

SEE GOD'S HEART, BE HIS HANDS

A 20-DAY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE FOR MISSION TRIP PREPARATION

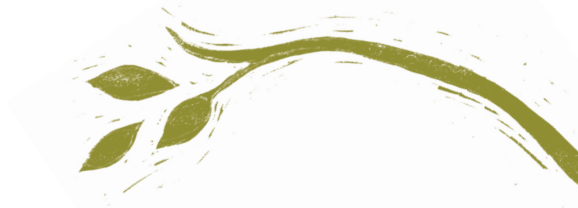


PREPARING FOR A MISSION TRIP

DEVOTIONS BASED ON *GOD'S JUSTICE: THE HOLY BIBLE*



BY TIM STAFFORD, *GENERAL EDITOR*



So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹ Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

– Genesis 1:27-31

Today we begin a 20-day series of devotions preparing you to go on a mission trip. This series aims to focus your thinking away from anxiety or uncertainty, and toward the confidence and assurance you can gain from God’s perspective. For many people, the unknowns of travel and the uncertainties of encountering other cultures may be frightening. So is the possibility that you may be inadequate for the tasks you are called on to do. These fears and uncertainties can dominate your thinking. But God’s perspective is far more valuable.

Beginning in Genesis we will follow through Scripture seeking to understand God’s plan for the world he made. Your *mission*—all of our missions—is to be a part of that. What does the Bible say about what God wants? What does he love?

The first two chapters of Genesis describe God’s making of the heavens and the earth. They offer a breathtaking picture of complexity and beauty, one that God could describe in its totality as “very good.” (1:31)

Here’s another way to describe it: it was a *just* world. There was nothing in it that was unsettled or unfair. Every creature was provided for. They had enough to eat. There was a settled order on the earth, in which humankind’s natural power of planning was used for good in the environment. Just as a good king would rule benevolently in his realm, so humanity would rule peacefully and benevolently on the

earth. They would, as God intended, mirror God in the universe. (That is what an image does—it offers a picture of the one it images. And God made male and female to be image bearers of himself.)

As you go on your mission trip, you will encounter a world that doesn't look this way. You may find people who do not get enough food or other provisions they need for life. You may find animals and plants that cannot flourish because their environment does not provide for them. You may find people who do not mirror God in their behavior. In fact, they may make a horrible caricature of what it means to rule benevolently in their environment.

Whatever you see, you can gain a great deal by holding it up next to the first chapters of Genesis. Is this what God intended? Is this what God lovingly created? If not, how can we participate in making it right? That is what we call *doing justice*. When we say that our Lord is a God of justice, we mean that he is engaged in making the world right, spiritually, physically and socially.

PRAYER *Father, just as you made a just and beautiful world, help us to participate with you in making a broken world right. Show us just one small piece of the whole that we can help to set on a course to please you.*

— NOTES —





18 **A**braham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.[a] ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

– Genesis 18:18-19

God chose the most curious way to go about setting his creation right. He might have put on a power display, destroying whatever had warped it, and starting over with instant new creation wherever it was needed. Instead, he invited Abraham and Sarah, who were unknown and insignificant, to start a family that would transform the world. These verses from Genesis 18 reflect God’s perspective on how this would happen. Abraham and Sarah remained nobodies. Yet God sees a great future for them.

God says he has chosen Abraham, the head of the family, to train his children and his household in doing “what is right and just.” Remember that they had no Bible and no book of laws to follow. But all people know a great deal of what “right and just” means. Abraham was to lead a family and a household—which would be something like the family business, with employees included. As he followed “right and just,” and taught his family, God says he will “bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

What has he promised? A big family, settled in Palestine, owning the land. (They were a small family, and landless nomads, when God made this prediction.) Even more significantly, God promised Abraham that through him he would bless the whole world.

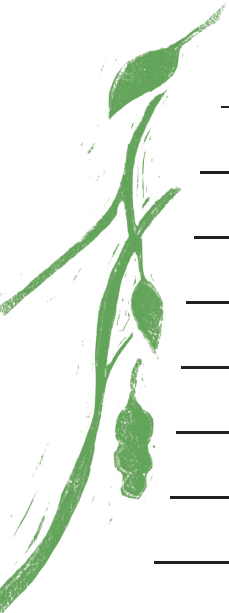
Here we see a fundamental biblical pattern. God calls people to be his followers, and he asks them to learn justice and teach it to those around them—their family, pre-eminently. It is through such people that God will bring his justice to the whole world.

What does this mean for you on your mission trip? It means that God has called you to represent his justice. The kind of person you are, the relationships you have with your mission team, are tremendously important to the work that you do. They are the key to whether God’s purposes will be fulfilled.

PRAYER *Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where I see injustice, enable me to live a renewed life.*



— NOTES —



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines. The first 10 lines are on the left side of the page, and the next 10 lines are on the right side, separated by a vertical line.





7 The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

— Exodus 3:7-10

What kind of God do you represent when you go on a mission trip? This brief passage from Exodus emphasizes some very important characteristics. He is a God who sees misery. He is a God who hears cries from the slaves. He is a God who is concerned. He is a God who rescues and a God who liberates and a God who provides abundant opportunity.

You may not encounter any slaves—though some say that there are more slaves today than at any time in the ancient world.

Surely, however, you will encounter people who are in misery, and people who cry, and people who suffer. Will you be like your heavenly Father, to see what is happening, to hear cries from the oppressed, to show concern, and even to rescue and provide? These are heavy burdens for anyone to carry, and God does not ever ask you to carry them alone. No, he asks you to help him as he leads the way.

It is important to note that God chose to liberate the Israelite slaves through a human being. He called Moses to help set his people free. Perhaps you, too, may be so called.

PRAYER *Lord, help me to see and hear and show concern. Call me, as you like, to join you in liberating people. Call me, as you like, to help provide for their needs.*

— NOTES —





“**T**he land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. ²⁴ Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

²⁵ “If one of your fellow Israelites becomes poor and sells some of their property, their nearest relative is to come and redeem what they have sold. ²⁶ If, however, there is no one to redeem it for them but later on they prosper and acquire sufficient means to redeem it themselves, ²⁷ they are to determine the value for the years since they sold it and refund the balance to the one to whom they sold it; they can then go back to their own property. ²⁸ But if they do not acquire the means to repay, what was sold will remain in the possession of the buyer until the Year of Jubilee. It will be returned in the Jubilee, and they can then go back to their property.

– Leviticus 25: 23-28

After God redeemed his slave people, he gave them his law to show them the kind of God he was and how they should live. When we mention God’s Law, most people think of the Ten Commandments, which are magnificent but general, dominated by “Thou Shalt Not.” The rest of God’s Law, however, gives lots more detail, often very positive detail picturing what ought to be. The law is not preoccupied with theft and murder and sexual sin, though those certainly are dealt with. It deals with many aspects of a complex society, and many of its prescriptions are very positive—“You *should*.” The Law shows great concern for economic relations, especially as they affect the poor.

Some of the most inspiring laws have to do with land, as does this passage from Leviticus. It’s important to understand that in these ancient times, land was the only source of income. There were no factories, no stores, no businesses such as we know. In order to make a living and provide for your family, you had to farm. And in order to farm you had to have land.

The law sets up a process to ensure that no family will ever permanently lose its land. They may become poor—perhaps through tragedy, perhaps through their own failings—and sell their land. But the rest of the family is commanded to buy it back for them.

Furthermore, if no one has the money to buy it back, the next generation will be *given it back*. Every 50 years is the Jubilee, when all land is returned to its original owners. Everybody starts over. There can be no permanent separation between the rich and the poor, no rich landowners and poor peasants. Every fifty years they will go back to having the same resources.

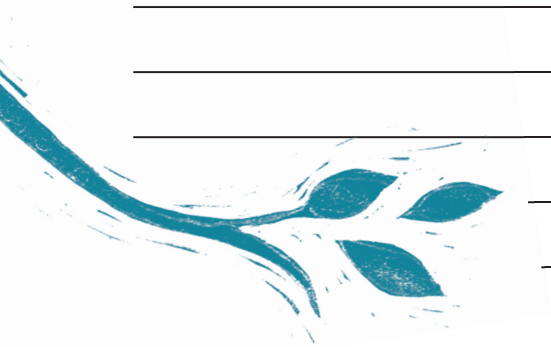
With our current economic mindset, we might think this was a very unfair way to treat the well-off. Why should they just give back what they got fair and square? But the Bible introduces a very different point

of view. *The land is mine!* God says. (25:23) It never belonged to any of you in the first place. It's mine to use as I see fit, and my choice is to ensure that no family ever permanently loses its share in the economy.

It's hard to say how exactly this might be applied in a modern situation. Our economic setting is very different, starting out with the observation that farming is not the whole economy. What is not different is God's concern for the poor, and his ownership of everything. As you see, hear and show concern on your mission trip, try to think about God's priorities for the economy.

PRAYER *Lord, help me to see the economy as you see it, ruled by a concern for the welfare of all your creatures.*

— NOTES —

[illegible]

At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. ² This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the LORD's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed. ³ You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your fellow Israelite owes you. ⁴ However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, ⁵ if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. ⁶ For the LORD your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.

⁷ If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. ⁸ Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. ⁹ Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. ¹⁰ Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. ¹¹ There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

– Deuteronomy 15:1-11

Yesterday we reflected on a passage in Leviticus that shows God's radical plan to eliminate permanent poverty. This passage in Deuteronomy is somewhat similar. Every seven years, all debts were to be cancelled. Everybody would start over, unburdened by accumulated indebtedness.

God says something controversial and striking about the society he wants to build: "There need be no poor people among you." (15:4) His intention is to build an economy that is so prosperous, poverty can be eliminated. That is the optimistic framework that God's justice requires. He created a world where all flourish. He means to bring about that condition again.

Of course, God knows the failings of the people he has called. So he also says, "There will always be poor people in the land." (15:11) Whether through oppression or natural calamity or through their own failings, people will become poor. But that is not what God wants! He has made a world where no one need be poor, and he gives laws to his people that are meant to stop poverty in its tracks. Is his remedy fair to those who loaned the money? Again, as with the land laws in Leviticus, it's God's money! Not ours! According to him, it's not right that any one of his creatures should be permanently poor.

— NOTES —

[illegible]



Blessed is the one
 who does not walk in step with the wicked
 or stand in the way that sinners take
 or sit in the company of mockers,
 2 but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
 3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
 and whose leaf does not wither—
 whatever they do prospers.

— Psalm 1:1-3



Justice is a word that means something different in the Bible than what it means in modern life. Most people think of justice as a matter of punishing those who disobey the law, or providing appropriate compensation for those who have lost money or property through someone else's fault. Justice has to do with law and the courtroom, with politics and government, with money and contracts.

In the Bible, justice also has to do with the law, but God's law is a very different thing from a modern statute book. Much of God's law has to do with worshiping God—doing it correctly and joyfully and with due reverence for God. As we've noted in the last few days, the Bible's law has to do with care for the poor. It's about generosity. It commands us to love our neighbor. The law is a reflection of the character of God, and it tells us how he wants us to live. That's a life of abundance. That's a life of blessing. That's a life of grace.

According to this psalm, the person whom God blesses is delighted by God's law—his way of justice—and thinks about it day and night. Such a person has the means to live well in season and out of season, to yield a good crop at the right time, to be unaffected by drought because he has roots sunk deep in God's aquifer.

God's justice is a deeply spiritual matter. It's not just about politics and reform. It's not just about exposing crimes and putting an end to corruption. It begins with a deep drink of God's character, such that his nature seeps into everything we do.

PRAYER *Lord, sink my roots deep in your aquifer, so that I will find your law delightful and that my life will bear fruit for many other people.*

— NOTES —

[illegible][illegible]



The Mighty One, God, the LORD,
 speaks and summons the earth
 from the rising of the sun to where it sets.

² From Zion, perfect in beauty,
 God shines forth.

³ Our God comes
 and will not be silent;
 a fire devours before him,
 and around him a tempest rages.

⁴ He summons the heavens above,
 and the earth, that he may judge his people:

⁵ “Gather to me this consecrated people,
 who made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”

⁶ And the heavens proclaim his righteousness,
 for he is a God of justice.

— Psalm 50:1-6

As we saw yesterday, we follow a God whose character we can meditate on with delight. Through his law he provides the nourishment we need to live a meaningful, fulfilled life.

Psalm 50 reminds us of another view of God. It emphasizes his majesty and power, before which everybody must stand in awe. There is nothing cozy about the God of Psalm 50. “He is a God of justice,” as verse 6 emphasizes, and that means that he has strong views on what is supposed to happen on planet earth. No one can contradict this magnificent God.

Two things this psalm can teach you as you go on your mission trip:

First, the God who has sent you on mission is the Lord of the whole earth—from the “rising of the sun to where it sets.” He “summons the heavens above, and the earth.” There is no corner of the earth, no place in the heavens, where he does not adamantly declare, “This is mine!” It is important to be polite and humble and sensitive as you encounter people who are very different from you—who may worship a different god, or who hold to a completely different set of values. But never forget that you represent

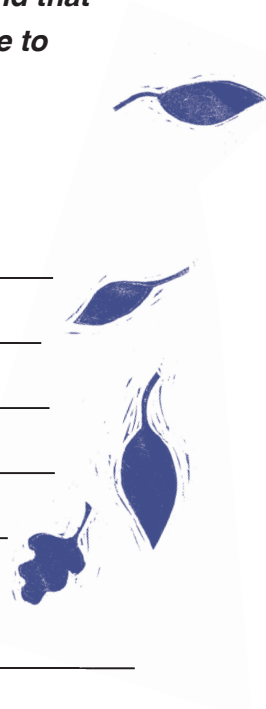
a God who made the heavens and the earth out of nothing, and who deserves complete and absolute reverence. Don't let your God be too small!

Second, this majestic God does not remain high and mighty, detached from humanity. To the contrary, he has invited his people to be his partners. He consecrated Israel to serve him, and he invited them to be covenanted with him. In modern life, a covenant is best known as what binds a married couple together. It is a two-sided promise based on love. God has forever bound his heart to his people: and through your faith in Jesus, you have become part of that covenant.

You go on mission representing the highest power in the universe, and you go as part of a team—a worldwide team of those who have chosen to follow Jesus, and whom God has covenanted to love and keep.

PRAYER *Lord, thank you for your majesty. Thank you also that you have chosen me, and that you love me, and that you have made me a part of your people. Thank you for calling me to serve you in mission—the highest privilege any human being can be given.*

— NOTES —





Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
2 May he judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.
3 May the mountains bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
4 May he defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
may he crush the oppressor.
5 May he endure[a] as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.
6 May he be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.
7 In his days may the righteous flourish
and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.
8 May he rule from sea to sea
and from the River[b] to the ends of the earth.
9 May the desert tribes bow before him
and his enemies lick the dust.
10 May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores
bring tribute to him.
May the kings of Sheba and Seba
present him gifts.
11 May all kings bow down to him
and all nations serve him.
12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.
13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.
14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight.

– Psalm 72:1-13

Time and again, justice comes down to a question of who is in power. Concerns for poverty, concerns for violence, concerns for prejudice and oppression—these and most other social issues are strongly

linked to the kind of government that regulates society. A government that is corrupt and takes bribes; a government that arbitrarily imprisons and punishes people; a government that is incompetent in setting up regulations and overseeing the money supply—such a government will cause ordinary people to suffer. There will be no flourishing of God’s beautiful creation where governments are bad.

Psalm 72 offers a much more hopeful view of government. It is a praise psalm for the king, the head of government. But this is a unique king, who should “endure as long as the sun” and “rule from sea to sea.” Other kings will bow before him, and all nations serve him, because of the quality of government that he brings.

What does this king do? He delivers the needy and afflicted. He takes pity on the weak. He rescues the needy from oppression and violence.

Clearly, this psalm does not describe any king who ever lived, except one: the Messiah-King, Jesus. He came for the needy and afflicted.

In the end, God will provide the government that we all need. Jesus will rule in justice. He will endure as long as the sun.

As you go on mission, remember how important good government is to establishing justice. And remember that God's standards are very high—so high that no human government can measure up. We will never see perfect justice until the one just king is on the throne.

PRAYER *Lord, we anticipate the great day when you will come again to bring justice to the earth. Help us to live with your values, caring for the needy and afflicted.*

— NOTES —

[illegible]



When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

⁴ But the LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

– Jonah 3:10-4:4

The story of Jonah is deservedly famous, but unfortunately many readers are satisfied with his adventure with the large fish, and never go on to ponder the very dramatic conclusion.

Like you, Jonah was called to a mission. Unlike you, he tried to get out of it. Eventually, though, under extreme pressure, he came around. He obeyed God by going to Nineveh and proclaiming God’s message. He warned them that the great city would suffer judgment for their unjust behavior.

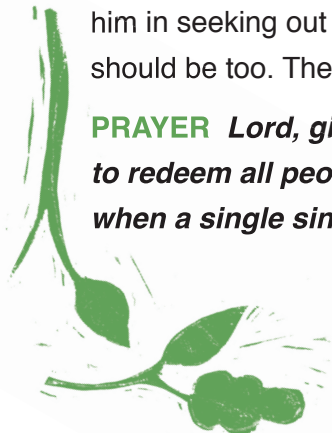
What happened next? The Ninevites heard God’s message and turned their behavior around. They stopped doing evil and using violence. God saw it and forgave them. He chose not to punish them after all.

For this, Jonah was angry at God. Probably he or members of his family had suffered from the Ninevite violence. He hated the Ninevites and he thought no punishment was enough. If God was not going to kill them all, Jonah would rather die!

Jonah was concerned with justice. He felt it in his bones. But his version of justice was punitive and negative. God, however, had a version of justice that abounded in love and forgiveness. He was eager for everyone to flourish—even the vicious Ninevites.

When you encounter injustice, anger is a natural and a healthy response. However, God wants us to join him in seeking out the smallest hint of true repentance. He is eager to forgive and quick to hope—as we should be too. The ultimate justice is not punishment, but a world truly set right.

PRAYER *Lord, give us a vision of your justice that shines with hopefulness. We know you want to redeem all people—even those who are terribly wicked. Show us how to hate evil but to rejoice when a single sinner repents.*



— NOTES —





He has shown 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[a] with your God.

— Micah 6:8

The prophet Micah expressed God's deep frustration with his people. Micah's book offers a searing condemnation of the nation of Israel, beginning with its leaders—its religious leaders, its governmental leaders, its judges. Together they had become vicious predators. They cared only for their own welfare. It is a crying shame how far God's people have fallen. They were meant to flourish, showing the world what a life of justice can be. God intended this people to lead the way in setting his broken world right. Instead, they are leading the way in greed and callous carelessness. It should not be so! It breaks God's heart!

So what can be done? How should anybody respond to this? Should they make an extravagant dedication, sacrificing money and even children on God's altar?

No, says Micah. God has shown you what he wants. It is not extravagant or grandiose. It is simple. You should practice justice. You should love mercy. And you should walk with God humbly, recognizing just how small and fallen you are.

On your upcoming mission trip, God is not seeking grandiose sacrifices or extraordinary gestures. He wants from you simple things. Daily he wants to see you behaving in a just manner—that is, in a way that honors God's law to love your neighbor as yourself. God also wants you to love mercy. Unlike the prophet Jonah, who could not forgive, you are to see mercy as the most beautiful set of clothes you can wear. And finally, God wants to see you turn to him—not showing off how great you are, but recognizing your own weaknesses and failings while keeping your hand tightly in God's hand.

PRAYER *Lord, help me to see myself the way you see me. Help me never to despair at my weaknesses, but to love the things you love and do the things you do.*

— NOTES —





He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

– Isaiah 53:3-6

Most people going on mission trips have hopes of accomplishing great things. Indeed, when we are called on mission, we are called to participate in God's powerful plan to set the world right. That is a great thing!

This passage from Isaiah reminds us that God's way of accomplishing great things can be strange and hidden. Isaiah is describing God's suffering servant. The terms he used must have seemed very odd to his first readers. All through the Bible, God promises to make his people flourish, to destroy their enemies, and to turn evil into good. As we saw in Psalm 72, he sets the world right through a messianic king, who will reign from sea to sea.

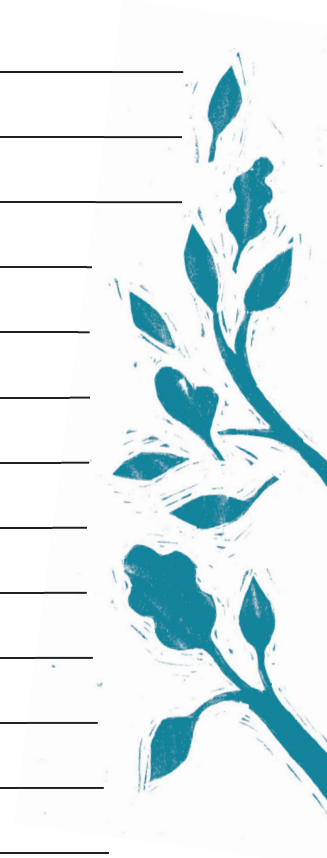
Here, though, God's servant is tormented, crushed—and that is the means of healing. Somehow, Isaiah suggests, the worst that can happen to a servant of God will prove to be the best that can happen. Nobody could make much sense of this until, hundreds of years later, Jesus was subjected to torture and

was cruelly executed. His suffering and death brought the salvation of the world.

What happened to Jesus was unique in all history, but as 1 Peter 2:21 says, Christians are called to walk “in his steps.” In your mission trip, it’s possible that God will do great things in ways that surprise and shock you. There may be suffering and disappointment and distress. But we should never lose sight of Jesus. The truth is that he brought justice to earth through the most harrowing and disappointing experience anyone can ever know. Whatever lesser struggles you may encounter, be assured that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus can use them for good.

PRAYER *Lord, enable me to walk in the path you walked. Help me to keep my eyes open to see your justice worked out even in moments of struggle.*

— NOTES —

[illegible]



“**B**ut to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.

³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.

³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

— Luke 6:27-36



How does Jesus expect us to make a difference? How does he propose we should act so that God’s world can be set right? Right from the beginning of his ministry he made clear that he held to a radical agenda.

He was a king, but a king without an army. He did not propose to bring change through force, nor even through argument. He told his disciples what he expected of them: to love their enemies. To avoid payback for mistreatment. To give freely to anyone—not just to the deserving. Mercy is the key, because God himself is merciful.

To say the least, this could not have seemed like a very powerful approach. In the face of a hypocritical religious establishment and of a violent, oppressive government, in a society marked by poverty and injustice, Jesus speaks in the strongest terms about the power of love. This love is to be exerted not just to friends and family, but to people who despise and mistreat you. “You will get a lot out of this approach,” he tells them. Most tellingly, you will be “children of the Most High,” because you are acting in the way that he acts.

When you are on your mission trip, this will be your way of making a difference. You may find enemies among the church leaders you want to help; or among obstructive officials, or greedy soldiers. You may find your enemy on your own team! Don’t fight them. Love them!

PRAYER *Lord, love doesn’t come easily to me—especially when I’m trying to love people who are so extremely unlovable. Help me to keep my focus on you, and on your kindness. You care for the ungrateful and the wicked. Help me to follow your way.*

— NOTES —

[illegible][illegible]



Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

⁴² “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

– Luke 11:39-42

Pharisees have a bad reputation, so it’s easy to forget that they were “good people” in their day. They claimed to take God’s word more seriously than anybody. Consistently Jesus condemned them for making a show of their faith in front of other people, but neglecting to focus on God’s deeper concerns. What did they neglect? This passage mentions three things. They don’t show generosity to the poor. They overlook justice. And they aren’t adequately concerned with loving God.

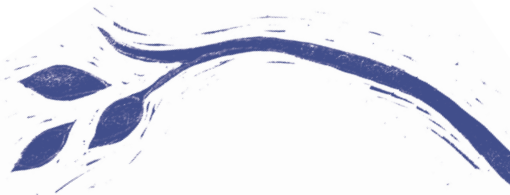
A mission trip can tempt you to go the Pharisees’ way. After all, you are giving up time and money to do God’s work. Your sense of following God’s call can easily turn to pride, and that pride can easily become self-righteous regarding the “little things.” More than a few mission trips have been marred by such attitudes.

The antidote is clear, if not easy: practice generosity, especially to those who need it. Look for opportunities to practice justice, which is to love your neighbor as yourself. And love God with your heart, soul, mind and strength. No one whose focus stays on such things can be anything other than humble.

PRAYER *Lord, help me to see myself clearly. If pride creeps in, help me to turn my focus toward you and toward others.*

— NOTES —





Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ ⁴ “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’” ⁶ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ 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? ⁸ 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 18:1-8

We’ve emphasized the story of God’s justice in this series of devotions. Justice is not a subject that is sprinkled on occasionally throughout the Bible, like confetti. Rather it is the core of what God seeks in the earth that he created. He aims to set right the world that has been broken by sin. He wants every creature to flourish, and he wants to put an end to evil. Then there will be peace. So God wants, and so he promises to do.

In mission we seek to take part in this story—to do what we can, by word and deed, to advance the coming of God’s kingdom and make this planet more what he wants. As Jesus’ parable of the persistent widow makes clear, even the most helpless person can participate in this—by prayer. God wants to bring justice, and he is eager to hear his people requesting it. But “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” Will Jesus discover us praying with heart and soul for his kingdom to come?

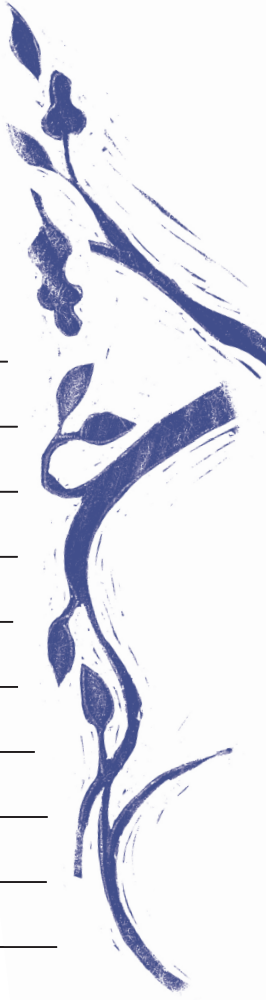
What about you? Can you say that justice is consistently your prayer? Do you persist in looking for it and asking for it from God himself?

Your mission trip can be a time for you to develop the habit—the faith habit—of praying for justice. During your trip you will be highly attuned to your environment, noticing what you might ordinarily miss in your everyday life. Most of us see more critically when we are in another cultural setting too: we recognize injustice because it stands out to us, whereas the familiar life of our own community may have lulled us into thinking there is no injustice.

When you see injustice, you can respond with plans for action. You can respond with anger and outrage. Here’s another response: learn to pray. Truthfully, your outrage may not accomplish much. Neither may your plans for action make any deep impact. But you go on mission accompanied by a God who



— NOTES —

[illegible]



A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁹ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’[a]”

²¹ “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.

²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

²⁸ Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!”

²⁹ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰ will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”

– Luke 18:18-30



Does God make you rich? Some Christians preach that he does—that if you give to the church you will get a phenomenal return on investment and end up wealthy. This teaching is known as “the prosperity gospel.”

In contrast, Jesus tells a rich young man to give up his wealth if he wants to experience eternal life. He will have “treasure in heaven,” though apparently not much on earth. Jesus comments that it is really difficult for the rich to truly follow God’s will. He sees wealth as a problem, not a promise.

To his disciples, who have left behind their businesses and careers to follow Jesus, Jesus promises a prosperity of relationships—multiplied home and family, which is part of being a member of God’s family. Jesus also promises eternal life.

Yes, God does make you rich—but rich in what truly matters.

You might ponder this as you prepare for your mission trip. You are giving up something to go. Whether it is a lot or a little, it is something. What kinds of rewards do you hope for?

(Devotion continued)

PRAYER *Lord, beneath our greedy concerns for money, we feel this universal longing for home and spouse and brothers and sisters and parents and children. We ask you to fulfill this longing in an unexpected and abundant way.*

— NOTES —

[illegible]



Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

– Matthew 28:18-20

Today’s scripture is one of the most famous in the Bible. It is the foundation for evangelism and discipleship, and a key text in mission. Christians are commanded to go to “all nations.” No place on earth is excluded.

In some circles this command stands apart from the concern for justice that we have been following through the Bible. Is there justice in this text? Where is the command for Christians to work for justice?

The answer is actually quite obvious. Jesus’ disciples are to teach new disciples “to obey everything I have commanded you.” As we have seen in the last week, Jesus’ concern for justice runs throughout his teaching. He also emphasized his continuity with everything in God’s law. So all the detailed laws of the Old Testament, all the prophetic critiques, all the prayers for justice to be done, are folded in to “what I have commanded you.”

God wants to bring justice to the earth through human beings. That is why he chose Abraham. That is why he gave Israel the law. That is why he urged his prophets to criticize the lack of justice they saw in Israel.

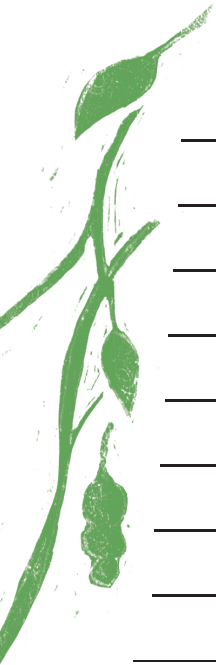
So it is no surprise to note that Jesus called his disciples and trained them in a lifestyle of justice. Nor is it a surprise that he tells them to make other disciples and train them in the same way. This is God’s way of bringing justice to his creation: he does it through people.

This is the ultimate test of effective mission. Have we been able to raise up a body of people who love God and live a life of justice? To do so requires that you first learn yourself to “obey all that I have commanded you.”

PRAYER *Lord, we want to be people who can disciple other people into your commands of justice. Please help us; we are inadequate to this command. We trust that you would not command in us what you will not also empower. Help us.*



— NOTES —





Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever.”[a]

¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

– 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

The apostle Paul believed in a generous lifestyle, and he tried hard to teach it to those he had won to Christ. One way was to sponsor a collection for the poor in Jerusalem. In many of his letters he advances this collection, but never at more length than in 2 Corinthians, where he lays out much of his thinking about generosity.

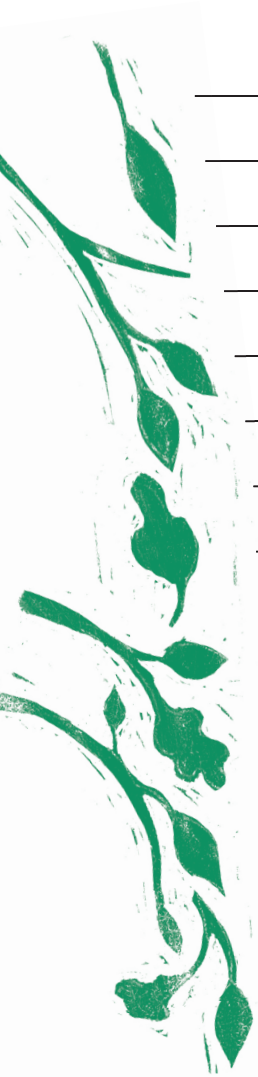
Remember where we started in this devotional series? In the first chapters of Genesis we get a picture of the world as God made it—a place of justice, where each creature can flourish. The key point in this Corinthians passage is that generosity furthers human flourishing, both for those who receive and for those who give.

Generosity is a gentle and natural way to set the world right. Notice Paul’s words that emphasize abundance: “reap generously,” “cheerful,” “abundantly,” “abound,” “enriched.” These happen when God’s people do something small and simple: they give cheerfully.

PRAYER *Lord, help me to see that when I give I am not truly giving anything up. You bring a wonderful harvest for every act of generosity. Make me see this; help me live it.*



— NOTES —



Lined writing area consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature[a] God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

– Philippians 2:5-11

The greatest challenges on mission trips often come from the people who accompany you. Sometimes the stress of the new and unfamiliar brings out the worst in people. And even at your best, you're supposed to cooperate closely with people you probably haven't worked with before. Quite often, there are bad feelings.

This famous passage from Philippians speaks to those attitudes, urging you to imitate Jesus' humility. This prose-poem contains the story of God's justice in a nutshell. It's all wrapped up in Jesus. As a humble servant he gave up his privileges. More, he sacrificed his life. God the father raised him back to life, and lifted him to the highest place of honor. Before this Jesus, the whole earth will come together. Surely peace will reign under the Lordship of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

It's not an exaggeration, then, to say that when interpersonal stress comes, you encounter the very moment to see God's justice flourish. For if you can imitate Jesus in humility, following in service, sacrificing your privileges and even your life, God can raise you up.

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1) It may seem to be a small thing, but it may be the most powerful place for God to work in your mission trip.

PRAYER *Lord, prepare me and our entire team to be servants, not only of those who host us, but also of each other.*

— NOTES —

[illegible]

I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you.¹³ I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.¹⁵ Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.

— Philippians 2:5-11

People sometimes wonder why Paul didn't preach against slavery. The short answer is that he did. The little, powerless Christian church had no power to influence the Roman government, and in fact it's questionable whether the emperor himself could have ended an institution that was so powerful and pervasive. Slaves did everything!

Nevertheless, Paul's writings undermine slavery at every point by insisting that slaves are really human beings, God's children, worthy of respect. They are not tools, to be used up and discarded!

And in this little book of Philemon, we see what Paul is really after: revolution.

This is not a revolution of blood. Rather it is a revolution of love. Paul gently but firmly urges his friend Philemon to give up his slave Onesimus—his valuable property. But more he urges Philemon to join the revolution, seeing Onesimus not as a slave, but as a dear brother. The two are utterly incompatible. Slaves aren't brothers, and brothers aren't slaves. If Philemon listens to Paul, his days as a slaveholder are over. If the Roman empire listens, its days as a slave nation are over too.

Slavery of the kind Paul experienced did eventually die, but the power of his revolution goes on. Love has a way of chipping away at the foundation of tyranny. We've seen revolutions of blood that only led to more shed blood. But the true revolution, the one that changes everything, is still coming. That's why we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "your kingdom come." Whenever we treat an enemy or a stranger as a brother, the kingdom comes a little closer.

PRAYER *Lord, show me the "dear brothers and sisters" that I don't even recognize.*

— NOTES —



Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

– Revelation 21:1-4

In the beginning God made a cosmos that was “very good.” In the end, it will become even better. This is the justice of God that we wait for and work for. It’s what your mission trip is all about.

We are talking about a real place—a city. The people who live there will have their bodies back, new and improved. God will live there too! The residents of this city will no longer fear death. There will be no crying or pain. The long era of injustice, ruled over by death, will have ended.

We aren’t there yet. But we must not lose the sense of direction we get from knowing where we are going. This is God’s destination for the world that he made. He wants it wholly beautiful again. He will make it so.

As you are about to begin your mission trip, keep this heavenly city in mind. Try to imagine the changes it will bring to whatever places you go. It’s not just a dream. It’s the future, and you are privileged to live as part of that future.

PRAYER *Lord, make me an ambassador of your new city. Help me to represent its values. Help me to live its life in advance, for all to see.*

— NOTES —

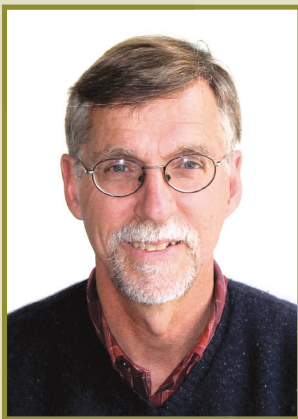


– AS YOU GO OUT –

Jesus sent out his disciples—the original 12—and he has been sending out disciples ever since. You are one of them. God’s justice always extends outward, beyond comfort zones, beyond ethnic and geographic boundaries. The whole universe belongs to Jesus, and he claims it for the purpose of setting it right. Whatever you do and wherever you go on your mission, you are part of a vast movement helping to bring God’s justice to the earth. You are not alone! You are not the first! Wherever you go, God is already there. He will welcome you as you join his work in that place.

– PRAYER –

Lord, help me to see you when I meet you. Help me to serve you just as I am called to do. Help me to rejoice in the hope of a world set right.



Special thanks to Tim Stafford

for writing this incredible reading plan. Tim is the editor for *God’s Justice: The Holy Bible* and author of more than 30 books. He lives with his wife Popie in Santa Rosa, California.

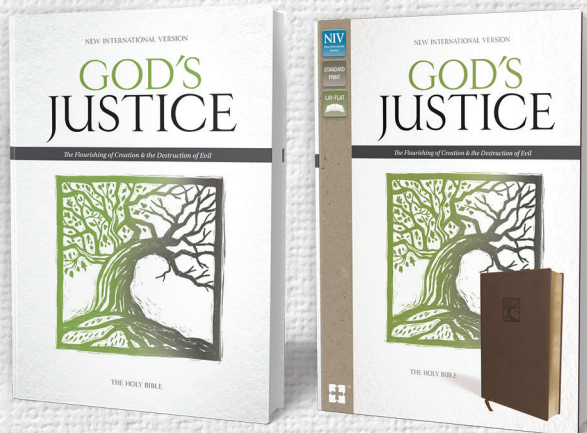
LEARN TO DO RIGHT. SEEK JUSTICE.

God's justice—his plan for “setting things right”—is a foundational principle of the Bible. His plan for justice to triumph is traced from Genesis to Revelation, and as a theme, it forms the backbone of Scripture. God's plan is to restore the flourishing of creation and to see the end of evil, and every book of the Bible is infused with hints of this powerful and redemptive process.

The NIV God's Justice Bible, featuring Christianity Today Editor at Large Tim Stafford as general editor, brings together clear introductions and thoughtful notes on the biblical text from a mosaic of global perspectives.

“Traveling to 5 continents and seeking out writers to contribute to this special project was an honor,” says Stafford. “God's Justice represents a new kind of Bible experience, not only because of its emphasis on the story of God's justice – in making things right – but because of its truly international character.”

This Bible address justice issues through the perspectives of fifty-six contributors who are scholars, activists and ministry leaders from around the globe. The world Christian voice of this Bible is groundbreaking and sheds light on God's work in his diverse cultures so that God's justice story can be told in dozens of different accents. Readers will be inspired to join God's mission for his world as they discover how the entire Bible reveals how God is setting things right so that evil is destroyed and God's creation flourishes.



AVAILABLE WHEREVER BIBLES ARE SOLD

For more information visit: www.GodsJusticeBible.com