

Prayer Requests & Praises

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. We need someone who would be willing to step up and be an apprentice leader. The mission and structure of CARE groups requires growth – and although it may seem a bit uncomfortable – in order to continue the growth of the church – and of our amazing groups, we need people to be willing to step up. (Billy & Erica can go a step further: we are at the point where our group does not have room for more people. It would be a shame to close the doors to someone who is seeking positive Christian friendships, or more importantly a healthy spiritual relationship with God). Please pray and step-up – I know it will be a blessed experience and you will be a blessing to others.
2. We will be planning a CARE meet-up – where all the groups will be welcome and encouraged to attend. This meet-up will be on September 20 – further details will follow – but mark your calendar.

In the CARE Group survey taken after the first four-week study the first topic of interest was homosexuality and the Bible, which is no surprise in a largely g/l/b/t/q congregation. The second was social justice. It could be the discriminated against find strong cause to stop discrimination, it might be that the mission minded want to do more to help the poor, there may be many reasons that this is a hot topic – but it is curious that in the history of the mainstream church social justice only has a denominational reach (i.e., “Join my church and I'll help.” or “I will only send money to the tsunami victims through a missionary in my church affiliation.”). It is interesting that this is never the case throughout the incredible words of the Bible. Even so, as well-meaning as we may be, it is often the case that Christians seem to be at the end of the line when it comes to fighting for social justice. I guess to back this point, it is relevant first to find a working definition of social justice.

- ✍ Share your definition of social justice.
- ✍ identify what you consider to be an injustice in our world, our nation, or our community, today.
 1. Name the injustice
 2. Describe the injustice.
 3. Share why you consider this an injustice.

One dictionary defined social justice as “A situation in which all individuals and groups in a society are treated fairly and equally, regardless of race, gender or any other factor that could be used to create situations of injustice. “

- ✍ Do you think we, as Christians, are expected to fight for social justice? Why or why not?
- ✍ If yes, how are we doing? – give a grade and explain.

✎ Do you think the Bible promotes social justice?

Having searched for the relationship between social justice and the Bible, I found that many Biblical scholars want to get out of their social justice obligation by Biblically defining the words separately and justifying a lack of action by showing that God and only God brings true justice. This may be further perpetuated by the Biblically defining roles of men and women, slaves and masters, Jew and Samaritan. It is hard to argue that the Bible is a book of social justice until one takes a look at the actions of the godly men and women in the Bible as well as the savior himself. Although the term social justice does not appear in the Bible, the actions of social justice run throughout the Bible as much as and possibly more than any other theme.

This study will talk about themes of social justice throughout the Old Testament, the next CARE Group will discuss Jesus' example of a life committed to social justice, and in the final study we will talk about our obligation to be involved in acts of social justice and ways to become involved.

From the very beginning of the Bible we see a clear account that we are keepers of our brothers and sisters. When Cain killed his brother Able in Genesis 4, God said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." When the Israelites were in captivity in Israel God sent Moses to fight for their liberation. Over and over the law instructs Israelites to remember the foreigner (i.e., the immigrant), the orphan and the widow—those most vulnerable to hunger and poverty. Here are a few examples:

When you gather your crops and fail to bring in some of the grain that you have cut, do not go back for it; it is to be left for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. . . . When you have gathered your grapes once, do not go back over the vines a second time; the grapes that are left are for the foreigners, orphans and widows. Never forget that you were slaves in Egypt; that is why I have given you this command. (Deuteronomy 24:19-22)

"At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)

The prophets, too, insisted on justice for everyone. Amos, for example, denounced those who trampled on the needy and destroyed the poor in order to gain wealth. He railed against those who lived in luxury while the poor were being crushed.

*If you refuse to listen to the cry of the poor,
your own cry will not be heard. (Proverbs 21:13)*

*Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.
Defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:8-9)*

*Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?*

*If you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.*

—Isaiah 58:6 & 10 (NRSV)

✎ Often times people tend to see the Old Testament as God's wrath or the law before grace. How different of a perspective does this give, when viewing the interwoven thread of social justice throughout the Old Testament?

✎ If any one has any further thoughts concerning the definition or Old Testament promotion of social justice, please feel free to share before we close.

Prayer and socializing (if time)

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3. We need someone who would be willing to step up and be an apprentice leader. The mission and structure of CARE groups requires growth – and although it may seem a bit uncomfortable – in order to continue the growth of the church – and of our amazing groups, we need people to be willing to step up. (Billy & Erica can go a step further: we are at the point where our group does not have room for more people. It would be a shame to close the doors to someone who is seeking positive Christian friendships, or more importantly a healthy spiritual relationship with God). Please pray and step-up – I know it will be a blessed experience and you will be a blessing to others.
4. We will be planning a CARE meet-up – where all the groups will be welcome and encouraged to attend. This meet-up will be on **September 27** – sorry I put the 20th in last sessions announcements - it will be on a CARE Group night – I just looked at my calendar wrong.

Last time we met we talked about what social justice is, identified current injustices in our world, and wrapped up the session exploring themes and teachings of social justice in the Old Testament. This week we will be moving forward into the New Testament and, more specifically, looking at the life and teaching of Jesus in his example and expectation of social justice.

- ✎ Have you ever wished you could have been present when Jesus was ministering to people? What would you have liked to see Him do or say? Why?

Jesus' ministry, especially when compared to many mainstream churches today, was really out-of-the-ox, when it came to his interaction with others. He touched the untouchable, defended the unsavory, forgave the unacceptable and ministered with the unusable. Here are a few scriptures to back this premise:

The untouchable:

Matthew 8:1-3 "When [Jesus] came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said, "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured.

The unsavory:

John 8: 2-8: "At dawn [Jesus] appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this

woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" " But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

The unacceptable:

Luke 7: 44-50: ⁽⁴⁴⁻⁴⁸⁾ Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

...⁽⁴⁴⁻⁴⁸⁾ "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The Unusable

Luke 8:1-3 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

✎ Do you believe the above passages to be instances of social justice? Why or why not?

The narratives of Jesus' life are primarily about his interactions with those the church would have nothing to do with – from children to widows to the demon possessed to the sick, the homeless, the poor, the unrighteous. He had no filter to prevent him from loving such people – and he had every reason not only to care about them, but to act in their defense. This was the foundation of his ministry – a call to salvation and a call to social justice. Jesus made this clear at the beginning of his ministry. He had just been tempted in the wilderness after fasting for 40 days. Then he broke his fast and began to minister. One of the first places he went (in Luke 4) was his home town, Nazareth. When in Nazareth Jesus walked into the temple, unrolled an Old Testament scroll (which had on it what we know as Isaiah 61) and read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of God's favor." When Jesus put the scroll down,

with all eyes on him, he essentially I am the fulfillment of this prophecy... I am the one who was born to do these things.

- ✎ Our theological foundation in Christianity is that Jesus came to save us (that is offer salvation through his sacrifice on the cross). Do you think, after reading how he chose to begin his ministry, that the act of salvation and the continued action of social justice can be separated? Why or why not?

Jesus not only acted in social justice, but instructed us to do the same:

- John 14:12 (Message Bible) *The person who trusts me will not only do what I'm doing but even greater things, because I, on my way to the Creator, am giving you the same work to do that I've been doing.*
- When Jesus spoke to the rich young man in Mark 10, the prerequisite to following Christ was selling his possessions and feeding the poor.
- When Jesus reinstated Peter after Peter's denial of Jesus he told him three times, if you love me you will feed my sheep.

Jesus didn't talk about us understanding theology nor did he ask us to say "the sinner's prayer." He instructed us to act on the love that is not only for us, but is for the world beyond us.

- ✎ As much as Jesus' life cannot separate salvation and social justice, can we really live a Christian life without standing against injustice? Can salvation and social justice be separated, if so – how, if no, why?
- ✎ Conclude with discussions/questions/thoughts.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS:

5. Still looking for apprentice leaders. Those who are interested should talk to their CARE Group leader.
6. Our next CARE group night will be our CARE Group meet-up. All the CARE Groups will meet at Oak Grove Regional Park for a picnic, fun, games, and a time of fellowship. We will meet at 1:30pm to allow plenty of time for church dismissal, but also for an early getaway, since there will be Tracy, Sacramento and Stockton groups. Show up to support your team and the CARE Group ministry.

Everyone can be great because anyone can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't even have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve... You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love...
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the last two sessions we have clearly seen that there is an expectation that we, as followers of God, are to work for justice. The Old and New Testament clearly state this message, and the life and teachings of Jesus undeniably modeled this belief. Today, we will go a little bit deeper into personal possibilities that we have open to us.

We acknowledge God as a triune essence referred to as the trinity: which has often been expressed as "God the father, the son and the Holy Spirit." In our more inclusive language we often say "God the creator, Christ the redeemer and the Holy Spirit." Either way, God is one being with three identities. We, being created in the image of God, are no different. We have a spirit (our mind, our emotions, our personality), a body, and a soul (our spirituality or spiritual being).

These three parts of our whole essence need to be in balance for us to be truly healthy and whole. Unfortunately, when many secular organizations reach out to help the poor, they feed them physically and ignore their soul. When many churches or church mission projects reach out to help the lost, they speak to their soul and ignore their spirit.

I believe Jesus knew the importance of ministering to individuals at each level. Let's read some of his words:

Matthew 25:35-36; 40

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you

clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'
... *'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.'*

Consider the needs that Christ acknowledged:

Body: *hungry and thirsty and you gave me something to eat and drink; needed clothes and you clothed me; sick and you looked after me*

Spirit: *a stranger and you invited me in, in prison and you came to visit me.*

And of course he addressed the soul too:

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Mark 16:15

The act of social justice is not limited to supporting a missionary in a foreign country, nor is it limited to fighting for the rights of the homeless in our city. It is all of these and more. One thing social justice does not include, however, is talking about it – then doing nothing.

All that to say this... the options are limitless. And yet, sometimes that can be an overwhelming prospect. This session is purposefully short, with the hopes that we, as a group, can offer passions, ideas, and possibilities for reaching into our community and reaching into our world. Although there is a list of resources offered to each of you, my hope is that we can begin by discussing what is important to us and how we can make a difference. The resources are a short list of long possibilities, but they are certainly not exhaustive. Let's let our passions and the Holy Spirit guide our discussion as we explore possibilities.

Discussion:

In the first session we identified what we consider to be an injustice in our world, nation, or community. I'm going to ask that those who spoke up revisit this, and those who did not or who weren't present be willing to identify one or two injustices they have seen. Then answer these questions:

- What injustice did/do you identify?
- How can you personally make a difference in this area(s)?
- What are specific actions you would be willing to take to make a difference, if any?

There are so many ways to become involved when it comes to issues of justice (e.g. homeless, world hunger, abuse, equality, genocide, etc).

- Identify resources that you are aware of that might be of help to others in your group.

Injustice/Need for Justice	Potential Resource	Person Who Identified <i>(for possible further information)</i>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Other Possible Resources

Valley Ministries Missions Team: <http://www.valleyministries.com/about/missions.cfm>

Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry: <http://www.uulmcaaction.org/>

United Methodist’s General Board of Church and Society: <http://www.umc-gbcs.org>

The United States Junior Chamber (Jaycees): <http://www.usjaycees.org/>

Amnesty International: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/>

Stop Genocide Now: <http://www.stopgenocidenow.org/>

Stop Genocide: <http://genocide.change.org/>

World Hunger: <http://www.worldhunger.org/>

Find a place to volunteer anywhere for anything:

- <http://www.volunteermatch.org/>
- <http://www.voa.org/>

Specific Local Opportunities

Stockton:

Stockton Homeless Shelter: <http://www.stocktonshelter.com/volunteer.htm>

Gospel Center Rescue Mission: <http://www.gcrms.org>

Food bank: <http://www.stocktonfoodbank.org/volunteer.htm>

Habitat for Humanity:

<http://www.habitat.org/cd/frame/frameset.aspx?url=www.sjchabitat.org>

Meals on Wheels (feeding the elderly): <http://www.mowaa.org/Page.aspx?pid=396>

Tracy:

McHenry House Homeless Shelter: <http://www.mchenryhousetracy.org/volunteer.htm>

Food Bank of San Joaquin County: (209) 833-3663

Habitat for Humanity:

<http://www.habitat.org/cd/frame/frameset.aspx?url=www.sjchabitat.org>

Sacramento:

Loaves and Fishes: www.sacloaves.org

Habitat for Humanity: <http://www.habitat.org/cd/frame/frameset.aspx?url=www.shfh.org>

Safe Ground (homeless): <http://www.safegroundsac.org/>

Volunteering in Sac:

- <http://www.volunteering.sacounty.net/default.htm>
- <http://www.cityofsacramento.org/volunteers/>
- <http://www.handsonsacto.org/>

GLBT Equality:

Equality California: <http://www.eqca.org/>

Equality Action Now: <http://www.equalityactionnow.org/>

Human Rights Campaign: <http://www.hrc.org/>

Soulforce: <http://www.soulforce.org/>