

JUSTICE STUDY NOTES (JSN)

Justice From a Biblical Perspective

Aims of the Study and context

The aims of these study notes are to shine a light on God's heart for the poor and oppressed and call the church to fight for justice, in partnership with the International Justice Mission (see below).

We have learned much about sharing the love of Christ with people all over the world who have never heard the Gospel. We have learned a great deal about how to make disciples, feed the hungry, heal the sick and shelter the homeless. We have come to understand that the early church and the apostles continued the work of evangelism and the work of justice as one and the same thing.¹

However, when it comes to rescuing the poor and oppressed, we seem to be less familiar.

This justice movement needs to have strong biblical conviction of God's call for justice if it is to maintain a long-term and sustained engagement against vast, confronting and brutal injustice. Furthermore, understanding the Bible as one connected story helps us to see how our pursuit of justice fits in with God's long-standing desire for freedom, flourishing and wholeness of the world.

Background

Mary Robinson, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, says this: "I am often asked what is the most serious human rights violation in the world today, and my reply is consistent: extreme poverty" (defined as earning less than US \$1.25/day). And she's right: almost half the world, or some three billion people, still live on less than US \$2.50 a day. Poverty touches just about every aspect of their lives, such as food, education, health, shelter and safe water. Fortunately, many national and international programs are addressing these issues and are making a difference.

But, there is one issue causing the most horrific consequences for the poor that, tragically, *is not getting the attention it so desperately needs*.

Around the world, particularly in developing countries, the poor have been trapped in a brutal system of slavery and everyday violence. They live outside the protection of the law because basic law enforcement systems are so broken. The impacts of lawless violence are enormous and the scale of injustice massive. More than 45 million people are held as slaves; and nearly two million children are exploited in the commercial sex industry. For millions more, sexual violence is part of childhood.

The International Justice Mission (IJM) is a Christian NGO (Non-Government Organisation) whose goals are: "Rescue thousands. Protect millions. Prove justice for the poor is possible". So far, it has rescued more than 25,000 people from violence and oppression. And, today, their work is helping to protect 21 million people globally from violence.

IJM partners with local authorities to rescue the victims, bring criminals to justice, restore survivors and strengthen justice systems. IJM Australia joins in this mission globally and works locally to grow the movement of Australians seeking justice for the oppressed.

¹ Abraham George & Nikki Toyama-Szeto, "God of Justice", p 119.

Study overview

The Study covers five main themes:

- The story of Creation and “shalom”, the ideal condition that God desires for the human race to operate and grow, live together in harmony and peace, particularly without injustice and conflict;
- Sin corrupts shalom and creates injustice and destruction in relationship with God and with one another;
- God has a deep heart for justice, is deeply concerned for the oppressed and wants it to stop;
- God’s plan for ending injustice is the church; and
- Pleading for justice: what can we do; the way of justice is led by the way of prayer.

These themes are organised in three Studies:

Study 1: The Creator and how sin introduces injustice

Study 2: Understanding God’s heart and Jesus Christ’s work of justice

Study 3: The Church and justice

How we study

Steps in each Study:

1. Read
 - Asking God to speak to you through the texts you are about to read
 - Reading them slowly, reflecting on what you are reading
 - Asking God what He is saying to you as you are reading
2. Getting started: Raising general issues to think about, and setting the scene
3. Observation: Getting the detail and noting what they are about
4. Interpretation: Thinking a little more in depth by going *in and behind* the passages
5. Implication: Applying and reflecting on what God is saying to you
6. Praying:
 - For what God has spoken to you
 - For specific plight of the oppressed and for their deliverance
 - Praising God for answered prayers

References

The study notes have drawn relevant materials from the following books and publications:

- “God of Justice” by Abraham George and Nikki Toyama-Szeto;
- “Good News about Justice” by Gary Haugen;
- “The Justice Calling” by Bethany Hoang & Kristen Johnson;
- “The Just Church” by Jim Martin; and
- Various IJM publications.

The questions for discussions are selected from “The God of Justice” and “Good News about Justice”.

STUDY ONE

Creation and The Sin That Corrupts Shalom

Study overview

We begin with the story of God's creation which reflects His goodness and image. People have inherent dignity and value because they are made by God in his image. **Shalom** (the Hebrew word from Genesis and translated in English as simply *peace*) incorporates what it means to be whole, complete, safe and sound for all humanity. God's justice and righteousness are manifestation of His character.

Sin enters humanity, corrupts shalom and leads to injustice. It is important therefore that we understand the root causes, scale and magnitude of injustice, and how the systems and cultures around us contribute to, and perpetuate, injustice.

Background note on shalom

"First articulated in the Old Testament poetic and prophetic literature, and then again in the New Testament, the idea of shalom places justice at its core. Shalom is present when people live in harmony with God, and is present when they live in nature. In addition, there is another key relationship that shalom encompasses. We believe it is critically important to recognise that shalom is present when a person lives in perfect harmony with his/her human beings. As people working with victims of violent abuse around the world, this takes on special poignancy"².

Biblical passages

The Creation: **Genesis 1: 1-2, 11-12, 26-31; Ch 2: 1-3; Ps 139: 13-16**

Sin corrupts shalom: **Gen 3: 1-13; 21-24; Ch 4: 1-12**

Injustice: **Ps 10: 1-11**
Isiah 59: 14-15

Observation and interpretation

Question 1: What characteristics of God do you see emerge from these passages?

Question 2: In Genesis, God says his creation is good. Is it still true and in what ways when you look at the world around you?

Question 3: How do you characterise injustice and on what basis?

Question 4: Do you struggle with the reality of suffering and evil in the world?

² Abraham George & Nikki Toyama-Szeto, "God of Justice", p 9.

Question 5: In Ps 10: 1-11, what are the elements that define injustice?

Perspectives & implication

Identify any current issues of injustice and brain storm the various ways that different factors have contributed to them. Consider both personal (i.e. injustice committed by individuals) and systemic (by society and culture) factors.

Question 6: What do you think are the roots of injustice for these issues?

Question 7: By gaining a deeper understanding of injustice, in what ways might it help you relate to injustice victims?

Praying

God says that those who mourn (injustice victims in this context) will be comforted. How? Where will they find comfort amid all this darkness? The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter; at the same time, God has also assigned us a role as comforters and intercessors.

Prayer points:

- i. For us to be relentless comforters and intercessors;
- ii. For us to be sensitive to God's call to justice;
- iii. Specific prayer points to be provided by IJM;
- iv. Praise to God for answered prayers;
- v. For us to have wisdom, courage and perseverance to become the answers to these prayers;
and
- vi. Others.

STUDY TWO

Understanding God's Heart

Study overview

The main theme is that God cares deeply about justice and is passionately concerned for injustice victims. He detests injustice and wants it to stop.

We read at the story of God leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, an event that helps the Israelites to know who God is. God's justice also involves punishment (the Egyptians in this case).

As part of the connected story of the Bible, we study at the life of Jesus and the kind of justice he showed. The central purpose of His coming to earth was to do the work of justice and restore shalom, just as God promised He would do back in the Old Testament. Jesus revealed God's heart. He revealed that bringing freedom for slave victims and relief to the poor and oppressed, is integral to his mission.

Shalom is not only God's cause but we too, as followers of Christ, must engage in the work of shalom.

Biblical passages

Exodus story:	Exodus 2: 23 to 3: 15; 12: 29-36; 14: 19-31
Justice of God & His response to injustice:	Ps 10: 14-18; Ps 12: 5, Ps 103: 6, Ps 146: 7-9
Jesus doing work of justice:	Luke 4:1-21
Justice and the Cross of Jesus	Luke 23:13-49

Observation and interpretation

Exodus

- Question 1: What characteristics of God do you see emerge from the Exodus story?
- Question 2: What is the role of punishment in delivering justice?
- Question 3: What might have happened to the Israelites if God had not punished the Egyptians?

God's attitude and heart for the oppressed

- Question 4: How would you describe how God feels about injustice, the oppressed and the perpetrators?

Jesus' mission

- Question 5: Why did Jesus quote Isaiah when declaring his mission on earth?
- Question 6: What are the verbs describing Jesus' mission?
- Question 7: What does the crucifixion teach us about God's view of justice?

Perspectives & implication

Question 8: What do you think God is specifically saying to you about His heart of justice?

Question 7: What stood out to you as you read the above passages?

Praying

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Prayer points:

- i. For us to be relentless comforters and intercessors
- ii. For us to be sensitive to God's call to justice
- iii. Specific prayer points to be provided by IJM
- iv. For us to have wisdom, courage and perseverance to become the answers to these prayers
- v. Others

STUDY THREE

The Justice Calling

Study overview

This Study focuses on God's call to us for justice and the church's role in doing justice. There is also a need to connect justice and discipleship. The work of evangelism and justice are carried out together. The questions we want to ask ourselves are:

- i. How can we do the work of justice?
- ii. What do we need to confront the power of injustice?
- iii. When will we start?

Biblical passages

God's call to us for justice:	Micah 6: 8, Proverbs 31: 8-9, Isaiah 1: 17; Jeremiah 22: 16, Isaiah 58: 6-9
The church and justice:	Acts 2: 42 – 3: 10
God's power for work of justice:	Philippians 4: 13, 2 Timothy 1: 7
Pleading for justice:	Hebrews 13: 3

Observation and interpretation

God's call to us for justice

Question 1: What do these verses say about God's expectations of His followers?

Question 2: Is God asking you why "righteousness stands at a distance"?

God's power for work of justice

Question 3: What does this mean for you personally?

Pleading for justice

Question 4: How can you reserve space in your life to attend to the needs of the oppressed?

Perspectives & implication

Question 5: How can we do the work of justice?

Question 6: When can you begin?

Praying

(From IJM's "Prayer of Release and Entrustment" – Prayer/Liturgy)

Prayer for justice can be exhausting and draining; often we feel overwhelmed by the stories of violence and injustice that we see and hear. While this discomfort and sorrow can be healthy, God does not desire to leave us in a place of darkness where we are overcome by the brokenness in His world. Remembering that God is with us and with those who suffer in the darkest places, enables us to release our burdens.

Below is a prayer/liturgy of release and entrustment that IJM hopes will help you to intentionally hand over to God the weight of darkness you may bear after praying for justice.

Kind Lord, thank you for commissioning me into this ministry of prayer for rescue and deliverance.

I have answered your call this day/night. Even as you left the light of heaven to dwell in the darkness of earth, I have followed you deliberately into a kind of darkness and evil from which most righteous people are taught to flee.

I have read stories with my eyes and prayed fervently for deliverance from a kind of suffering and despair that is more than my human ear can bear. O God of Light, by your mercy, dispel this darkness and speed the dawn.

May all those who now lie beyond the reach of safety and freedom remain in your watchful tender care. For this day, I leave all that I have read and prayed in your gentle hands.

Lift me from the burden of sadness, fear and despair that weighs me down because of this sinful world. Where I have been tempted by anger, lack of faith or hopelessness, fill me instead with your joy, persistence and peace.

June 2017

David Vu

St Barnabas Broadway



Cassie's Story

After five years trapped in cybersex trafficking, Cassie is now standing on her own and reaching for dreams that no longer feel impossible.

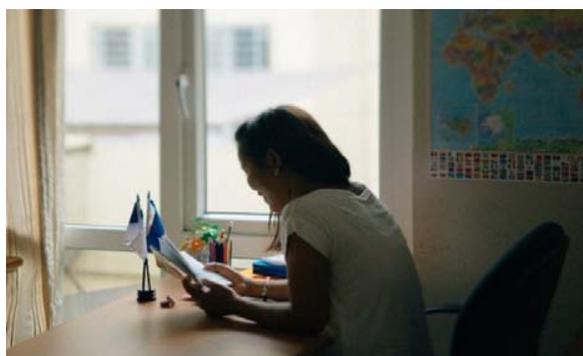
CASSIE* WAS 12 YEARS OLD when she followed a family friend's promise of new clothes, school supplies and a chance to get a good education in Manila.

Eight hundred miles away from the childhood home where she had grown up without electricity or technology of any kind, Cassie soon learned that the man she had trusted was running a global cybersex trafficking ring out of his home.

For nearly five years Cassie was trapped with other young women and children—including a 2-year-old—who were subject to horrific abuse.

By day, she went to school. But at night and on weekends, she was raped and forced to perform sex acts in front of a webcam broadcast to customers located all around the world.

“It was really hard,” Cassie says, her chilling words tumbling out quickly, “I was thinking, ‘I want to die, I want to die because of this pain, but I can’t. I want to stop my breath. But, it’s always—Oh, I’m still breathing. Why can’t I die?’”



“I’m one of the victims too of cybersex trafficking who is standing in front of you talking to you...I want to tell her forget about the past, just stand with your own feet. And reach the dreams that you want to reach.”

- Cassie's message to other trafficking victims

Although Cassie felt completely alone, people were looking for her. IJM worked with Philippine authorities and U.S. Homeland Security to pinpoint Cassie's location and rescue her and six others from the living nightmare of exploitation. The man who profited from her abuse for so many years was arrested, imprisoned and is now standing trial.

Cassie is safe today and thriving in an aftercare home for survivors of sex trafficking. She meets regularly with her IJM social worker and is back in school. Cassie dreams of traveling and someday becoming a tour guide.

“It is hard to pen how strong and courageous Cassie has been, given the intensity of circumstances she went through and how she has found her inner strength and beauty in the process of recovery,” wrote her IJM social worker Karen recently.

“Cassie overcame the most difficult enemy she faced, herself, when she decided to stop blaming herself for everything that has happened. She unceasingly fights for her rights and strives for the realization of her dreams.”

[Watch Cassie share her story in her own words.](#)



Maarko's Story

A 7-year-old survivor of cybersex trafficking has been set free, but scores more still suffer in silence and wait for rescue in the Philippines

If you met Maarko* today, you would see a joyful, energetic 7-year-old boy who loves superheroes and playing freeze tag with his friends. Yet when the IJM team first met Maarko in the Philippines, his life was drastically different.

A British man paid Maarko's mother to set up a webcam in the privacy of her home so he could direct live sexual abuse of children over the internet. The demand for shows spread to customers in other countries, including the U.S. and Canada, and Maarko, his 2-year-old sister, and cousins living next door found themselves trapped in a global network of abuse.

Cybersex trafficking is a devastating form of modern slavery made possible by the rapid spread of the internet.



Maarko's story represents the reality that thousands of children in the Philippines face.

Children even younger than Maarko are forced to perform sex acts in front of a webcam, as directed by a customer sitting on the other side of a computer screen. The criminals feel protected by the anonymity of the internet, but the crime is anything but virtual. It's a real child being abused in real time.

After a six-month investigation that underscores the complexity of this borderless crime, Maarko, his sister and cousins were rescued by IJM and Philippine authorities in August 2015.

"I had mixed emotions while listening to their stories," an IJM social worker confessed after supporting Maarko throughout the rescue operation. "I could not understand the logic of these suspects in abusing their own family members. This is a very traumatizing experience for the victims and will definitely affect the way they look at their future."

The British man who organized the cybersex trafficking ring is behind bars, and Maarko's mother is awaiting her trial. Authorities have not yet found digital evidence of Maarko's abuse; when shows are live-streamed, the video evidence disappears. IJM lawyers are supporting the case, while IJM social workers continue counseling and meeting with Maarko and the other children at the safe shelter where they now live.

Maarko is learning and growing in his new life—free to be a child again.



Rescued Families Return Home as Kiln Owner Faces Charges

March 11, 2016

CHENNAI, INDIA – This week, hundreds of families rescued in IJM’s largest anti-slavery operation ever returned to their home villages, and the man responsible for their abuse waited in custody to finally be held accountable for his crimes.

This is the second time this powerful brick kiln owner has been arrested on charges of bonded labor slavery.

In 2011, IJM and local police rescued 512 children, women and men who had been forced to work in his factory. The owner was arrested, but later released on bail. IJM and local authorities argued for him to be returned to custody as the case progressed, but he remained free. That legal case is still waiting for trial today.

Just in the last few months, IJM and police discovered the kiln owner had begun trafficking more families to work in a brick kiln—and we collaborated to bring all 564 people to safety last week. [Read about the thrilling rescue here.](#)

Police arrested the kiln owner again, as well as five of his accomplices, and plan to charge him under the Bonded Labour Act and under newer provisions of the Indian penal code directly related to slavery and trafficking. This new law, passed in 2013, has helped bring stronger cases against traffickers and business owners using slave labor, and better protects the vulnerable poor from this kind of violence.



Rescued Families Return Home to Recover

Now safe from this kiln owner’s brutality, the 564 people rescued last Wednesday are just beginning their new lives in freedom.

Read about the abuse these families endured and the hard-working officials who rescued them in [The Hindu](#) and [The Deccan Chronicle](#).