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How Do I Make It Right?

DOING JUSTICE IN A BROKEN WORLD

Tracy Young



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Tracy Young



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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This study is part of In the Works, a faith formation program for adults.

Studies in this series include:

Where Do I Come In? Joining God's Mission

What Do I Do with My Life? Serving God through Work

What Do I Owe? Managing the Gifts God Gives You

How Do I Make It Right? Doing Justice in a Broken World

How Do I Begin? Sharing Your Faith

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How to Use This Book

How Do I Make It Right? Doing Justice in a Broken World, as well as the other books in the In the Works series, offers a unique format that combines insightful daily devotions with a discussion guide for small groups. It's simple and easy to use. Here's all you need to do:

Before your group meeting, please carefully read the five daily readings that offer insights on the topic for the week. You'll find them stimulating and full of practical ways to help you embrace God's passion for doing justice in the world. We suggest reading one devotional on each of the five days rather than reading through all five at once. That way you can take your time and reflect on what the reading says to you personally. You may want to highlight lines that speak to you or jot questions or comments in the margin.

Note: Before your first small group session, you should have received a copy of this book so you can read the daily readings for Week 1 prior to your first meeting.

During your group meeting, use the small group discussion guides found at the end of each week of readings. These self-directing guides offer plenty to talk about for forty-five minutes to an hour or more. Groups should feel free to use them selectively, choosing the questions or activities that fit the group and the amount of time you have.

Each discussion guide includes

- an **Opening** question or activity that takes group members into the topic for the session.
- a **Bible Study** of passages that relate to the topic of the week. Group members should bring their own Bibles to the meetings or arrange to have a supply of Bibles available.
- **Group Discussion** questions that take participants back into the daily readings for the week and help relate them to their daily lives. Groups should feel free to select which

of these questions they want to discuss; of course, you can always substitute questions and comments from group members for our precooked ones!

- a brief **Closing** time of focus and prayer.
- **Action Options** for groups and for individuals. These are suggestions for follow-up activities that flow from the daily readings and group discussion.

From time to time, the discussion guides offer **Options** or **Alternative Approaches**, giving groups a choice of activities or questions.

Of course you'll want someone who's willing to lead the discussion and keep things moving for each small group meeting. But the discussion guide is written for the whole group, not just the leader. Together, may you grow in your understanding of justice and how you can contribute to making things right—at home, in the neighborhood, and in the wider world.

—Faith Alive staff

Introduction

“He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

—Micah 6:8

Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly.

We may have a pretty good idea of how to walk with God. We devote time to reading our Bibles and spend time with God in prayer. We worship with God’s people and seek God’s will for our lives. Picking up this book means we’re serious about wanting to walk with God. We might need to work at the humble part sometimes, but we have an idea of what that humble walk is about.

We may know the sorts of things we need to do to love mercy (or kindness, depending on your translation). We give an uplifting word to a discouraged friend, share a smile with a stranger, or give money to help someone who is down and out. We’re not always in the mood to bestow kindness on someone, and we might need to work on the loving part sometimes, but we have an idea of what loving mercy and kindness is about.

But what about acting justly, or, as we call it in this book, making things right in a broken world? Do we really have an idea of what that’s about?

Some of us may have the idea that biblical justice, the view of justice we get from spending time in the Scriptures, has to do with folks on the sidelines. You might remember that when the word *justice* or its close friend *righteousness* comes up in the Bible, it’s often close to words like *poverty*, *hunger*, or *oppressed*. That gives us a clue about what biblical justice, God’s justice, might be about.

But what about *doing justice*? What does that mean? What should it mean for us?

This little book aims to explore God’s call to pursue justice for the least and the lost. For the first three weeks we’ll look at passages from the Old Testament, preparing our hearts, minds, and lives for the coming of an unexpected and new sort of King—entering into our study and our story with the ministry of Jesus. Then we’ll look a little closer at what pursuing justice means for our relationships with God and one another, and how injustice warps right relationships. Finally, we’ll look at some specific ways we can move toward doing justice and explore some specific challenges for acting justly in our contemporary world.

I hope that as you move through these daily readings and discussion guides you’ll see with fresh eyes God’s deep and enduring love for those who suffer and who long for restoration. And I hope you’ll be challenged in your humble walk with God to build on acts of mercy by pursuing justice: life-changing, culture-challenging, shalom-seeking, Christ-following justice.

WEEK 1

God Loves Justice



Allowing Lament



They lie in wait near the villages; from ambush they murder the innocent. Their eyes watch in secret for their victims; like a lion in cover they lie in wait. They lie in wait to catch the helpless; they catch the helpless and drag them off in their nets. The innocent are crushed, they collapse; they fall victim to superior strength. The wicked say to themselves, "God will never notice; he covers his face and never sees."

—Psalm 10:8-11

Things just aren't right, are they? Even if we are cheerful by nature, even if we're among those who enjoy much blessing and happiness, we recognize that there are things going on in this world that just aren't right.

I often have a difficult time watching or reading the news, and I bet I'm not the only one. Each new day informs me that millions of children do not have enough to eat or are infected with diseases and have no access to treatment. Each new day informs me of a bitter conflict that threatens the lives of innocent people. Each new day holds seemingly insurmountable

challenges for a refugee, for a girl removed from school to work in the fields, for a homeless person battling a mental illness, for a woman forced into prostitution. Enough, already. It's not right.

We're certainly not the first ones to find such suffering distressing and unfair. The people of God have long made room in their relationship with the Lord to cry out, to yell, to scream. "Why, LORD, do you stand far off?" challenges the psalmist (10:1). "How long, LORD?" (13:1). These psalms must have been voiced in anguish and desperation, not with neatly clasped hands and a demure whisper. This is wrong, they insist. Help us! Do something!

Such cries of lament fit our faith. It can be easy to forget this—after all, no one seeks out sorrow. We'd rather focus on blessing and peace and joy in a risen Savior. But lament, our grief over the wrongs of this world and the brokenness between us and in us all, is a part of who we are as followers of Jesus. Our lament signals that we recognize things aren't the way they should be.

Don't get me wrong here. I'm not suggesting that we should care about and pursue justice because we need to feel bad. Our pursuit of justice, our walk with those who are suffering, does not end with our shared human lament, and it is not fueled solely by it.

Though we must recognize the brokenness of our world in order to participate in kingdom-building renewal, we can rejoice that God is on the side of justice. In the passage at the beginning of this reading, unjust predators think that God has forgotten the poor and oppressed, that they're out of God's sight. "But you, God, see," the psalmist cries (v. 14). God sees and shares in our grief. God judges harshly those who have taken advantage, and he lifts up the orphan, the meek, and the oppressed. The wounded belong to God, who will "encourage them, and . . . listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror" (vv. 17-18).

What a stunning vision! The God of all creation, the God of power and glory, sees and cares about the most vulnerable and weak among us. We may not always see the vulnerable and weak, but the God of the universe does.

Things just aren't right. But our cries, and the cries of the poor and suffering, are heard by a God who loves justice. God does see!

Discussion Guide



Opening *(10 minutes)*

The Old Testament tells us a lot about what justice is, who it is for, and what God expects from us. What three words come to mind when you think about the issue of justice? Briefly share your answers without getting into any discussion at this time.

Then have someone read the following focus statement aloud:

The Old Testament follows God's people as captives in Egypt crying out for release. It follows them as they are delivered from their oppressors. And it shares the voices of the biblical prophets expressing God's anger with the people who, over and over again, seem to forget the God who had led them out of captivity. In the Old Testament we learn that God expects us to share his concern for those at the bottom of the barrel—and to do something about it.

The Old Testament gives us a great foundation from which to begin our look at what justice means for God, what it should mean for us, and how we might pursue it today.

Bible Study (15-20 minutes)

The following activity has been adapted from a small group toolkit called *Shalom Seekers: Living the Call to Do Justice* (www.faithaliveresources.org). Divide into groups of three or four people for this activity.

Choose one person in your group to read aloud each of the passages below. Discuss each passage together, and for each passage jot down on a board or on paper your answers to the three questions that follow. If you are short of time, choose only a few of the passages.

- Deuteronomy 24:17-21
- Deuteronomy 15:7-11
- Isaiah 58:3-7
- Jeremiah 22:13-16
- Nehemiah 5:1-13

Justice *for* whom?

Justice *by* whom?

What does justice *require*?

After reading all or some of these passages, invite group members to share their thoughts on what this means for our lives today.

Activity Variation

If your group is small, do the activity together.

Discussion (20 minutes)

As time permits, discuss some or all of the following questions based on the daily readings for this week, or use questions raised by group members.

1. What's going on in your community or around the world that makes you want to say, "Enough, already. It's not right."

2. Looking back, have there been times in your life when God has used you in an unexpected way? Describe such a time with the rest of the group.
3. What changes could you make to start reflecting God's concerns more in your life outside of worship?
4. Sometimes it can be awfully hard to love the people on the margins of society. While a great many people struggle through no fault of their own, others get trapped in their own terrible choices. Do you think God's love and mercy extend to these people as well? What does that suggest to you?
5. Sometimes the river of justice might run up against dams. What sorts of "dams" get in the way of letting justice flow in your community? How might these dams be dismantled?

Alternative Approach

Rather than using the five discussion questions above, walk back through each daily reading together and have group members raise their own questions and comments about the readings.

Closing *(5-10 minutes)*

Is there a particular cause or organization working for justice that touches your heart? Take a few moments to share these with one another. Then spend some time in prayer, thanking God for his faithfulness to his people throughout the Old Testament until now and lifting up the causes that have been mentioned. You may want to use the pattern that follows: One person opens the prayer with a petition that the God of justice hear us. After each sentence starter below, allow for a minute or two of silence so that group members can add their own prayers, either aloud or silently.

For the widow and the orphan . . .
For the oppressed and marginalized . . .
For the imprisoned and lonely . . .
For the sick . . .
For the lost . . .
For the least . . .
For us . . .

Action Options

Choose from among the following suggestions for extending your session into the week ahead, either as a group or individually.

Group: Divide a large sheet of newsprint (or a board, if you have one available) into quarters labeled as follows: neighborhood, town or city, country, world. For each section, decide together who might be the widow, fatherless, or oppressed people. Are you surprised by any of the answers? Are there some you had not thought about before? Are there similarities among some of the answers? Differences?

Personal: Spend some time this week researching a justice organization such as Bread for the World, Habitat for Humanity, or Citizens for Public Justice. Decide how you might want to support this organization.