you' is qualified by the phrase 'with humility'. John 1 reminds us the 'word' encompasses more than the written text. What may be some obstacles to fully accepting the word with humility? Integral to this process is taking off and getting rid of all moral filth and evil. Both are intentional acts for Christians: accepting the word while rejecting evil. The image of putting away all filthiness is drawn from Zechariah 3 where the High Priest, who represents the whole nation, is in filthy garments.

James 1:27 compares worthless and futile religion with pure and faultless religion. Verse 26 challenges those who may seek blessing because of their religious observances or behaviour. How might we be tempted to seek blessing through our behaviour? The word 'pure' refers not only to the cleanliness of religious objects but also to purity of heart. The word 'undefiled' refers to being free from contamination or defect. In the Greek sentence structure, it commences with pure *and* undefiled to describe religion and finishes with the call to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. The word 'cosmos' (world) is connected to the word 'cosmetic' meaning 'to arrange something' or 'reorient the face'. James is articulating that the world's orientation is to leave God out.

**'WE WILL NOT
KNOW WHAT GOD
REQUIRES FROM
US IF WE DO NOT
WALK WITH HIM
AND ARE NOT
SPIRITUALLY
CONNECTED
WITH HIM.'**



DISCUSS:

- * What are some of the challenges we encounter in demonstrating the connection between faith and action?
- * What is the significance and the implications of 'pure and undefiled' preceding our 'religion' in our daily living?
- * In our current contexts, how might we be maintaining the systems of injustice and oppression rather than seeking justice and freedom?

Finally, let's look at our work. Being part of God's work means seeing others as God sees them, especially those who seemingly don't have much to offer in return. This should be evident in our compassion to those most vulnerable. James uses the phrase 'widow and orphans' to bring to mind all those who have been marginalised or oppressed.

Throughout James 2:1-7, the issue of favouritism and the concern of power and privilege are addressed. The rich had oppressed the early believers but rather than retaliate, the danger to appease or defer to the rich resulted in a prejudice towards those poorer. 'Partiality' refers to making judgements or distinctions based on attributes such as physical appearance, gender, ethnicity or social status. Rather than challenging the systems of oppression, they were bestowing honour on those actively engaged in oppressing others through economic exploitation. William Booth, when he realised the Methodist Church had become too 'respectable', sought to maintain his mission with the most vulnerable and overlooked by the church. How might The Salvation Army respond to this danger today of becoming too respectable and deferring to those with power and privilege?

In James 2:8-13, James anticipates some might defend their favoritism to the rich as fulfilling the command to love their neighbour. How might 'showing favoritism' be sinful? In verses 14-26, James goes on to not contradict Paul but focus on our faith after salvation. Utilising the examples of Abraham (Jewish Patriarch) and Rahab (Gentile of questionable background), James not only challenges the partiality seeping into the Church but presents two different expressions of lived faith. What principles do we see from these two examples that we may apply in our lives?



Thank you, Lord, for the privilege and calling to be part of your transforming work in our world. May we boldly seek truth and love in our hearts and be instruments of your grace and beacons of hope as we seek justice and freedom for all.

MAJOR SHARI RUSSELL

CANADA AND BERMUDA TERRITORY

Major Shari Russell is Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) and married to Robert. Together, they have three wonderful sons: Charles, Gavin and Brannon. They were commissioned as Faithful Intercessors in 1999 and have had appointments in various corps and the College for Officer Training. Shari completed her BA and MA in Biblical and Theological Studies and is currently pursuing a PhD with NAIITS through the University of Divinity (Melbourne). Currently, Shari serves as the Territorial Indigenous Ministries Consultant for the Canada and Bermuda Territory.



JUSTICE FROM THE HEART

MICAH 6:1-8

KAYLEEN SAM

'He has showed 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' (v 8).

The book of Micah is about God's judgement over Israel. Israel disobeyed his commands and began to worship other gods. Even though they brought him offerings and sacrifices as an act of worship, their hearts never truly connected with God and they did not have a close personal relationship with him. God knew their hearts were far from him and he willed them to find their way back. As we study Micah we begin to understand that we must not lose focus on our personal relationship with God.

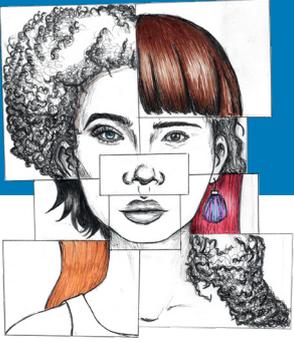
God requires a lot of things from us but the most important of all is our personal relationship with him; to walk humbly with God. If we really desire to know what God is saying and want to know him more, then we must choose to develop a close and personal relationship with him. We must seek him daily, feed on his Word and communicate with him through prayer. We will not know what God requires from us if we do not walk with him and are not spiritually connected with him. Connection creates communication. Our spirit must connect with God's spirit, our hearts must connect with his heart and as we draw closer and closer to him, he will draw himself closer to us (James 4:8).

We are God's hands and feet, and for God's hands and feet to move on this earth we must open our hearts to invite him to move in and through us. Micah questions the people of Israel about the kind of sacrifice God desired from them: 'With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' (Micah 6:6-7).

'OUR SPIRIT MUST CONNECT WITH GOD'S SPIRIT, OUR HEARTS MUST CONNECT WITH HIS HEART AND AS WE DRAW CLOSER AND CLOSER TO HIM.'

God is not pleased with other forms of sacrifice. God is pleased when we bring ourselves as living sacrifices to him, holy and set apart for his will. God cannot work alone; he needs people who are willing to give themselves up completely to him for the sake of those who are suffering and lost. When we are firmly rooted and connected with God, then everything that God requires from us can be revealed ('Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it fully' Proverbs 28:5).

God's ways are higher than our ways, his thoughts higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9) and therefore God's justice is entirely different from the world's view of justice. God's justice is not what we do from the outside, but it is what comes from deep within our hearts. God's justice is not just an ordinary activity to be performed whenever there is a calling to reach out. When it becomes a normal, ordinary, everyday activity, we slowly tend to lose focus of the importance of why we reach out in the first place. In verses six and seven, Micah suggests that when the sacrifices became an everyday routine, they slowly began to lose focus on why they offered them in the first place. The activities became mere performances without weight, and without weight they did not become true acts of worship from the heart. Only love gives weight.



DISCUSS:

- * What does God require from you to seek justice?
- * How can you become God's hands and feet (what sacrifices will you make to give to God)?
- * How can you reach out with God's love (what actions or activities do you do that shows God's love)?

Love is the essence of God's justice and is a powerful, magnetic force. When our heart joins with God, we become a channel of his unending love, distributing it to those who are in desperately in need of it.

Social justice is love in action, where we identify with the sufferer, feeling their pain as if it is our own, and are driven to heal and restore in Jesus' name. But action without love means nothing if our heart is not right with God.

God wants his justice to reveal itself in us only when our sacrifices come straight from the heart. Walking humbly with God transforms us into his hands and feet, creating a channel of God's love, flowing freely and reaching those who are suffering. Let us show the world who God is and be the arrow that points the way back to God.

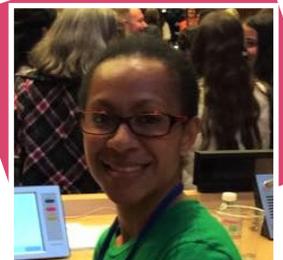


My Father God, teach me how to draw my heart closer to you; through prayer and meditating in your Word, to help me build this personal relationship with you first, before I reach out with your justice to others who are in need of your love. Amen.

KAYLEEN SAM

PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND SOLOMON ISLANDS TERRITORY

Kayleen is a secondary school teacher in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea and supports her corps in Goroka. She was previously an intern at The Salvation Army's International Social Justice Commission in New York, USA.



HOSPITALITY AND HOLINESS

LUKE 11:37-52

COMMISSIONER JANE PAONE

'Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them"' (Luke 11:46).

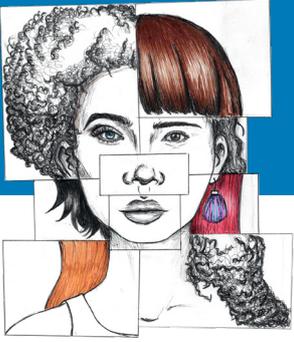
We long to hear Jesus speaking words of comfort, but here he says, 'Woe to you!' to two influential groups of leaders in the Jewish community. Pharisees and experts of the Law were responsible for studying the Mosaic Law and applying it daily. Pharisees kept the Torah alive during the hard time after the destruction of the second temple. Thanks to them, synagogues flourished and Jewish identity was upheld.

One of them listened to Jesus teach and dared to invite the One who had a reputation of eating with unsavoury sinners into his home. Luke has several hospitality stories where Jesus was host or guest and enjoyed food and fellowship. Yet, in the simple, everyday act of sitting down with others at meals, he managed to arouse hostility! This offer of hospitality had conditions attached. Jesus was expected to carry out the religious purification that Pharisees scrupulously carried out and wanted others to follow: the symbolic washing cleansed away filth of anything they had touched, prevented corruption. Men, passionate to live lives that pleased God, 'separated' from the 'unholy', since they believed themselves pure. Jesus dared to violate their rigid ritual!

As on other occasions during his ministry of bringing justice on earth, Jesus echoes the prophet Isaiah (10:1-2). His harshest words are for Pharisees and experts in the law, who focused on their religious duties, yet ignored the joy of being in his company. Desiring to do what was right, they had forgotten about being in a right relationship: love for God and for others summed up the commandments. Intent on being holy, they forgot to be generous to others in kindness and mercy. With their attitudes and actions, exclusion rather than inclusion resulted. They judged, loved praise, were unaware of their own lack of inner purity because they thought only of the outward appearance. They blocked others from learning about God's Kingdom of justice; they oppressed and abused their power.

Jesus could not remain neutral, and we cannot remain neutral about certain issues either. Sins of oppression affect those who oppress and those who are oppressed. Desmond Tutu argues that outsiders should not be objective vis-à-vis apartheid South Africa. He explains taking such a stance is like this: 'It is small comfort to a mouse, if an elephant is standing on its tail, to say, "I am impartial"'. In this instance, you are really supporting the elephant in its cruelty.' To the expert in the law who complained that Jesus was insulting also them, he replied, 'And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them' (Luke 11:46).

'JESUS COULD NOT REMAIN NEUTRAL, AND WE CANNOT REMAIN NEUTRAL ABOUT CERTAIN ISSUES EITHER.'



DISCUSS:

- * Why do you think Jesus' words to the experts of the law were so harsh? Consider what consequences would result because of their actions, and Jesus' words.
- * How do we open Jesus' words of strong justice and mercy to women and others who may feel excluded?
- * How has the Pharisee understood hospitality and holiness? Consider those we invite into our homes and how we treat them. Remember that true hospitality, like holiness, is an act of gracious generosity.

The burdens of the legal rites that the experts placed on people may have been heavy, but the heartless rigour with which they were enforced, and by men whose behaviour was inconsistent, was even heavier! These men should have attracted people to God's Word but bound them instead with a heavy yoke (Acts 15:10). This would have eternal consequences: they would be held accountable. Their detached judgemental attitude reflects a law without love. They do not even *touch* those burdens with one of their fingers to alleviate another's suffering under the load they have made. This Greek word is used only here in the New Testament, a technical medical term for touch, used when a doctor would gently feel a sore part of the body in an attempt to relieve the pain. The experts could have helped, but they did not.

In contrast, the One who is love personified invites each of us: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Matthew 11:28-30).



Lord, help me to walk justly, with a pure, loving heart – generously giving back the love I have received from you so that I do not judge, but see Christ in each person I meet.

COMMISSIONER JANE PAONE

UNITED KINGDOM TERRITORY WITH THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Proud of her Scottish origins, Commissioner Jane Paone has served as a Salvation Army officer, along with her husband Massimo, in the UK, France, Italy and Switzerland, giving territorial leadership in Italy and Greece, France and Belgium and Switzerland, Austria and Hungary. She was part of the International Social Justice Commission until she retired. Jane was a speaker on social justice at the *Boundless* Congress, and at social holiness conferences in Haiti and Canada. She continues to have a passion for fighting for justice in the Army and the world, aiming at connecting all generations and communities so that concrete actions can result.



LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF

MATTHEW 22:34-40

MAJOR COLLEEN HUKE



Our Bible passage begins with Jesus being a target yet again for the religious leaders' attacks! In *The Message* translation of Matthew 22, we read that 'they gathered their forces for an assault', but earlier we were assured that Jesus was already wise to their intentions. When Jesus was verbally ambushed with the question 'Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?', his answer caused anticipated controversy for there were 613 commandments in the Jewish law – most of them began with 'do not' – and all were considered to be of equal significance.

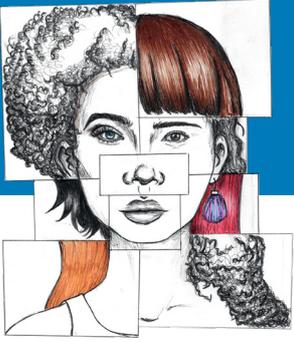
Jesus' answer to them emphasises that although they obey the *letter* of the law, the greater thing is understanding the *spirit* of the law which must ultimately and always be love. 'Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself."' Jesus makes it clear for the legalistic Pharisees – as much as he does for us today – that nothing matters more than loving God and loving each other.

'IF WE DON'T FIND CHRIST IN OTHERS AND LOVE THEM WITH GOD'S LOVE, THEY WILL NEVER FIND CHRIST IN US.'

Obedience to this double commandment is the essence of the gospel, the basis of The Salvation Army's mission and should be the root of all Christian social action and justice. Our social responsibility cannot be substituted with the fulfilment of religious obligations and traditions, as Jesus continues to point out to the religious leaders: 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!...you have neglected the more important matters...justice, mercy and faithfulness' (Matthew 23:23). Jesus appears to be saying that we cannot love God with all our being without loving our neighbour, and we cannot truly love our neighbour without loving God.

Contrary to popular interpretation, loving your neighbour 'as yourself' is not reference to a positive self-image, but rather to the recognition of God's image in all human beings. In this way, when we find God in our fellow humans, we see all people as our brothers and sisters, made in his image, deserving of equal and fair treatment without exception. Our actions must then reflect Matthew 5:7: 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.' In other words, we must treat our neighbour as we would like to be treated, and when our neighbour is treated poorly, we must be the voice that advocates for human dignity and social justice on their behalf.

If we don't find Christ in others and love them with God's love, they will never find Christ in us. It is only God's love that enables us to deeply love all human beings without discrimination and to treat all of humankind with dignity and respect, especially the poor, oppressed and most vulnerable. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus claims that whatever we do for one of the least of our brothers and sisters, we are actually doing for him. Mother Teresa of Calcutta referred to this when she said: 'At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me, I was homeless, and you took me in."'



DISCUSS:

- * What does 'loving others' look like for you?
- * Consider your own prejudice and/or personal feelings. In what way might these influence your application of God's commandment in Matthew 22:39?
- * How might you advocate for mercy and justice on behalf of someone you know of who is in need of unbiased and unconditional love right now?

It's important to understand the meaning of love in these verses. It is not associated with intense emotion, as we typically understand love. The Greek word used for love is not *phileo* that expresses fond feelings and friendly affection, but *agapao* which is better expressed as loving-kindness. My favourite definition of loving-kindness is 'active mercy' and I experience it daily in my relationship with God. He acts towards me with unconditional love, mercy and compassion; given generously and faithfully, regardless of how deserving I am! Yet, many Christians hold perceptions and attitudes that cause them to deny their neighbour love. Their actions are often based on personal feelings towards either a friend or enemy as well as prejudice concerning gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability or education; and on how deserving they believe their neighbour to be in light of that status.

However, the love commanded in Matthew 22:38-39 is not influenced by feelings, prejudice or status. We need only look at the Cross for confirmation. Jesus modelled 'active mercy' when he demonstrated *agapao* love to save a world that despised and rejected him. The Cross was as much an act of the will, a choice that had to be made, as it was emotional love for all of humankind. The Body of Christ must share this kind of unbiased and unconditional love with hurting human beings amidst growing injustice when moved by feelings of compassion, but also when not. We must make deliberate decisions of our will every day to bring in God's Kingdom on earth, by intentionally demonstrating active mercy without discrimination in Jesus' name. It is not the emotion of love that is commanded, but the choice to love others in response to God's unconditional love for us and as an expression of our love for him.

It is easy to doubt our ability to make a difference when we consider all the social injustices so prevalent in our communities around the world, particularly with regard to women and young girls. However, Bible commentaries note that Jews typically interpreted 'neighbour' as meaning 'one who is near'. Therefore, Jesus' command to love your neighbour calls us to act in the best interests of those nearest to us. While Jesus' active mercy on the Cross changed the prospects for us all, these verses imply that we must start living out principles of mercy and justice right where we are.

I like the concept that 'justice is love translated into social policies' because it suggests that while we ultimately need to effect social change, love is where it begins. Jesus maintains that all religious teachings depend on and are fulfilled in just one word: Love.



Dear God, help me to love you wholeheartedly so that I might love others unconditionally. In Jesus' name. Amen.

MAJOR COLLEEN HUKÉ

SOUTHERN AFRICA TERRITORY

Major Colleen Huke and her husband Darren are divisional leaders in the Eastern Cape Division of the Southern Africa Territory. They have two teenage sons, Samuel and Daniel. Colleen has enjoyed serving as an officer in both rural and city corps appointments, as well as in territorial training and education. Her passion is Jesus and the ministry of reconciliation God has given to every believer.



STANDING UP FOR OTHERS

AMOS 5:24

CLEFA JOHN PARMAR

'But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream' (Amos 5:24 King James Version).

Sakina was a young beautiful girl. She always wanted to receive a good education and become a chartered accountant. She was a quick learner and was full of zeal and enthusiasm. She was kind and humane.

But from a very young age she was faced with a harsh reality. At the age of 14 she was forced into prostitution by her own relatives. She was coerced to attend 15 to 25 customers a day. Whenever she refused to attend a customer, she was beaten up by the brothel keeper. Every day she was pushed into the shackles of Hell.

I am sure that after reading this you must be gripped with anger and frustration. How can someone be so brutal with a girl like Sakina? Did she really deserve such harsh and cruel treatment? Unfortunately millions of girls are trafficked and used as sex slaves around the world.

As a social worker I met her and counselled her, and I was heartbroken to hear her story. It stung me so hard and many questions came into my mind – 'why did this happen to her?', 'where is justice for this girl?', 'what does the Bible tell us to do?', 'what can I do to protect such girls?'

What I discovered is that God does not like injustice either. Throughout the Bible God speaks about justice.

We read in Ecclesiastes 4:1, 'I saw the tears of the oppressed – and they have no comfort'. God sees our tears. He sees the tears of the poor and those in slavery and his heart cries out loudly to us. He is a just God and he wants us to be just towards others and to help the people who are oppressed and have no power.

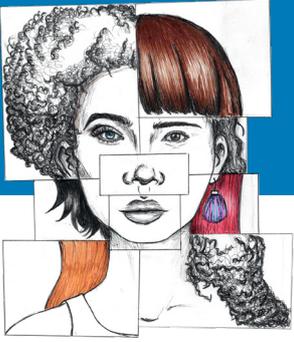
Let's understand more about justice and injustice:

Justice is about using power rightly to make sure everyone is safe, defended and protected.

Injustice is when someone abuses their power to take from others the good things that God has given them – their life, liberty and the fruits of their love and labour.

Often, when we think about what is just and unjust, we think of government, police, judges, etc – the people who directly grant justice. But just because you are not a judge or police officer, it doesn't mean that you don't have a role to play in justice.

'GOD CALLS US TO USE THE POWER WE HAVE TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE – ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE WEAK OR VULNERABLE – IS TREATED FAIRLY.'



DISCUSS:

- * In what ways do you see power being abused in our world today?
- * As a child of God how will you support or stand by those who are oppressed?
- * Why do you think God chooses to use us as his ambassadors?

Justice is about using power. God calls us to use the power we have to ensure that everyone – especially those who are weak or vulnerable – is treated fairly. Exodus 23:2 addresses the justice issue by urging us to stand up for others, especially for people who are vulnerable or have been robbed of their power.

Isaiah 58:6-7 points out the reason why God sometimes doesn't respond to the prayer and fasting of the people. The prophet Isaiah highlights in this passage what God wants from his people. It is not about the foods one can eat but rather the action taken on behalf of and in connection with the marginalised. This chapter shows a connection between worship of God and acts of justice on behalf of the most vulnerable. The nation of Israel is challenged to see that its relationship with others, particularly those who have been cast aside in their community, affects its relationship with God.



Dear Lord, help me to understand what social justice is and how I can make a difference while practising and supporting justice. Lord, grant me a humble heart so that I can take a stand for people who need your favour. Lord, I pray for girls like Sakina who are going through heart-wrenching pain every single day.

CLEFA JOHN PARMAR

INDIA WESTERN TERRITORY

Clefa lives in Mumbai and works with an anti-trafficking non-government organisation, International Justice Mission. She is a social worker and works with victims of sex trafficking, and seeks justice for those in need of care and protection.



COME AND SEE

JOHN 4:1-38

TERRI NEVILLE

Our scripture reading is bounded by two headings. When placed together they read 'Jesus Talks with a Samaritan Woman' and 'Many Samaritans Believe'. Before we read a single verse, we know that this was no ordinary day at the well. Meanwhile, the disciples missed it, literally and figuratively. Tired from the journey, Jesus stopped to rest at Jacob's well and the disciples travelled to Sychar for food. When they returned, the disciples were 'shocked' to find Jesus talking with a woman. Strangely, not one disciple asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking to her?' In fact, the woman left, leaving her water jug behind, and all the disciples had to say was, 'Rabbi, eat something'. To which Jesus replied, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about'.

As was his custom, Jesus often used the physical, visible, created things of this world to reveal the spiritual, invisible realities of God and the Kingdom. The disciples, as was *their* custom, were confused. They wondered, 'Did someone already bring him lunch?' The disciples' complete misunderstanding opens the door for Jesus to teach this vitally important lesson:

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, "Four months more and then the harvest?" I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest' (John 4:35).

Jesus was sent *on* a mission, spiritually empowered *for* the mission and sustained *by* the eternal rewards of doing the mission. The very questions the disciples didn't ask in verse 27 lead us to the heart of Jesus' mission.

Question: What do you want?

Woman: There is nothing on earth that will satisfy the unquenchable longing of my heart.

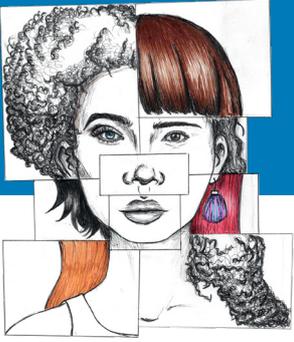
Question: Why are you talking to her?

Jesus: I am the Messiah, and my father sent me to offer you the bubbling up, overflowing, everlasting, love of God. (John 4:13, 26)

'Open your eyes!' The disciples passed the Samaritan woman on the road to Sychar, shopped in a Samaritan town square, and all they brought back was lunch! The disciples needed to be reminded of their mission. They were called to be fishers of men, yet they were more preoccupied with sandwiches than salvation. A heavenly wake-up call to never let the busy-ness of the mundane take you out of commission.

Meanwhile, the excluded, morally reprehensible Samaritan woman comes face-to-face with her Saviour and her life is completely transformed. The social and moral outcast runs straight into the centre of community issuing an invitation to 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!' Now, isn't it just like Jesus to identify himself as the

'JESUS WAS SENT ON A MISSION, SPIRITUALLY EMPOWERED FOR THE MISSION AND SUSTAINED BY THE ETERNAL REWARDS OF DOING THE MISSION.'



DISCUSS:

- * In what ways have you or your church family erected barriers to human fellowship? Do you benefit from those barriers? Are you bothered?
- * Is your lifestyle open to encounters with non-believers? What one step can you take out of your comfort zone?
- * Who have you written off as beyond hope that needs to receive new life and wholeness and freedom together in Jesus Christ? Pray for God to reopen a door of communication.

Messiah to a devalued and despised, friendless Samaritan woman? To restore her voice, her standing in the community, and transform her from a morally impure outcast to the religious leader in Sychar is a whole life transformation! Isn't it just like Jesus to forgive her sins and make her whole? And God's not done yet. Perhaps his eyes were set on the redemption of the whole community from the start. Wouldn't *that* be just like God?

The key to God's justice and righteousness lies in surrendered obedience to the will and ways of God. Jesus, while completely God, was also completely human. As God's only begotten Son, he was completely dependent upon his Father to send him, lead him, empower him and to provide for his physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual engagement with the world. 'By myself I can do nothing'... 'for the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God' (John 5:30, John 3:34).

As followers of Christ, how do we do justice on earth? Our identity in Christ must be secure. We must be all in! A complete surrender of our lives, our loves and our identity to the Lordship of Jesus is required, or our service is of no use to God. Just like a branch on a vine that doesn't moan and groan to pop out fruit, when we abide in Christ, God will produce his fruit in and through us. It is only when we partake of God's goodness for ourselves that we become a living invitation to 'taste and see that the Lord is good'.

When we offer our lives and calling, God multiplies our humble offerings to satisfy the hunger and thirst of the lost and bring them into the Kingdom. Lift up your eyes, and look at the fields! Watch justice roll right to the ends of the earth, and never underestimate the power of a divinely orchestrated conversation.

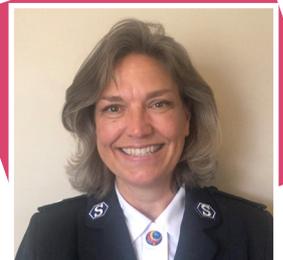


Give strength and hope to the oppressed and humble the oppressors that they may go and tell their story to the glory of God and the amazement of the people.

TERRI NEVILLE

USA SOUTHERN TERRITORY

Terri serves the Lord through The Salvation Army as the Director of the Social Justice Resource Center (SJRC) for the USA Southern Territory. Located on the campus of Trevecca Nazarene University, the SJRC is a catalytic learning lab dedicated to inspiring, informing and equipping Spirit-led, missional best practices. Terri is also an appointed member of the International Moral and Social Issues Council and the Assistant Territorial Sergeant-Major. In her free time, Terri loves Broadway, music, playing sports, games and, most of all, spending time with her husband Rob, son Ben and daughter Riley.



JUSTICE IN EVERY CORNER

GALATIANS 5:13-26

MAJOR NI KOMANG ARIANI WIBOWO



In today's world individualism and materialism make it difficult to seek justice. Justice has become scarce and expensive and it feels as though injustice occurs in virtually every aspect of life.

Social justice is a term used to describe actions and thoughts, both national and even universal, that lead to a just world. But can the world be just in its every corner? Isaiah 1:17 says: 'Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.' Speaking of social justice means to speak of equal rights for all human beings. For centuries there have been issues of social injustice, and the many factors involved mean that numerous issues have never been resolved, even today. We must recognise equality as an absolute right for every human being.

Injustice occurs in various forms, in all environments and, even more alarmingly, within many families and households. The impact of conflict causes divisions in the family, dissension in the community and brings a sense of distress, hatred and envy; emotions which are increasingly powerful in controlling those who are treated unfairly, while the arrogant and arbitrary attitudes of greedy people who rule continue. In response to these circumstances, what should we do?

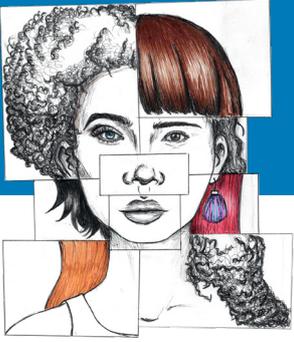
We are reminded by the Apostle Paul's writing in Galatians 5:13-14:

'You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself".'

This passage speaks of freedom – a beautiful word to hear. What should we as Christians do with the freedom we have been given?

People who have been set free should not use their freedom to sin, but to serve others with love. This is a very clear message – that those who have been set free and loved in Christ should contribute to help create justice and caring, wherever we are, based on love. Jeremiah 22:3 says: 'This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.'

'THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SET FREE AND LOVED IN CHRIST SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO HELP CREATE JUSTICE AND CARING.'



DISCUSS:

- * How can we radiate Christ's justice in our own lives, and for our family and other people? What about ourselves and our lives as Christian women. Can we radiate Christ's justice for our family and other people?
- * Have we taken part in the fight against injustice happening around us?
- * Do you want to be used by God to express his justice and love?

Let us learn how to preserve our freedom in Christ and make an impact in our surroundings to realise justice in our communities:

1. We, as Christian women, are personally required to maintain our freedom in Christ, by keeping the sanctity of life, be it in prayer, worship, activities or words, so that our old way of life does not reappear. Galatians 5:13 says 'But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love'. When you do this, your testimony and example will act as a motivation and encourage others to imitate your way of life.
2. Through the freedom that we have, God will use us to do his works – to serve and help our neighbours who are still living in sin. We do it in ways that do not discriminate (heart to God and hand to man), but with love and justice as God does in our lives. As Deuteronomy 32:4 reminds us 'all his ways are just'.
3. God's justice is perfect. Freedom in Christ is the same, as the power of God lives in our lives to perfect us as his own and to do his works.

So what is written in Amos 5:24 – 'But let justice roll on like a river, righteous like a never-failing stream!' – will continue to happen. Many will be blessed and we, as women who have been set free in Christ, will be involved in creating and seeking justice.

Now let us take a moment, as Christian women who long to be involved in God's work, to show justice to everyone.

I hope the discussion questions may help us to become extraordinary individuals before God and for others. Begin by focusing on social justice for yourselves and your families. Remember, with God we can!



Father God, thank you for setting us free as your special creation. Help us to be your instrument of peace in this world, so that people around us will see your love and have hope in you. Amen.

MAJOR NI KOMANG ARIANI WIBOWO

INDONESIA TERRITORY

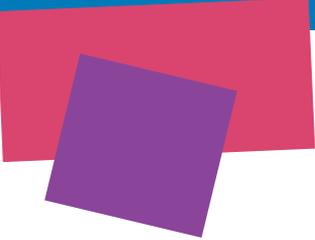
Major Ni Komang Ariani is the Social Service Projects Officer and National Contact Person for Human Trafficking in Indonesia. As a follower of Jesus Christ, she desires to communicate God's love to everyone through words and deeds.



WOULD YOU LAY DOWN YOUR LIFE?

MAJOR EDITH LOUZOLO

1 JOHN 3:11-24



'For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another... This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth' (1 John 3:11, 16-18).

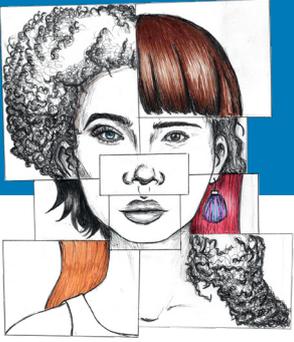
This world can be unfair in the way that people are treated, and there is a great deal of inequality. As Christians, when we see a brother or sister in need, as 1 John 3:17 says, we must show them pity. If we neglect to do this, we must ask ourselves the question 'How can the love of God dwell in us?' We live in a world where we must cry out for social justice.

The motivation behind our cry for social justice is captured in Proverbs 31:8-9, as the Bible reads: 'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.'

The Bible teaches that God is a God of justice. All his ways are just. The Bible's notion of social justice involves concern and care being shown to the poor and afflicted. The Bible often refers to the fatherless, the widow and the sojourner – that is, the people who were not able to fend for themselves or had no support system. The nation of Israel was commanded by God to care for society's less fortunate, and its eventual failure to do so was partly the reason for its judgement and expulsion from the land. As part of the Bible's vision of justice, we are taught that God sees us all as being of equal worth: God created human beings in his image (Genesis 1:27), everyone has sinned and is equally separated from God (Romans 3:23) and under the blood of Christ human divisions are irrelevant and believers become one family in him (Galatians 3:27-29).

Justice in the Bible means justice for all. Love should be shown to all, regardless of background: 'And when an alien dwells with you in your land, you shall not oppress him. The alien who is dwelling with you shall be like a native among you, and you shall love him like yourself, because you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am Yahweh your God' (Leviticus 19:33-34). These laws in Leviticus 19 were specifically meant to protect refugees and immigrants to Israel. Thus, it was not only Israelites who were protected by God's system of justice (his Law), the outsiders also found protection.

'AS CHRISTIANS, WHEN WE SEE A BROTHER OR SISTER IN NEED...WE MUST SHOW THEM PITY.'



DISCUSS:

- * How can you speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves?
- * What are you ready to sacrifice for justice to be restored?
- * What action are you ready to take for justice to roll around you?

However, it is not enough to simply cry for social justice. We must also take action, just as Jesus did. Our Scripture focus, 1 John 3:11-24, emphasises the power of love as we live out our faith. Right in the middle of the selected verses is 1 John 3:16: 'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.' This verse is telling us two things: Jesus laid down his life for us out of love, and we should strive to love others as Jesus loves us. When we look to another, similar verse in John 15:13, we read that 'greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.' These verses are preparing us to live and act radically in the name of love, just as Jesus did.

In the Old Testament, we find an example of someone who is willing to die in the name of love in Esther: 'Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish"' (Esther 4:15-16).

By saying 'If I perish, I perish', Esther is recognising that, although knowing her danger be great and evident, and knowing the uncertainty of the king's mind and the severity which he showed to Vashti, she would never neglect her duty to God and God's people. She decides to go to the king, and cast herself upon God, asking for safety and success. She is signifying that she readily and cheerfully will risk her life for the good of her people and to honour God. Esther believes that if losing her life was the pleasure of God, then she should lose it. She was content in his will for her life and left herself entirely in his hands.

The closing verses of our selected Scripture mirror Esther's sacrifice: 'We have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him... The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us' (1 John 3:21-22, 24). Jesus is calling us to seek out and action justice everywhere, just as Esther risked her life for the sake of her people, and as Jesus himself laid down his life for the sake of the people God loved.



Lord, fan the flame of your love in me so that I will always love others like you. Amen.

MAJOR EDITH LOUZOLO

RWANDA AND BURUNDI COMMAND

Major Edith Louzolo is married and the mother of four children. She has been a Salvation Army officer for 28 years. She has served as an officer at various corps in the Congo (Brazzaville) Territory and also in Belgium, in social work and at the Officer Training College. She is currently serving as Command Secretary for Women's Ministries in the Rwanda and Burundi Command.



ADMINISTERING JUSTICE

ZECHARIAH 7

MAJOR JASHIBEN D. KHRISTI

'This is what the Lord Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another' (Zechariah 7:9).

I still remember my economics class in which our professor referred to some luxury apartments and tiny, overcrowded huts that were built side by side. While one family enjoys more than they need, another is struggling to eat, have access to safe drinking water, health facilities and sanitary products, and lives in an unsafe environment.

Years have passed but this universal situation remains the same. It shows a clear picture of social injustice, where the condition of poor people is overlooked.

In general, social Justice means all people should have equal access to wealth, health, well-being, justice and opportunities. Justice is not an optional extra, it is essential; it is not a one-time action but a continuous process. If we look at the Bible, social justice has been summarised in one commandment – 'love your neighbour as yourself'. Love doesn't do anything wrong to its neighbour; instead, it is ready to lay down its life for them.

Our God shows his love and compassion relentlessly. The psalmist says, 'He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities' (Psalm 103:10). Though the Israelites had experienced many miracles done by God, they were grumbling for security, food, water, etc. Yet God showed love and mercy towards them.

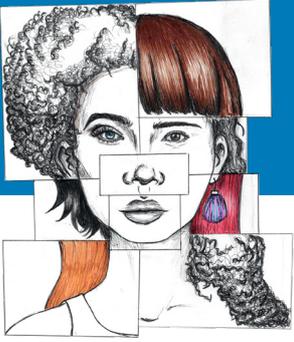
We read in the Bible about the constant love of our Lord Jesus Christ towards the distressed and needy during his ministry on the earth. 'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (Matthew 9:36). Jesus Christ has set an example of true justice, love and compassion towards others.

The seventh chapter of Zechariah deals with mourning and fasting as a practice which the people were following for 70 years. However, God was not happy with their mourning and fasting as they were going against God's commandment in verses 5-6. Therefore, God spoke with them through Zechariah, making clear what he expects of his people: to act against the issue of social injustice.

We find the same situation today. People tend to follow the usual practice of sacraments and religious ceremonies blindly. Their lack of love and compassion causes them to fail to see that they are playing a vital role in the violation of basic rights of people who are victims of discrimination and injustice.

In God's eyes, people are more important than practices. He does not look at the position, personality or prosperity of a person, while humans are very concerned about all these things. God expects us not to neglect charity but to serve

'LOVE DOESN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG TO ITS NEIGHBOUR; INSTEAD, IT IS READY TO LAY DOWN ITS LIFE FOR THEM.'



DISCUSS:

- * What injustices have you discovered happening around you?
- * What was your reaction towards these injustices?
- * How can you respond to God's call on your life to participate in his mission?

out of love without discrimination. Many issues related to social justice arise due to selfishness, egotism and hunger for power or position. If people understand this, there will be no poverty or trade of humans; no war or refugees; no preference for men over women. If there is true justice they could stay peacefully in their homes and countries, and people would get equal opportunities in every sector. Due to inadequate health services or insufficient finances people die, and women and children are being trafficked in many countries. These situations are clearly visible, yet people close their eyes, turn their faces and walk away like the priest and the Levite who changed their route after seeing a man lying half dead alongside the road at Jericho. However, the Good Samaritan showed mercy to that man and saved his life. Social justice issues can occur in relation to practically any aspect of society where inequality can arise as a result of unjust prejudices or policies.

When will this situation change? Who will change it? We must come forward to change the situation. It's time to act. Remarkable efforts are made by the United Nations, governments and other organisations. They do their best by creating new legislation and initiating awareness campaigns. We may be aware of those provisions, but we need to change our mindset to bring change in our community, our country. Let's have a Christlike mindset, who was and is full of justice, love and compassion. We are his followers; we need to follow his footsteps. Let's listen to what God says, 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another' (v 9).

General Brian Peddle has given us a call to action; no matter who or where we are, regardless of our appointments or position, we must respond to the call and do as God has commanded us.



Dear Lord, help me to give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Give me a compassionate heart to fulfil my call to mission. Amen.

MAJOR JASHIBEN D. KHRISTI

INDIA NATIONAL OFFICE

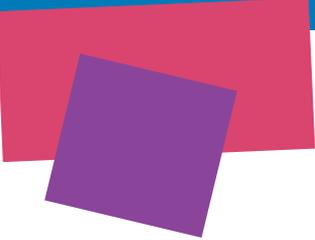
Major Khristi is an officer of the India Western Territory, serving as the Child Protection Specialist for India, based at the India National Office in Kolkata. She has served as an officer for 28 years and has a master's degree in Social Work.



A HEART FOR JUSTICE

MARK 10:35-45

CAPTAIN MARIE LANGE DRUART



Recently I was watching a documentary about the issue of 'temporary marriage' in Iran, *Nikah mut'ah*, also known as *Sigheh*, literally meaning 'pleasure marriage'. In this kind of marriage, a married man can have as many temporary wives as he wants, with up to four permanent wives, and has the right to break the contract anytime he wants. Many secular Iranians are irked by what they perceive to be the hypocrisy of clerics who have made ample use of temporary marriage over the years but are adamantly opposed to premarital or extramarital sex. The practice of *Sigheh* enables many married men to enter temporary marriages with women other than their wives and also allows the establishment of chastity houses.

How can we remain unmoved by such horrible treatment toward young girls and women in our world? How can we turn our face from such hypocrisy? A better question to ask is, as a Christ follower, what is our responsibility toward the maltreatment of others and when do we dare to take action?

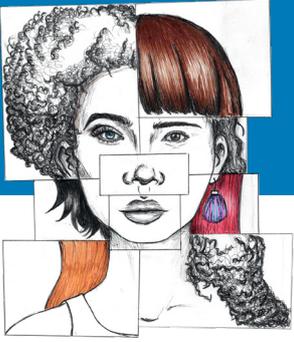
Through this passage of Mark 10:35-45, we first learn that every Christ follower will have to face suffering, but they are called to serve people despite their own personal struggles. Unlike James and John, both of whom were very interested in being at Jesus' side in his glory, every disciple must recognise that the way to be at Jesus' side is not by demanding to be elevated in status. The way to be at Jesus' side is actually by being willing to humble oneself, to become a servant of all. Note the context in which the two men brazenly asked Jesus about their future positions: Jesus has just told his disciples how he would have to suffer and be humiliated before being glorified. How shocking that instead of paying attention to what Jesus just told them, their focus is still on themselves!

What the disciples failed to see is that Jesus actually taught them about the conditions required to have access to his glory. He used two images: first, 'the cup', an image of contents or circumstances that are difficult to swallow and second, 'baptism', literally meaning 'to be plunged', here conveying Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection. Jesus knew that before he entered into his Father's glory, he would have to drink from the cup of suffering to the point of death. The disciples did not grasp the implication of their request.

'NO MATTER OUR CURRENT PERSONAL SUFFERING, WE SHOULD STRIVE TO BE AT JESUS' SIDE, SERVING HUMANITY IN HUMILITY.'

Now, if we look at this passage from the perspective of social justice, we can acknowledge that everyone faces unjust behaviour or unfair treatment at some point, which is a form of suffering. Just as Jesus knows that James and John will also face the cup of suffering in their own way we, as disciples of Christ, realise that we will suffer hardships in this life for various reasons. However, what we learn through those experiences enables us to look beyond our own pain in order to focus on how to tangibly fight on another's behalf, and that glorifies our Saviour.

A bit further into the discussion, Jesus reminds his disciples what it means to be a servant in God's Kingdom. He demonstrates glory versus humility as he contrasts 'the rulers' or 'the high officials who exercise authority over them' and 'the great' in God's Kingdom who are the servants of all. In fact, Christ's followers should focus on helping anyone who faces unfair treatment, serving them humbly and with a servant's heart. In Mark 10:43 Jesus told them, 'Whoever would be great among you must be your servant'. Note how the word 'slave' is used in verse 44 which emphasises a key posture of subservience that the word 'servant' does



DISCUSS:

- * Consider any time you have served for man's glory and not Christ's glory.
- * Who can you support within your city with prayer, time or finances?
- * Knowing Jesus' heart for serving in the midst of difficulty, what practical steps can you take to be a voice for the voiceless despite your own personal struggles?

not, in order to grasp the full meaning of servanthood in the Kingdom of God. The word 'slave' stresses the subordination to the one who is being served. This reminds us how we are bound as subordinates to Jesus which spills over in service to our fellow man.

A Christ follower's aim should be to value others more than oneself. As 'the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many', all disciples are urged to follow this principle. Having a heart for justice through service includes pouring out to those who may not have had the same opportunities or privileges in terms of wealth, material, education, social status or gender.

In application of the Word, knowing about this practice of 'temporary marriage' or any other social injustice that we are made aware of should not just stir us to be moved emotionally, but it should also propel us toward action. Many things could be done to grant a voice for those women and girls. Raising awareness about such situations can be the first step. We don't have to be an expert to start the process, but we can meet with and learn from the experts and get involved in some way. As our world is filled with social injustice, no matter our current personal suffering, we should strive to be at Jesus' side, serving humanity in humility.



Lord, thank you for being the true example of serving humanity through suffering. Please forgive us when we serve looking for acknowledgement rather than with humility. Help us to serve with a deep desire to bring justice in our circle of influence, forbidding that our own suffering would cause us to focus inward and ignore a world of injustice that beckons to be righted. Amen.

CAPTAIN MARIE LANGE DRUART

FRANCE AND BELGIUM TERRITORY

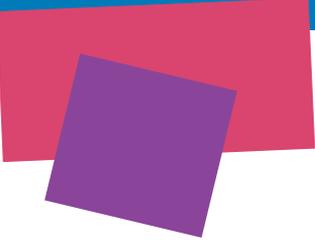
Captain Marie Lange Druart is currently serving as a corps officer in Liège, Belgium, but is originally from France. She is married and has two children. Marie has a heart to raise awareness about modern slavery and enjoys making new connections with different people wherever the Lord takes her.



WHAT DOES GOD ASK OF YOU?

MATTHEW 25:31-46

MAJOR VALESKA JARA



'The King will answer, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me"' (Matthew 25:40).

How can we do justice by being a follower of Christ? Reading this question, it seems that the answer comes in an obvious way, since Christians are often likened to righteous beings. However, doing justice is like a different, almost elusive responsibility, as we struggle and long to be considered righteous. Doing justice is something that does not seem to concern everyone. We come to think of it as a special or separate calling, only for some.

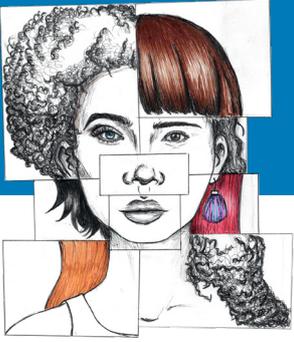
The truth is that since the Old Testament the call to do justice is for everyone, since we live in a world where, because of sin, injustice reigns.

The call to do justice can be found in Micah 6:7-8: 'Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for my sin? You have been told what the Lord expects of you: to practice justice, to love mercy, and to humble yourself before your God.' In this passage, we can clearly see that the justice God expects of his people is practical. It was a time when the means of redemption was through sacrifice and altars. Doing justice not only by command but by love was what God really required them to learn to do. Of course the people had to perform the ritual of sacrifice, but in God's eyes it was empty if they were unjust to their brothers.

Therefore, acting justly is not a choice which only some may make, but it is an essential part of being a follower of Christ. This essential part surfaces when we have our own transforming experience with God. When we come to Christ's feet empty and without purpose, he fills our lives with joy, hope and of course with love. Scripture says that God's love has been poured out in our hearts. Divine love is the engine that moves us to stop looking only at our own problems or situations and it moves us to look at the lives of others, putting ourselves in the place of those who suffer. When this happens, we will genuinely want to do what we can to alleviate their suffering whatever it may be.

1 John 3:18 says, 'Dear children, let us not love in word or in speech, but in actions and in truth.' The way to make the world see that we are true followers of Christ is by demonstrating his love, not by lips, and not by a love that stays at the pulpit, but a practical love that comes down to the world that needs it. Love is to be

'DIVINE LOVE IS THE ENGINE THAT MOVES US TO STOP LOOKING ONLY AT OUR OWN PROBLEMS OR SITUATIONS AND IT MOVES US TO LOOK AT THE LIVES OF OTHERS.'



DISCUSS:

- * How can you respond to the call to do justice in your community?
- * What are some of the barriers that followers of Christ encounter in the way of doing justice?
- * How does the comfort of today's protected Christians in our churches prevent them from seeing Christ suffering in today's social inequalities?

demonstrated through clear actions to our neighbour. We must show a love that looks with interested eyes at the need of the people around us, a love that embraces, that contains, that shares, a love that develops others, that teaches, that empowers, that moves freely in the communities where we live, that recognises the needs and acts to satisfy them. We must display a love that is Christ himself walking in the midst of need and reaches out, through us, to that need.

God wants to be honoured by his people, not only with great and prepared programmes, but when we love one another and especially when we extend that love to those who live in difficult situations within our communities and beyond.

Matthew 25:40 says, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.' This passage offers us both an opportunity and a challenge with regard to doing justice. It provides a list of actions that are within our reach and that we can do for the unjust situations that affect our neighbours. Hunger, thirst, lack of clothing are but the consequences of the inequalities that our world generates more and more every day. The scales are tipped toward economic models that favour the one who has more and jeopardise the one who has less; we often find discrimination characterised on the foreigner and lack of empathy with those deprived of freedom and other minorities. The response of those on his right and left is, 'Lord, when did we see you or when did we not see you?' We live so embedded in our 'blessings' that we do not see that Jesus is reflected in every need around us and that, as followers of Christ, we are called to intervene in practical ways.



Lord, help us to be sensitive, to see you in the need of our neighbour, to come out of our comfort zone and be moved to do something for him, because in this way we honour your name. Amen.

MAJOR VALESKA JARA

SOUTH AMERICA WEST TERRITORY

Major Valeska Jara is currently serving as the commanding officer of the Central Corps in Santiago, Chile, and as Mission Secretary in the central area of the Chile Division.



SEEK WHAT IS GOOD

AMOS 5:10-15

ROSY KEANE

Amos was a sheep-farmer who lived sometime around 760 BC, and he was raised out of his 'everyday' job to prophesy of God's great fury at the injustice happening in the surrounding nations. Not only were the Gentiles oppressing their neighbours through war and exploitation, but God's own people in Judah and Israel were joining in!

In Amos 3:2, God laments, 'You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.' God outlines the ways people have been hurting one another and exploiting the needy for profit.

THE POWERFUL TREADING ON THE NEEDY.

'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 5:11).

When making wine, people would stand upon the grapes until the fruit was crushed and they could profit from the liquid inside. In the same way, the rich were treading upon the poor until they died, to make profit for themselves. The courts were corrupt and the measuring weights were dishonest – no one had opportunity to have their case heard. The powerful were failing to hand out justice, silencing the honest, hurting the hopeless and despising the vulnerable.

But the sin didn't end there! Amos records the Israelites telling the prophets to stop prophesying (Amos 2:12), setting up rival places of worship and ignoring God's call to live in love. They were trying to silence and tread on God, too.

Perhaps they imagined God wouldn't notice?

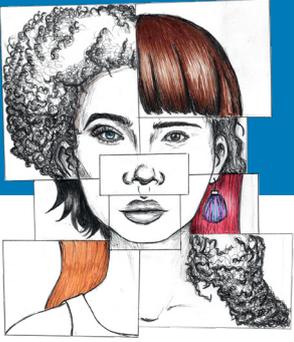
OUTWARD RELIGION WHILE HURTING OTHERS.

I do the dishes in my house, and one thing that's very hard to get off is peanut butter. If I'm not paying 'careful attention', a spoon with peanut butter still on it can end up back in the drawer! One side can look clean, but the other is not. It will make everything else dirty, and could even make you sick if you were to ignore it. Jesus talks about the spiritual equivalent of a dirty spoon in Matthew 23:25, saying 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence'.

In the Book of Amos, the Israelites are in the same situation. They continued to show outward signs of worship, but they were not paying 'careful attention' to God. They might appear to obey him, but they delighted in injustice and evil. They were becoming sick with injustice.

God says: '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).

'IF WE WANT TO LIVE BY SEEKING GOOD, WE NEED TO LIVE BY SEEKING GOD.'



DISCUSS:

- * What are some immediate concerns in your community where the powerful are treading on the needy? What is one thing you could do to make a difference?
- * Are there times you are tempted to act religiously on the outside, but inside you aren't paying 'careful attention' to God?
- * Do you identify more with God's anger or God's grief?
- * What can you do to 'seek good', and where does God's light still need to shine in your life?

Yet, amid God's great anger, we also witness God's deep grief at the many, many sins of the people. In Amos 4:11, God's lament is that the people still have not returned to God.

SEEK WHAT IS GOOD.

God's aim wasn't to just punish the nations for doing wrong; God wants people to rejoin the oneness and fullness of the family of God. God offers a way home to those who want to turn from their wicked ways. How? We need to seek 'good'.

'Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is' (Amos 5:14).

And what is 'good'? Good is justice that has a view of human wholeness in mind.

'Justice' comes from a root word that means 'conforming to truth'. When we seek justice, from others or ourselves, we want all parts of the truth to come to light. We don't want anything hidden. We know anyone can be forgiven, including the unjust, if they turn and seek good. 1 John 1:7 says, 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.'

If we want to live by seeking good, we need to live by seeking God. We need to allow God's light to shine within our own lives so we may light the path for others as we advocate for justice. Then it won't be an outward act; God will truly be with us as we say God is.

Poetess Maya Angelou says, 'I'm convinced of this: Good done anywhere is good done everywhere. For a change, start by speaking to people rather than walking by them like they're stones that don't matter. As long as you're breathing, it's never too late to do some good.'



Your Word says 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good' (Romans 12:21), so help me to seek good and seek God in all things, by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

ROSY KEANE

NEW ZEALAND, FIJI, TONGA AND SAMOA TERRITORY

Rosy is a prophet, poet and holy romantic. She searches for the ferocious beauty of God in all creation and people, and articulates this through spoken word, which she has performed internationally. She is the resource and online community specialist for The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa Women's Ministries, and her firm belief is that God is calling the women in the Body of Christ to stand up, proclaim the message of the Resurrection and lead. Rosy is a committed soldier of Upper Hutt Corps and has many Salvationist women in her whakapapa (lineage). Rosy and her husband Scott have been married for seven years.



THE DESIGN OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

MATTHEW 7:7-12

CAPTAIN PERITA WABOMBA



'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 'Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 7:7-12).

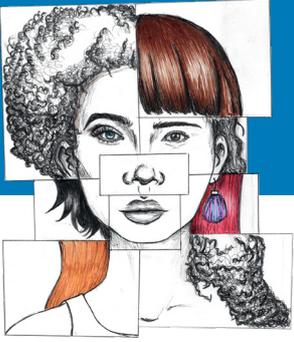
Social justice is attained when there is equal distribution of wealth, opportunities and privileges within a society. The struggle for social justice is caused by individuals giving in to sin, corruption and evil, leading to others not receiving what is fairly due to them. The fight for social justice encourages social systems to act fairly towards each member of society so that all people can live and live well. Fairness between God's people is his desire: 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 7:12).

In Psalm 9, the Bible expresses the need for those who are oppressed to turn to God in prayer, and he judges in favour of the oppressed: 'The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He rules the world in righteousness and judges the people with equity' (Psalm 9:7-8).

'IN EVERYTHING, DO TO OTHERS WHAT YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO TO YOU.'

In Isaiah 1:2-9, the Lord is judging Israel, with the covenant supplying the terms of reference. At this point, the people of Israel had been sinful and the place was rife with corruption and evil. The Lord God always acts in righteousness because he is righteous by nature. In this divine righteousness, God called Israel to be his people. They were placed in his covenant and they were to become in right relationship with him through faith. Therefore, they were expected to live in right relationship with each other and also with people from other nations. This calling did not exempt any member of society, since even the king was called into a right relationship with God, so that he may influence and guide his people and the surrounding nations.

In Jesus' days on earth, he used his holy influence to teach in the ways of social justice. Through his teaching, his followers discovered that living righteously means living in relationship with God, as well as upholding fairness in relationships with others. In doing this, we will be obeying Jesus' command to 'do to others what you would have them do to you' (Matthew 7:12). This means treating fellow human beings with love and respect and responding to their needs.



DISCUSS:

- * How did Jesus fight for social justice? Are his methods relevant today?
- * How do you strive to live out social justice as a Christian?
- * Discuss a time when you have been available to someone in need. How were you able to support them?

The Church is mandated to proclaim the mission and message of Jesus to the whole world, especially the ministry of peace and reconciliation. As an Army, fighting for this godly mission, we must do the works of love and mercy and seek justice for everyone, whatever the cost. As Christian women, we have a critical and prophetic role in speaking the truth. By asserting our God-given humanity and gifts, we further the gospel. Women face the task of advocating and modelling gender justice in the Church and in wider society.

The focus on social justice in the Bible is shown through the people Jesus chooses to surround himself with. He does not gather with people esteemed as worthy, but he mixes with the 'lesser' crowds of society. Jesus allows the little children come to him (Mark 10:14), he shows compassion to the woman suffering from bleeding (Luke 8:47), and he turns the values of the world upside down by teaching values of the Kingdom when he gives the Sermon on the Mount. As followers of Christ, we should continue Jesus' work of loving the unloved.

It is the overall duty of the Church to take care of whoever or whatever requires support. It is for God to decide what is righteous, and we can work to discern that through following him. As followers of Christ, and therefore enablers of social justice, we must fight for fairness in society. Will you commit to taking care of the environment? Will you advocate against social evils like human trafficking and modern slavery, child sacrifice and domestic abuse? Will you live a life that is separate from violence, crime and war? Will you care for people in need? For the poor? For the sick? For the refugee? If your neighbour asks for bread, will you offer him a stone, or will you give him the help he has requested?



Father, whatever the cost, make me a special instrument of your love, peace and reconciliation. Allow justice to roll like a river in all nations of the world and your righteousness like a never-ending stream. Amen.

CAPTAIN PERITA WABOMBA

UGANDA TERRITORY

Captain Perita Wabomba is currently serving as Administrative Secretary to Women's Ministries in Uganda. She says, 'My work is a privilege granted to me by God, through the mentorship of our territorial leaders and the Women's Ministries department. It is a great and challenging task, but all glory and honour be to God!'



GROWING IN CHRIST

HEBREWS 6:1-12

CAPTAIN SARAH ILSTERS

When I was pregnant with my daughter, I signed up for a weekly email update so I could follow the growth and development of the new life that was forming inside me. When she was born, I was eager to see how she reached different milestones in what she understood and what she could do. Sometimes I was waiting with such impatience to see the next thing! We see in this passage that spiritual life should reflect physical life.

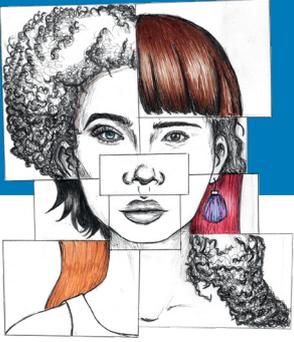
Hebrews 6:1-12 starts with the word 'therefore'. This word always points us to the preceding text and looking at Hebrews 5:11-14 we see that the writer of the letter is frustrated with the recipients of the letter. They are 'slow to learn', by now they 'ought to be teachers', they are stuck on milk – the elementary truths of God's Word, when they should be getting mature on solid food – training themselves to distinguish between good and evil. This is a matter of discernment and it involves our consciences, senses, minds and our bodies. Can we recognise something tempting us before it traps us? Can we distinguish between a right use of Scripture and a wrong one? Do we really see situations going on around us and understand how God wants us to fight for justice? The goal of our life with God is not just to get saved. We are to grow, mature, teach, go deeper in God's Word in order to take action impacting the world around us.

The people who received this letter were those instructed in the Jewish faith, they were piecing together how their newfound faith in Christ as Messiah went together with their understanding of their Jewish practices. However, they were getting stuck arguing about the basics, rather than depending fully on Christ and putting all their energies into living for him and growing up to be like him. The elementary teachings of our faith are essential: the importance of faith, not trying to get saved by what we do, understanding the importance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, resurrection and eternal life (Hebrews 6:1-2). But maturity requires us to grow further, to have a full knowledge of Scripture, wrestling with an ever-widening view of who God is and what he requires of us.

The original intention of verses 4-6 would have been to warn Hebrew Christians who, having once accepted Christ, chose to return to Judaism and thereby commit apostasy. There are differing views about these verses today – are these people who were once Christians and turned away, or are they people who never really became Christians? Some Christians read these verses and especially the words 'impossible...to be brought back to repentance' and worry there is something they can do which means there is no road back to Christ. However, the main message here is that these are people who totally reject Christ – it is impossible to reject Christ and be saved. There is no other way to be saved apart from belief in the Cross. There is a hardness of heart that makes it impossible for a person to repent.

There is then a picture of two gardens – both experience the rain falling on them often (Matthew 5:45), one garden produces a crop 'useful to whom it is farmed', the other

'WE WILL BE GROWING IN CHRISTLIKE BEHAVIOUR, WORKING FOR JUSTICE, AND WE WILL BE INVOLVED IN SEEING GOD'S KINGDOM GROW.'



DISCUSS:

- * Where are you right now in your relationship with God? Are you stuck with the essentials? Have you turned away from God? Are you training daily in distinguishing good and evil?
- * What good fruits do you see growing in your life?
- * Who are the people around you who God is calling you to help? Where can you work for justice right now where you are?

worthless 'thorns and thistles'. This picture echoes Jesus' teaching about trees and fruits. He says a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them. Our lives are the gardens. If we are maturing in the faith our 'crop' or our actions, the things we do in life, will be useful to those around us. We will be growing in Christlike behaviour, working for justice and we will be involved in seeing God's Kingdom grow. If we choose not to grow, we are in danger of producing thorns and thistles which are of no use to anyone. These are hard words to read – but it is beneficial that we can see so starkly the consequences of standing still and not growing, or turning away from Christ.

Throughout Scripture God has a dream – to have a people who love him, seek to understand him and want to work together with him to see his will being done on earth as it is in Heaven. The writer to the Hebrews was confident that his readers were part of God's dream team – that they would move on from knowledge of the elementary teachings to knowledge of deeper truths. He commends them in verse 10 for the work and the love they had shown to God's people. They are reminded that God is not unjust – he remembers all the good things we do when we work for him and love people in his name. These believers were helping other believers – their brothers and sisters in Christ, maybe sometimes putting themselves in difficult situations. Working together with and loving our brothers and sisters around the world is just as important today – to help those who are suffering and in difficult and sometimes dangerous situations. We are all part of God's dream team and in that way are part of each other. These verses end with a call to perseverance, to not become lazy. How can we continually grow and develop in our relationship with God and our love for those around us? We must continually look to God's Word to inspire and guide us and we must take action, not be passive, but act for justice in the situations where God has placed each one of us.



Jesus, may my life reflect your values and may I never lack perseverance to continue to become a mature follower.

CAPTAIN SARAH ILSTERS

SWEDEN AND LATVIA TERRITORY

Captain Sarah Ilsters is the Assistant Regional Leader with responsibility for training in Latvia. As well as her current appointment, she has worked in the areas of children and youth work and leading a corps. Sarah is married to Aivis and they have two children. In her spare time she loves to read, explore her surroundings and have meaningful conversations.



GODLY SORROW LEADS TO ACTION

2 CORINTHIANS 7

CAPTAIN SUMMRA NEMAT

How many times a day do you hear someone say 'sorry'? People often use this word to avoid the consequences of their actions, or because they regret being caught. A friend of mine says 'sorry' just to finish a conversation and avoid an argument.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, brings a very clear difference between godly and worldly grief. He says godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. Godly sorrow works in this way: first sorrow, then repentance and finally, a changed life.

Why did Paul mention the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow to the Corinthians? There were many things going on in Corinth that caused Paul to confront them. The church was weak, struggling with division and spiritual immaturity. Some opposed Paul and questioned his credentials.

Many of the problems and challenges confronting the church at Corinth are the same that confront us today. We judge each other which forms divisions in the Church. Our work should be for unity of the Church, not for division and to uplift the Church, not to create hurdles. A judgmental attitude takes us away from our duty which is to bring people to God.

Paul was saddened at having to write such a difficult letter to the Corinthians about sin. In our life's journey we also experience this difficulty and it seems hard to tell the truth when the truth is unpleasant. We do not feel good about doing it, but as believers we have to do it, because sometimes difficult words need to be said and as a follower of Jesus we must do what God has called us to do: to love a person's soul.

This leads me to reflect on these questions: As believers, what kind of attitude do we have? Do we have a judgmental attitude towards others?

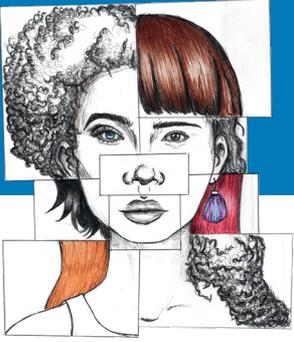
When Paul received the good news from Titus that many in Corinth had repented and there was just a small and fractious group that was continuing to cause problems, Paul encouraged the believers of Corinth about church discipline which helped to bring many to repentance.

Repentance only comes when we can see that sin is painful to God. When we realise that sin is a hurdle to holiness, we experience godly sorrow. Godly sorrow is a motivator to see ourselves the way God sees us and to help us to repent and align ourselves into being more like Christ. This sorrow compels us to repent and seek the holiness of God.

Psalm 51:4 assures us: 'Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.' David admitted that he had sinned and had done what was evil in God's sight. Godly sorrow leads to true repentance which does not care about the consequences but just wants things to be made right and is concerned more with God than self.

Paul was inviting the Corinthians to purify themselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God, which is a twofold action: he was asking them to turn away from sin and to turn towards God, to work towards holiness, to become mature in faith. Paul was asking them to live in this world but not to act like this world. It is written in Romans 12:2, 'Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind'. We need to be purified and to come out of the agenda of this world; then we will be able to see the difference.

'MANY OF THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE CHURCH AT CORINTH ARE THE SAME THAT CONFRONT US TODAY.'



DISCUSS:

- * Think about someone who is doing wrong. What do you want to say to that person? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you speak the truth to that person.
- * If 'godly sorrow' leads to repentance, how can we best produce this 'godly sorrow' in ourselves and others?
- * Think about an injustice that is happening around you. Can you apply the principles that Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 7:11?

To live a holy life, we need to open another layer, to analyse ourselves. We are very good at deceiving ourselves, but we need to be truthful. 2 Corinthians 7:11 describes this very beautifully: 'See what this godly sorrow has produced in you, what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.'

Godly grief produces earnestness and a desire to do something about the wrong that was committed, as part of true repentance. It also gives an eagerness to clear ourselves and a strong desire to clear our name, or to get rid of the guilt and shame, and to prove ourselves to be trustworthy again. Zacchaeus is an example in Luke 19:8, giving back double the amount he had taken.

A desire to prove ourselves as faithful and righteous again also reveals fear. Some translations use the word 'alarm'. Again, the emphasis is on the action. There is longing and zeal that is immediately provoked within the person to do right, to correct the error, and to restore themselves as trustworthy and faithful. The idea is continued in the next sentence: 'At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.'

Are we willing to go the extra mile to do right?

After analysing ourselves through the lens of Scripture we can go deeper in our relationship with the Lord and we are able to see what injustices that we were once blind to.

The Corinthians handled their rebuke and correction of sin properly. They accepted that they had done wrong and quickly responded with a godly response of grief, eagerness, diligence and a longing for what is right.

I am reminded that God's love is for all of us (John 3:16), but we have all sinned (Romans 3:23) and there will be consequences if we do not repent!

As Christ-followers we are called to exhibit his character and to 'do justice'. We are called to action. We are called to confront evil and to make right what is wrong.



Dear Lord, may your love and the conviction of the Holy Spirit enable us to act justly regarding our own attitude, and may we always seek justice for others. Amen

CAPTAIN SUMMRA NEMAT

PAKISTAN TERRITORY

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A HEART FOR JUSTICE

AMOS 5:24

LIEUTENANT VERÓNICA CENTENO

When we hear the phrase, 'He is a man of God', we think of famous evangelists, reverends, missionaries, we think of those Christian people who preach and teach God's Word because of their calling. Amos was a man of God who was devoted to serving the Lord and his lifestyle reflected his calling. Amos saw life as something controlled by a God of justice. Throughout the centuries, Amos's message has impacted God's people. Today's nations need to hear his message too.

So, as Christians, what do we understand by 'social justice'? The essence of social justice is the equal distribution of all that is considered as the common good within a society, based on equity, equal opportunities and respect for human rights.

God spoke through Amos that well-known phrase, that this collection of Bible studies is named after, 'But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!' (Amos 5:24). This rolling of justice like a river and righteousness like a stream makes us think about the need for having fair laws and then applying them properly.

**'SOMETIMES WE
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But God's desire is deeper. It is about correct moral principles (justice), and the right behaviour towards others (judgement), the sort of behaviour that gives others the opportunity to experience good and beautiful things due to the way we act. The prophet is pleading that people's hearts and lives be governed by the values and the way of living set out in God's Word, rather than by following the way of the world. In order for justice to roll like a river, and righteousness like a stream, we must find the courage to do what is right.

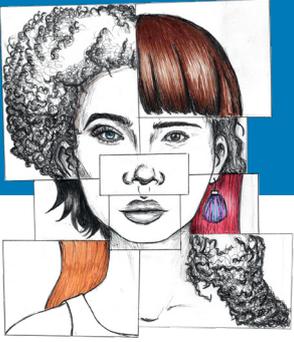
In his time, Amos attuned his heart to God's heart and condemned injustice as he saw it: he spoke out about a corrupt judicial system where the judges accepted bribery and declared the innocent guilty (Amos 2: 6-12).

He spoke out about a rich class who looked down on the poor. It was a social class that enjoyed seeing the misery of the poor, and that obstructed the way of the humble and helpless (Amos 2:6-7; 3:10).

He spoke out about the wheat and bread scalpers. They were people who didn't care about people's hunger and needs, not even about the most basic things for human beings to survive on (Amos 8:4-6).

Don't you think that the various things that Amos spoke out about are still a reality in our days? The prophet invites us to seek to do good and not evil, to hate evil and love good (Amos 5:14-15).

In my current appointment, I serve vulnerable women who have sought shelter and comfort in our centres. Every time I speak to the ladies that live in our homes, I see injustice.



DISCUSS:

- * Can human-led justice be compared to God-led justice?
- * What failures do we see today in social justice that do not consider God's will?
- * What role does the Church play in the fight for social justice?

I hear them say: 'I couldn't get a job because I live on the street' or 'I haven't completed my schooling – I have no degrees, I have no qualifications.' Usually if they do manage to get work, they get caught in a trap of labour exploitation, earning very little pay, but working very long hours.

In the first place, it is not right that they have had to leave their homes, their children and, in some cases, even their own countries. But this is the state of our world. Due to domestic violence and threats, many women live in situations of gross injustice. The women in my team's care have had to take refuge while continuing treatment that will help them overcome fear and anxieties, and they can be rehabilitated to independence.

Amos spoke out very honestly about sin. He clashed with the false religious leaders of his time and was not intimidated by priests or the king. He courageously continued to speak out his message loud and clear. What does God expect from us? God expects honesty, mercy towards others, justice and humbleness. Many of the things that happened in Amos's time are evident in today's society. In Amos we learn that sometimes we need immense courage to follow through with what God is asking of us.

How do we do justice like Christ did, as his followers in this world? God created all people. Therefore, forgetting those who are poor, or victims of gender-based violence, or victims of human trafficking, implies that we forget those who God loves and who Christ came to save. We must do more than just feel anguish and pity for the poor and oppressed. We need to act with compassion to stop injustice and help those in need.



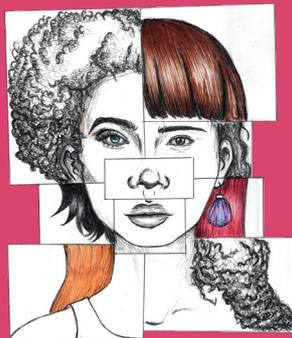
Lord, my God, who accompanies those who are alone, the sick, the little ones and those who suffer, help us to create a world in which, beyond our own needs and wounds, we can practise justice, compassion, love and help those who are in need.

LIEUTENANT VERÓNICA CENTENO

SOUTH AMERICA EAST TERRITORY

Lieutenant Verónica Centeno currently serves as the officer manager of Amparo y Betania Home. This is a shelter that cares for women living on the street and in situations of social vulnerability.





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