

GOOD NEWS
ABOUT
INJUSTICE

A WITNESS OF COURAGE

IN A HURTING WORLD

STUDY GUIDE

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Introduction

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Good News About Injustice by Gary A. Haugen provides a compelling tour of complex issues of injustice around the world. Not only does injustice confront us with the horror of human suffering and the terror of human (and demonic) evil, it also raises many troubling questions. Where is God? Why doesn't God act? Where are good people? Why don't we act? What can be done about these horrible situations? Surely God isn't content for us merely to sit back as voyeurs and observers of others' agonies?

This study guide and accompanying video are designed to help you process the complex issues and the confusing questions raised by the prevalence of injustice in our world today. It is also written to help you understand what others are doing about injustice and to discern what God might be calling you to do.

Through the four study sessions you will examine what it means to extend the love of Jesus to a particular category of persons; namely, the men, women and children who are victimized by the abuse of power in our world. As Christians 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. But when it comes to rescuing the oppressed, we are at the beginning of our journey.

Though the stories contained in this study guide reflect the work of World Vision and the International Justice Mission, the desire is not primarily that you choose to partner with these particular organizations. Our desire is for you to discern God's call in your life and find partners who can walk with you as you come alongside the poor and oppressed.

In order to make optimal use of this book and study, we encourage you to first read the entire book *Good News About Injustice*. The study guide will then lead you through key themes that emerge throughout the book, provide discussion questions for central biblical texts and give you opportunities to reflect on your own response.

The accompanying video includes some fascinating insights and comments by former President Jimmy Carter, who shares a commitment to Christ and to a witness for justice in the world. President Carter is well respected throughout the world for his active engagement in the promotion of justice and human rights. On the video he discusses why his Christian faith provides the foundation and the motivation for his involvement.

The video also contains scenes of situations around the world that are filled with grave injustice. While the footage is designed to provoke discussion, some images will be disturbing. If you are doing this study with children, we encourage you to preview the video.

Seeking justice on behalf of the oppressed can seem overwhelming, even futile. However, it is essential to understand that justice is God's concern. God is the God of justice who responds to the cries of the oppressed. Yet as Jesus' followers, Christians cannot view the pursuit of justice simply as an extra-credit option in our witness in the world. This is because injustice is frequently at the root of human suffering, and is an integral part of why so many are in need, why so many remain without adequate food, water, health and shelter.

The victims of injustice are often voiceless and forgotten. Who will remember and be their voice? God has set the task before his followers: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8).

Engaging in the pursuit of justice is our distinct privilege as Christians, who are empowered by the God of the universe to bring healing and justice to our world. It also is a choice. Will we choose to live in a world of injustice and do nothing? Or, like Jesus, will we choose to challenge the powerful, building bridges instead of walls among humankind? These are among the questions we will grapple with in this study of the world's needs, God's plan and our response.

As you embark on this study, consider challenging yourself to stay in prayer and record your insights in a journal. It is our prayer that throughout the coming four weeks God will reveal to you how you can be his instrument in bringing hope to the hopeless.

This study guide is one of three vital resources that take a biblical and practical approach to the critical issue of injustice throughout the world. World Vision, International Justice Mission and InterVarsity Press have cooperated to produce these resources.

World Vision is an international Christian relief and development organization that each year touches the lives of more than 50 million people. Working in both the United States and in more than 90 countries abroad, World Vision offers the sick, hungry, oppressed and homeless physical help and spiritual hope.

International Justice Mission is a Christian ministry, led by human rights professionals, that helps people suffering injustice and oppression who cannot rely on local authorities for relief. The ministry documents and monitors conditions of abuse and oppression, educates the church and public about the abuses, and mobilizes intervention on behalf of the victims.

InterVarsity Press is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA. As an extension of IVCF/USA, InterVarsity Press serves those in the university, the church and the world by publishing resources that equip and encourage people to follow Jesus as Savior and Lord in all of life.

Study 1

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GOD'S PROMISE:

Hope in the Midst of Despair

Through this session you will be able to:

- Describe the biblical definition of injustice and its causes*
-
- Discern the biblical definition of hope for victims of injustice*
-
- Begin the next steps in your own journey of bringing God's justice to the oppressed*

Contemporary Context

Osner is a prominent attorney in his home town of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Sadly, there is much poverty in his country, and as a devout Christian, Osner has provided legal counsel to World Vision International as it works with Haitian Christians to provide a future for vulnerable children. Osner and his wife have seen many brutal dictators come and go in their country. In recent years, it was only the pressure of international military intervention that was able to restore an elected president who had been overthrown by a military coup. Even now, the legacy of government corruption and abusive officials still presses against this struggling Caribbean country.

And now, Osner himself is a victim, thrown in jail on the orders of corrupt local officials who have been trying illegally to seize a section of his land. His arrest and detention are clearly illegal under Haitian law, and five court orders have mandated his release—but the detaining authorities ignore these orders.

Local pastors and Christian lay people have appealed to the Haitian government for Osner's release, but their pleas have been ignored. Authorities make unfounded allegations against Osner, but never charge him before a court on these claims. They also falsely argue that the court orders mandating his release are invalid.

Incarcerated for months in an overcrowded prison, Osner became ill with malaria and typhoid fever. His wife, Yanick, was terrified when she heard Osner was moved to a more dangerous prison that is well known for violence—and for prisoners going in but not coming out. Even the director of the prison became worried when high-level authorities demanded Osner be moved to this brutal cellblock where the most hardened criminals are held.

Weeks later, Osner's family and friends became even more frightened when they heard the voice of the prison director over a radio-broadcasting from Miami. The now former prison director had fled the country. He feared for his life, partly because he has refused to cooperate with official plots against Osner's life. After nearly nine months, those who love and care for Osner were losing hope.

Take time now to view the video for session one:

This session's video features a conversation between former President Jimmy Carter and International Justice Mission President Gary Haugen. In this video, former President Carter shares his Christian commitment to seeking justice for the oppressed and what inspires him to continue in that work.

Biblical Focus

1 Let's begin this study by considering what injustice is. How do you characterize or define injustice? On what do you base that definition (opinion, law, etc.)? **Read Ecclesiastes 4:1.** What does this verse say oppressors use to control others?

2 Scripture is clear that injustice occurs when power is misused to take from others what God has given them; namely, their life, their dignity, their liberty, and the fruits of their love and their labor. Simply put, the sin of injustice is the abuse of power (see *Good News About Injustice*, p. 86). **Read Psalm 10:2-10.** What elements that offer a biblical definition of injustice are included in these verses?

3 Look closely at Osner's story. Make a list of all the things local authorities have taken from Osner and his family. What means have they used to take these things away? Can you find the coercive force? Can you find the deception?

4 In many cases, the exercise of injustice may seem overwhelming, particularly to the victim. Put yourself in Osner's place and imagine how you might respond to your oppressors. What feelings do you think you would have? What would you consider your options? If you were Osner, what do you think you would need to overcome this injustice? **Note:** If you are doing this study with others, consider role playing Osner's situation. Have individuals play Osner, his wife, the prison director, oppressive authorities, a short-term missionary visiting Haiti, etc. Through role-play, try to answer the above questions.

5 Read **John 3:20**. What does the evildoer fear? What kind of investigation might be needed to expose the truth in Osner's case? Who are the members of the body of Christ who might have special training, expertise or experience for this task?

6 Dealing with oppression in a world of injustice may seem hopeless. As Christians, our faith and hope are challenged as we face the evil of naked injustice. Yet we do have hope as the God of all hope has called us to work on behalf of the oppressed (see *Good News About Injustice*, pp. 98-100). And those he calls, he empowers, as we will see in study four. Read **Isaiah 1:17**. What is God calling his people to do in this verse? Break into small discussion groups and share your feelings about this calling.

ACTIVITY Take some time this week to study issues in the news that include dimensions of injustice. What is the injustice? Who is being overpowered? What coercive force or deception does the oppressor use? What could be done on their behalf? Bring your findings and ideas to class next week.

Hope for the Oppressed

While Christian attorney Osner remained in the Haitian prison, Christians throughout Haiti remained steadfast in their prayers for Osner and his family. A number of American Christians serving in Haiti called upon Christians in the United States to pray, and brought Osner's case to the attention of the International Justice Mission, where Christians with special expertise could attempt to seek justice on his behalf.

The first step was to overcome the deception of the detaining authorities and to expose the truth about Osner's plight. Bob, a professional criminal investigator with International Justice Mission, visited Haiti and conducted a thorough fact-finding mission. Ray, a gifted Christian lawyer from the United States, donated his time to International Justice Mission and worked with Christian lawyers in Haiti to establish beyond any doubt that the detaining authorities were violating the law.

The next step was to overcome the coercive power of the detaining authorities by exposing the truth to powers over their heads. Haitian authorities are very concerned about their relations with the United Nations and the United States, so an International Justice Mission delegation (led by a former U.S. ambassador of devout Christian faith) met with U.S. government authorities in Washington, D.C., the U.S. Ambassador in Haiti, and United Nations officials in Haiti to present the facts of the case. Meanwhile, another American attorney donated her time to secure support for Osner from the U.S. Congress. In addition, International Justice Mission enlisted the help of former President Jimmy Carter, who made a direct appeal to the President of Haiti on Osner's behalf.

In the meantime, a constant flow of intercessory prayer was continuing in the U.S. and Haiti. One day, just before Christmas, International Justice Mission staff gathered for a special time of prayer for Osner and his family. And "while they were yet praying" (as the Book of Acts says about those praying for the release of the Apostle Peter from jail), the telephone rang. Osner's wife was calling with the news that her husband had called from prison to say he had been released.

As Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and . . . to release the oppressed” (Luke 4:18). Days later, as thousands of Haitian Christians gathered to celebrate Osner’s release, one could sense the word of the Lord—“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

First Step: Reserving space in our lives for those who suffer. While it is not our natural inclination to “reserve space” for those who suffer abuse and oppression around the world, it is essential to answering God’s call to “do to others what you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31). This also means to remember those who suffer as if you yourself were suffering (see *Good News About Injustice*, pp. 38-40). How can you reserve space in your life to attend to the needs of the oppressed? In other words, how can you remember the plight of someone victimized by the abuse of power? Try to be specific.

Time in Prayer: There are thousands of innocent men, women and children held without charge or trial in detention cells around the world. Spend a few moments in prayer for them, remembering “those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners” (Hebrews 13:3). Consider contacting an overseas missionary your church supports. Ask them if there are individuals or groups of people in the country they serve who suffer under injustice and oppression, and ask how you might remember them in prayer.

Next week: While sin has entangled humankind in injustice, our God is a God of mercy and compassion who has not forgotten those who suffer. Next week we will see that God is a God of justice, examine why God allows injustice in the world, and know that Jesus himself experienced injustice at the hands of oppressors.

Study 2

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GOD'S PASSION:

Seeking Justice

Last week we examined the meaning of injustice, seeing that the sin of injustice is the abuse of power. Yet the God of hope provides relief for the victims of injustice as he empowers his followers to work on behalf of the oppressed.

Through this session you will be able to:

Explore ways in which God is a God of justice

Address some of the questions raised by God permitting such injustice in the world

Celebrate God's response to injustice in Jesus Christ

Contemporary Context

In Thailand, Cambodia, India and several other Asian countries, thousands of young girls are held in forced prostitution. Often kidnapped or sold directly by impoverished parents to brothels, these children face lives of terror and disease as they are sexually exploited—and beaten if they do not cooperate.

Atao is a 14-year-old girl from Thailand. Earlier in the year, a man came to her impoverished village in the hills of northern Thailand with promises of work in a restaurant near Chiang Mai. But instead of working in a restaurant she was sold into a brothel in Chiang Mai. Atao yearned to run away, but the burly, tattooed men in the brothel blocked escape and threatened beatings for girls who didn't comply.

Sumita is a 14-year-old girl in India. When she was 12-years-old her mother died and her father tried to marry her off to an older man in the village. Sumita ran away, jumped on a train for Bombay and found herself alone and penniless in this crowded city. A man bought her some food and said he knew a place she could make some money washing vessels. Hopeful, she followed the man across town, only to be led unknowingly to a Bombay street where men go to buy sex.

She was taken upstairs and held in a windowless room. For three days Sumita cried. The brothel keeper told her that she had been sold by the man for \$750 and she would have to provide sex to customers in order to pay off the debt. She was slapped, beaten, pulled about by her hair and constantly reminded of what was required of her. After a week, her first customer was brought to her room. But Sumita screamed and struggled, frustrating the customer. When the customer complained to the brothel keeper, Sumita was slapped and beaten until she would submit. Before the evening was over, she did submit. After that, she stopped trying to escape. "I was like a bird with broken wings," Sumita said.

Throughout the next few years she was sold from brothel to brothel, forced to receive four to five customers a day in a city with one of the fastest growing AIDS epidemics in the world. In time, the brothel keeper's coercion became as invisible and constant as gravity, conveying an iron law: "No one can help you. You have nowhere to go."

Take time now to view the video for session two:

This video introduces you to the International Justice Mission, which specializes in enforcing legal systems to confront injustice around the world. International Justice Mission President Gary Haugen is also the author of *Good News About Injustice*, the book on which this study guide is based. In this video, Gary Haugen shares his passion and vision for justice. You will also learn about two young people who have benefited from the work of the International Justice Mission, including Seema, an Indian girl who was forced into prostitution at age 13.

Biblical Focus

1 When we consider the violation of Atao and Sumita's rights as well as the physical and emotional abuse they were forced to endure, it may seem that the powerful are destined to rule over the weak. But is this true? **Read Psalm 72:12-14.** What do these verses say God will do for the needy? How does knowing that God is on the side of the oppressed change the way we as Christians approach what can seem like the futility of oppression?

2 To say that God is a God of justice is one way of saying that he is concerned about whether those who have power or authority over others are exercising it in accordance with his standards (see *Good News About Injustice*, p. 71). God is the ultimate power and authority in the universe, so justice occurs when power and authority are exercised in conformity with his standards. **Read Matthew 28:18 and Colossians 1:15-18.** What do these verses say about the authority of Jesus? Since God is a God of justice and has all authority in heaven and on earth, why do you think he allows injustice?

3 Part of the answer to why God allows injustice is this: God is willing to allow evil people to abuse those who are weak because in seeking an authentic relationship with each man and woman, he acknowledges that we must be free not to act in love (see *Good News About Injustice*, pp. 115-116). Yet God is not willing to allow injustice to rule unchecked. **Read Psalm 12:5 and 103:6.** What do these verses reveal about God’s response to injustice?

4 During his life on earth, what injustice did Jesus experience? Jesus’ suffering on the cross was the ultimate injustice—and also a demonstration that there was no measure of human suffering that Jesus was not willing to bear (see *Good News About Injustice*, p. 124). **Read John 19:1-3.** How does knowing that Jesus suffered oppression influence your commitment to “stand in the gap” for those experiencing injustice today?

5 In fact, God takes all of the world's injustice upon himself. Through his atoning act on the cross, Jesus took the burden of all the world's sins—including acts of injustice. **Read Isaiah 53:4-5 and Romans 4:25.** How does knowing that Jesus has assumed the burden for injustice affect the way you think about or approach issues of injustice?

ACTIVITY Take out the news articles you found last week and break into small groups. What touched you most about these articles? Can you identify the coercion and deception at work? What is being done concerning the injustice? What exposure of the truth is necessary? Who might have the power to intervene over the oppressors? How do you think Christians can step out in faith and obedience in these situations as God empowers us to meet the needs of the oppressed?

Hope for the Oppressed

While the brothel keeper told Samita that “no one can help you,” the brothel keeper was wrong. Christians who serve as professional criminal investigators with the International Justice Mission infiltrated the brothels where Atao and Sumita were being held and surreptitiously videotaped their plight. They took their investigative report to senior police authorities and established special police contacts, who raided the brothels, set the girls free and referred them for special care.

Of course, girls released from such circumstances need special care. Consider Ratha, a 15-year-old girl who was held in brutal forced prostitution in Cambodia. Fortunately, she was able to escape and make her way to World Vision’s Street Children’s Center in the middle of Phnom Penh.

Ratha stayed at the center for two months as she received counseling, nurture and guidance concerning her future. Ratha also went to Battambang for five months to study tailoring, then returned to the center.

“I enjoy studying here and the food is good,” she said. “I also have the opportunity to cook and sew, all of which I enjoy. The home here is much better than what we called ‘home’ in the village.”

Ratha, who plans one day to operate her own restaurant or sewing shop, now has hope for the future. However, countless other children are exploited each day to serve the Asian sex trade. Estimates suggest that 30 percent of the more than 20,000 prostitutes in Cambodia are minors. Many young Cambodian girls are trafficked into Thai brothels every year, where they are subject to appalling working conditions. A substantial number of young girls from Vietnam, some as young as 9 or 10 years old, are trafficked into Cambodia’s brothels.

Second Step: Preparing to confront injustice. God knows injustice intimately through the suffering of Jesus and he seeks justice for every human being. Understanding that Jesus is with us as we go to bring hope to a needy world, what areas of your spiritual life do you want to challenge to be ready to confront injustice?

Time in Prayer: Forced prostitution is an evil that at minimum robs children of their physical, mental and emotional security and health, and at worst claims their lives through the common transmission of AIDS. Pray for the estimated 1 million children that each year are kidnapped or lured into prostitution around the world—frequently with the complicity of local police. Pray for the mobilization of trained Christians to bring rescue, and for lasting solutions to the poverty that often creates the context that feeds children into this vile industry.

Next Week: We have seen this week that God is clearly a God of justice, but that in allowing humankind the free will to love him he allows injustice to continue to exist in our imperfect world. However, God is not without a plan to rescue those who fall victim to the oppressors; he intends to use us! Next week we will study what God is calling his followers to do, examine what each of us has to offer on behalf of the oppressed and be confident that in Christ we can find the compassion and courage to bring hope to victims of injustice.

Study 3

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GOD'S PLAN:

Rescuing the Oppressed

Last week we saw that God is a God of justice, and that a consequence of humanity's rejection of God is that evil people often abuse those who are weak. In seeking an authentic love with each man and woman, God allows individuals the freedom not to love him, and the result can be injustice.

Through this session you will be able to:

Describe how God uses his people to rescue the oppressed

•

*Appreciate that God can take whatever we have to offer
and use it for his kingdom*

•

*Know that as we go into the dark world of oppression
that in Christ we do not need to be overwhelmed
by the needs of the oppressed*

Contemporary Context

In many impoverished nations, children are exploited as resources for cheap labor. Whether working all day at home, serving as domestic servants, selling goods on the streets or laboring long hours in dangerous factories, millions of children around the world are forced to sacrifice their childhood to the rigors of labor. As a result, these children often remain uneducated, growing up to become adults who are unequipped to break out of the cycle of poverty.

One of the worst manifestations of this exploitation is a form of virtual slavery called "bonded child labor." Although it is illegal, 15 million children in India are

forced to work as slaves for local moneylenders. As it says in Job 24:9, “the infant of the poor is seized for a debt.” In bonded labor, children are sold into servitude in exchange for emergency loans.

Have another look at the story of Kanmani and the other young girls who have been sold into servitude, rolling cigarettes in their impoverished Indian village (see *Good News About Injustice*, pp. 43-44).

Today the market for these Indian-made cigarettes is growing, ensuring that more children will be bonded to produce larger quantities that are now shipped to the United States as a “fad” cigarette among some teenagers and young adults.

Take time now to view the video for session three:

This video introduces you to the issue of bonded labor and to Murugan, a young boy from India who was sold into bonded labor for \$75.

Biblical Focus

1 When we consider the conditions Kanmani and other children in her village must endure, it is easy to feel helpless. Yet, as we saw in last week’s study, God’s passion is justice for everyone—including Kanmani. **Read Psalm 9:9-12 and 10:14-18.** How do you think God protects and rescues the oppressed?

2 Take some time to brainstorm and list what you consider the options for freeing children from bonded labor. Now evaluate the pros and cons of each option. Since bonded child labor is against the law in India, how do you think the Indian government could be supported in the enforcement of its own laws? How do you think families could be helped so they do not have to resort to illegal bonded child labor?

3 God often chooses to rescue the lives of the needy from the hands of the wicked through those who choose to follow him in faith and obedience (see *Good News About Injustice*, p. 101). **Read Isaiah 6:8.** Note that the Lord was looking for someone “who will go for us.” How, like Isaiah, can we as Christians say, “Here am I. Send me!”?

4 As with Isaiah's calling, God is looking for willing hearts. While many who lack faith will shrink away from a distant and dark world of injustice, the people of God can find in Christ the compassion and courage to engage the call to justice. Knowing this, God promises in Galatians 6:9 that we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (see *Good News About Injustice*, p. 35). "What," you may ask, "do I have to offer to help bring justice to such looming problems as child labor?" Let's read again a familiar Bible story that demonstrates what God wants from us. **Read John 6:1-12.** What did the boy give to Jesus? What was Jesus able to do with the meager offering of the child? What can God do with whatever we have to offer?

5 When the disciples saw the crowd that needed to be fed on the shore of the Sea of Galilee that day, they assumed nothing could be done about it (see *Good News About Injustice*, pp. 100-101). From the world's point of view, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" (John 6:7). It is often easy to be overwhelmed by the world's needs, but Jesus warns us not to be lured into ineffectiveness by the world. **Read Matthew 5:14-16.** What are Christians to be in contrast to the world's darkness? What excuses do we use to not let our "light shine" before others in relation to justice issues?

ACTIVITY Working in groups, compile a list of Bible heroes you can think of who at one time were unjustly detained, imprisoned or abused by authorities of their day. (Hint: It may be a shorter list to name those who did *not* have this experience.) How does this impact the way you read **Luke 4:18** or **Isaiah 58:6**?

Hope for the Oppressed

John, a World Vision staff worker in India, was shocked one day when he saw that a bonded child laborer in his village was forced to wear leg irons. He knew he had to respond. Eventually, he worked alongside professional investigators from the International Justice Mission and carefully documented the exploitation of Kanmani and other children held in illegal servitude in a nearby village.

The investigation exposed a syndicate of nearly 500 bonded child laborers. When their investigative report was completed, God opened a door to meet with a powerful district magistrate—who also was a Christian. As a result of that meeting, the magistrate released Kanmani and hundreds of other bonded laborers, and scores of moneylenders were arrested. Moreover, the Christian magistrate was promoted to an office responsible for enforcing the laws against bonded child labor throughout the entire state.

Once released, children who were formerly in bonded labor are given educational and vocational opportunities designed to equip them with the skills they need for a better future. In some cases, parents also are trained with job skills that allow them to earn enough money so future loans are no longer necessary.

Third Step: Know that every Christian can make a difference in ushering God's justice into the world. Review the headings of the final chapter of *Good News About Injustice*. Are you a shepherd or teacher, a frontline global worker, a country or culture expert, a public justice professional, an international business person or professional, a storyteller or artist, or an active member of your church fellowship? Can you go, send, or pray? What might you and your closest Christian friends do together? What “five loaves and two fish” do you have, and how can you begin to offer them to the Lord for his work in the world?

Time in Prayer: Child labor severely limits the potential of an estimated 250 million children around the world. Whether children are needed to work at home, serve as domestic servants or spend long hours in substandard factories, child labor prevents children from receiving education and growing up with the confidence and skills they need to live wholesome lives. This is not just a problem in developing countries. A 1996 study conducted by the Associated Press revealed that in the United States some 59,600 children under the age of 14 were employed, and 13,100 worked in garment sweatshops (factories with repeated labor violations). Pray for all children whose lives are damaged by forced labor.

Next Week: As followers of Christ we have the privilege of being part of God's plan to rescue the oppressed. Next week we will see how we can step out in faith as God empowers us to meet the needs of the oppressed. You also will have the opportunity to begin creating a plan for how you will join God in his work of seeking justice on behalf of the persecuted.

Study 4

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GOD'S PEOPLE:

Empowered to Lift Up the Hurting

Last week we examined God's plan to rescue the oppressed through the work of his followers, and that God is ready to use whatever we offer on behalf of those victimized by the abuse of power.

Through this session you will be able to:

*Step out in faith as God empowers you to meet
the needs of the oppressed*

•

Begin equipping yourself to pursue justice on behalf of others

•

*Create a plan for how you will join God in seeking
justice for the hurting of the world*

Contemporary Context

For more than 30 years, the people of Colombia have suffered from many forms of brutality: army against guerrilla, guerrilla against paramilitary, average criminal against citizens. Kidnappings, corruption in government and violence caused by street gangs are regular parts of life in this Latin American country.

Milton Piragau grew up in this context in Soacha, a squatter settlement originally founded by members of a communist movement in the southern part of Bogota, capital of Colombia. The community has public services such as lights, but some of the 3,000 families who live there do not yet have clean running water and are not hooked up to a sewer system.

Although Soacha suffers the violence of many youth gangs who commit crimes and abuse drugs, most people are hard working and underemployed. Their minimal incomes come from construction work or street sales, and most people have not been educated beyond primary school.

Milton, however, never had the chance to break out of the violence and poverty. At 16, he was stabbed during a gang fight a few blocks from his home. Such deaths are so common in Colombia that most go unreported, but Milton's death had a profound impact on his next door neighbor, 14-year-old Mayerly Sanchez.

"He was like my brother," Mayerly said as she visited the cement crypt where her friend was buried after his death on January 28, 1996. "Just the day before he died, we had been playing soccer in the street."

Milton is only one of more than 30,000 who die violently each year in Colombia. The homicide rate in this nation of 36 million is 15 times greater than that of the United States. More than 1 million have also been displaced by the violence.

(This session's video segment will be viewed later in the study.)

Biblical Focus

1 God has bestowed each of us with certain gifts and resources. Being stewards of those resources means that as Christians we are to use these gifts for God's work. **Read Isaiah 59:14-16.** What do these verses say about God's expectations of his followers? Why do you think "righteousness stands at a distance"? What gifts, resources, relationships, expertise and power has God given you that may be used to work on behalf of the oppressed?

2 Now read **Philippians 4:13** and **2 Timothy 1:7**. According to these verses, who provides the power we need to confront issues of injustice? What does this mean for you personally?

3 If the almighty God of the universe is prepared to use us, his people, to seek justice, to rescue the oppressed, to defend the orphan and to plead for the widow, why do so many Christians fail to work for justice? We might begin with our attitude. How often are we resigned to the fact that gang wars, child labor, forced prostitution and homelessness are “just the way things are” (see *Good News About Injustice*, pp.126-128)? Yet as Christians our attitude should reflect God. **Read Psalm 9:9-12; 11:5-7 and Jeremiah 9:23-24**. What do these verses say about God’s attitude toward injustice? What practical ways can you demonstrate these attitudes in your own life?

4 When it comes to seeking justice in a world of vulnerable men, women and children, all of us are privileged with a role to play (see *Good News About Injustice*, p. 175). Why? Because Jesus said that along with mercy and faith, justice is one of those “more important matters” that none of us can neglect. **Read Matthew 23-24.** Here the Pharisees were so concerned with keeping the law that they strained their water so they wouldn’t accidentally swallow a gnat—an unclean insect according to the law. But Jesus said the Pharisees strained out a gnat but actually “swallowed a camel.” What is Jesus saying here about the importance of attending to justice? What does this mean for our work with justice issues?

5 As we prepare our minds and hearts to engage in some of the world’s most pressing issues, we do not have to come equipped with advanced college degrees, vast experience or high-level positions. Instead, we can be confident that God will use a willing, humble heart. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.** What kind of servants is God looking for in these verses? How can you be a willing, humble servant that God is able to use in areas of justice?

Hope for the Oppressed

Like many children growing up in the poorest neighborhoods in and around Bogota, Mayerly Sanchez has lived among violence for most of her 14 years. Yet Milton's death altered the direction of Mayerly's life. At his funeral, she vowed to work for peace in her nation. Making good on that promise, Mayerly today is the co-leader of a peace movement that was nominated for the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize.

"We define peace in four words: love, acceptance, forgiveness and work," explains Mayerly, one of 20,000 World Vision sponsored children involved in the movement.

In 1996 Mayerly and her friends, 15-year-old Monica Andrea Godoy and 10-year-old Brenda Carolina Monroy, were elected by their peers as spokespeople for the Children's Mandate for Peace, Life, and Freedom, a UNICEF initiative. Today Mayerly's activities range from discussing legislation with Colombian members of Congress to leading university conferences. Between organizing rallies, lobbying officials and running a kids' club, Mayerly juggles ninth grade studies, an after-school job and mother-daughter basketball games.

The work of Mayerly and the thousands of others mobilizing for peace has inspired more than 10 million Colombians to vote "yes" for a Citizen's Mandate for Peace, Life, and Freedom.

"I thank God for our participation in the peace process. This is really a great privilege," said Mayerly, who attends a local Nazarene church. "If I hadn't accepted God (six years ago) I wouldn't be doing what I am doing. I would probably have bad friends."

Take time now to view the video for session four. Throughout this study you have been introduced to injustices around the world. As Christians we can make a difference:

- The first video allows viewers to listen to the hearts of men and women who have incorporated Christ's call to justice into their daily lives.
- The second video allows viewers to listen to the hearts of children as boys and girls from different countries share their burdens and joys.

ACTIVITY As God calls us to seek justice, he calls us to equip ourselves with some basic knowledge of what it takes to pursue the call with excellence. As Isaiah said, we must “learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:17). Take several minutes now to write down the answers to these questions:

- What justice issues is God calling you to address in your community, nation, the world?
- Among the overseas workers that you or your church support, do you know of any manifestations of injustice, abuse and oppression that these overseas workers encounter in the communities where they serve?
- How might you and your church learn more about these issues?
- How might you or your church begin to specifically impact these issues?

Fourth Step: Know that each Christian can do something about injustice through three acts:

- Speaking up for the oppressed through prayer (speaking to the God of justice, mercy and power) and advocacy (carefully speaking the truth to humans in power)
- Standing with the oppressed
- Being used by God to deliver people from their oppression. Using the list you developed in this week’s activity, how can you help bring God’s justice to unjust situations? Consider situations in your own family, community and the world. What truth can you tell on behalf of those being victimized by the abuse of power? What power can you bring to bear on their behalf? What specific actions can you take on behalf of justice? When will you begin?

Time in Prayer: As we have seen throughout this study and particularly through the story of the children of Colombia, each one of us can make differences in issues of injustice. Pray for guidance for both yourself and others in your group as you prayerfully seek how you can be God’s instruments for justice in the world.

