

Everyday Justice

THE GLOBAL IMPACT OF OUR DAILY CHOICES



JULIE CLAWSON

Foreword by TOM and Christine Sine


IVP Books

An imprint of InterVarsity Press
Downers Grove, Illinois

Contents

Foreword by Tom and Christine Sine / 9

WARNING! *Read Before Proceeding* / 13

Introduction / 17

1. COFFEE: *Fair Trade and the Daily Latte* / 31

2. CHOCOLATE: *Modern-Day Slavery Exposed* / 53

3. CARS: *The Global and Local Impact of Oil Consumption* / 75

4. FOOD: *Choosing to Eat Ethically* / 95

5. CLOTHES: *The Story Behind What We Wear* / 119

6. WASTE: *The High Price of Our Dirty Little Habits* / 143

7. DEBT: *Proclaiming Jubilee to the Nations* / 165

Conclusion / 185

Acknowledgments / 191

Notes / 193

About the Author / 207

Warning!

READ BEFORE PROCEEDING



D*on't panic.* I think any book on living justly needs to have those words displayed prominently across the cover. With respect to Douglas Adams, whose *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* has those very words inscribed in large, friendly letters on the cover, I think those of us exploring how to integrate justice into our lives need a reminder not to panic.

All too often I find that conversations that involve changing our lifestyles result in us feeling overwhelmed at the sheer immensity of the problem. There is too much hurt out there, too much that needs to change, and too much to tackle all at once. From just becoming aware of the needs in the world, to realizing that our lifestyle choices make a difference, to understanding how our faith informs how we approach justice issues, we can feel shaken to the core.

Encountering new ideas and allowing those ideas to change who we are is a huge step for most of us. Too often we live compartmentalized lives that don't allow for the different spheres of our existence to interact. Church is separate from shopping. Our morning latte doesn't connect with our volunteer work (besides giving us a needed caffeine boost). Our waste disposal habits are removed from our politics. They each exist separately and apart in our hectic lives.

But encountering justice issues changes all of that. Our lives are no longer just a series of unrelated tasks and errands with the occasional leisure activity thrown in when there's time. Our lives are part of a bigger picture. Our local, everyday choices reverberate around the world. And at the center, pushing and informing all of those choices, is our faith. Life suddenly becomes a lot more complicated. Acting justly every day means developing awareness about the problems in the world; it means changing how we shop, how we dress and how we drive; it means starting to see our each and every action as an ethical choice.

So you can begin to see why the warning "Don't panic" might be necessary. Making sense of all this stuff, much less actually doing anything about it, seems nearly impossible. Even if we want to jump headfirst into a life of living justly, we may fear that we will drown in the vastness of the problems. We want to change the world, but sometimes it's hard to even know where to begin. We panic, we get overwhelmed, and we let our feelings of inadequacy paralyze us. We see acting justly as an all-or-nothing endeavor, and because we can't do it all, we often end up doing nothing.

This book exists to help us start doing something by giving concrete and practical steps to help us live justly in the everyday. I fully admit to the enormity of the problems, which are often too much for one person to fully grasp. The pain and suffering in this world are immense, as are the many systemic injustices that perpetuate cultures of poverty and oppression. I will explore some of the stories of ways systemic injustices are played out in people's lives and then examine ways that our lifestyle choices exacerbate the problems. This may shock and overwhelm you at times, but the point is not to leave you feeling guilty and helpless. This book tells the intricate and complicated stories of injustice for specific reasons: (1) so we can see how our Christian faith should inform our response to those issues and (2) so we can discover practical ways we can start working for justice in our day-to-day lives.

To change the world, we must start somewhere. It can be easy to sign a petition, wear a bracelet, put a banner on our blog or a bumper sticker on our car, or simply give money to help with a cause, but to really start effecting change we have to actually start tweaking the way we live.

And yes, I said tweak—not overhaul.

Asking people to completely overhaul their lives after reading a book is unrealistic. Such a request prompts the feelings of panic I mentioned before. A few of us *might* be ready for the overhaul, but we are *all* capable of tweaking. All of us can discern where God is leading us to alter our lives—to change one thing at a time, taking the time to really understand and get behind our actions. Sometimes insisting that the revolution be slow means that it will actually be *doable*.

I like the approach Benjamin Franklin took to becoming a virtuous person. Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Franklin “conceiv’d the bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection.”¹ He then compiled a list of thirteen virtues he desired to incorporate into his life. Discovering he “had undertaken a Task of more Difficulty than [he] had imagined,”² he decided against vowing to start living completely virtuously immediately (as many of us do every New Year’s Day). Instead he decided to tackle one virtue a week as he worked his way to his desired state of perfection. Using an eighteenth-century, pen-and-paper spreadsheet to keep track of his progress, he embarked on the quest for virtue. He, of course, discovered that he had many more faults than he expected, but over time, he had the pleasure of watching those faults diminish as virtue increased.

Those of us seeking to live justly wouldn’t be amiss to follow Franklin’s example. One thing at a time. Slow, step-by-step changes in our lives. This book presents sometimes-overwhelming amounts of information, yet this book hardly scratches the surface of many of the issues. The point is not to force change on

people or to expect everyone's journey into everyday justice to look the same. This book is a starting line. I hope it will provide some helpful information to acquaint you with the nature of the conversation and provide some good ideas on how to respond. But you need to take it at your own pace. Research the issues that strike you; go deeper on those that touch your heart. Explore more on what the Bible has to say about justice. Try a new type of food. Watch a documentary. Shop at a different store. Do what you can when you can.

And like I said: just don't panic.