

How our lifestyle can show love to our world



## THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is based on the teaching series at The Community Church (TCC) during March and April 2019 called JUST LIVING.

In those sessions we looked at how the way that we live has a direct and indirect impact on the whole of creation – people and planet.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- Remind you of some of the topics covered in that series
- Give you the chance to study some of the issues further using the **Action Points**. You can do this individually or in a small group setting
- Equip you to become actively involved in those areas that matter to you
- Challenge you to consider your lifestyle, and what it means to live justly and responsibly.

## JUSTICE

When we hear the word 'justice' we may easily think of it as punitive justice, perhaps the punishment that is handed out in a court of law. But there is a bigger sense of the word. Righteousness, fairness, faithfulness, proper, and being just are helpful words and phrases to consider

### Action Point 1

What does Justice mean to you? What does injustice mean? Can you think of some examples?

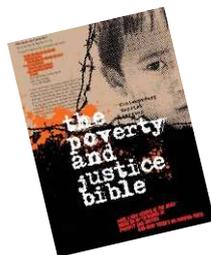


### Action Point 3

All through the winter months it is possible to buy a range of soft fruits in our supermarkets, yet these are 'unseasonal'. Is it right that we buy them, and encourage a situation that generates thousands of 'food miles'?

(Food miles is a term which refers to the distance food is transported from the time of its production until it reaches the consumer. Food miles are one factor used when assessing the environmental impact of food, including the impact on global warming).

## THE BIBLICAL CASE FOR INVOLVEMENT



The Poverty and Justice Bible (a special edition of the Contemporary English Version produced by the Bible Society) states that there are over 2,000 references to justice and poverty in the Bible. That is twice as many references as the word 'sin'. The famous singer Bono says, "...the only time that Christ is judgmental is on the subject of the poor."

Here are just a few of those references, with comments to consider as you read them:

- Genesis chapters 1 and 2 – God created the earth and everything in it. He took soil from the earth and made mankind in order to take care and look after it. It is what we were created for.
- 1 Kings 3 – Solomon was famous for his wisdom, but what he actually asked for was to be able to distinguish between right and wrong – to administer justice. His wisdom was the means to achieve that, not an end in its own right.
- Isaiah 58:6 – what it really means to worship the Lord: to deal with injustice
- Isaiah 59:14-16 – God was displeased that justice had disappeared, and "disgusted" that no one would do a thing about it (God is expecting us to do something...)
- Micah 6:8 – a key rallying call to justice, mercy and humility
- Luke 4:18 – Jesus setting out his mission in a keynote speech. For all Christ-followers this is for us too. He calls us to follow in his footsteps, how well are we doing?
- Acts 2:44 – generosity and hospitality were key features of the early church, giving to whoever was in need.

### Action Point 4

Read these passages, and any others around this topic, and note down your thoughts or share them in a small group discussion. Why not plan your own study on the topic of justice?

## KINGDOM JUSTICE

The Bible makes it clear that the topic of justice is not a fringe issue, and that it is central to all those who are followers of Christ. It also seems very clear that it is not an optional part of our lives. The call to be people of justice and righteousness is a very strong one indeed.

As we heed that call, and as we pick up the challenge to our lifestyle, it is important to do so with a strong sense of humility, and remember:

- The challenge is to retreat from AND engage with the world, but it is not to be superior to the world
- If we adopt a condemning, self-righteous attitude we will win no friends.
- We must be passionate but humble, because after all none of us will be able to live an entirely just life and every one of us can be accused of some form of hypocrisy in the way we live!

The point is that we allow our lifestyles to be challenged, we are open to our lives being changed and transformed, and we do what we can to be more responsible citizens of our world.

## A LOT OF WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE WORLD IS WRONG!

In the book 'Factfulness' by Hans Rosling (2018) he explains how much of what we believe about our world is not actually true. And he shows us the facts to prove it.



For example:

In the last 20 years, the proportion of the world living in extreme poverty<sup>1</sup> has

- Almost doubled
- Almost halved
- Stayed more or less the same

There are many reasons why we have a wrong view of the world, including the recent growth of 'fake news'. The point here is that some things are better than we think, and some things are worse. There are a lot of things that we need to do, but the good news is that **IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE!**

Individually, in small groups, and in larger more organized bodies we can make things change. If we take this responsibility seriously just imagine what we might be able to achieve...

<sup>1</sup> The answer is b, almost halved. Less than 1 in 10 people get this answer right. Over the last 25 years more than one billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty.

### Action Point 5

Change starts with us as individuals, so as an individual why not commit to learning more about the world. As you watch TV, read a newspaper, browse the internet, walk around town, talk with colleagues at work, make a note of the justice issues that you see and hear. As you discover things, why not begin to study it further.

Caution: not everything that you read will be true! Don't believe everything that comes at you via your favourite social media platform.

## BACK TO THE BIBLE

Earlier on we considered a number of Bible passages, including Isaiah 59:14-16 where we read that God was displeased that justice had disappeared, and disgusted that no one would do a thing about it. That is quite a significant passage as it speaks of God expecting us human beings to do something, when often our response to situations is that 'someone should do something!'

Is it that God is looking at us personally and saying "Well...?"

To explore this a little more, let's consider the story of Moses.

### Action Point 6

The story starts way back in Genesis 37 when Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. To get the background to the story of Moses, and insight into the injustices that were taking place, it is useful to read that chapter and then the following chapters of Genesis. Then read the first three chapters of the book of Exodus as they set out the part of the story of Moses that concerns us here.

## MOSES AND HOLY DISCONTENT

Here is a summary of that Moses story:

- After being sold into slavery, Joseph found himself in Egypt. There, amazing things happened and Joseph became governor of Egypt. Then famine struck all the countries including Canaan where Joseph's father Jacob and Joseph's brothers lived. They came to Egypt seeking food – eventually Jacob and his wider family (about 70 people) moved to Egypt and reunited with Joseph
- Pharaoh had become very powerful during the famine (Important point as we move on a few hundred years). Now a new pharaoh comes to power. He has incredible power, a real dictatorship. Yet he has no knowledge of the Joseph story – he doesn't know his history. The Israelites have now multiplied – they are numerous – and the King is fearful, "there are too many in our country"

- Slave bosses are put in charge of the Israelites, but their families continue to grow larger. So, they were hated more than ever, and made to work harder, leading miserable lives and suffering tremendous cruelty. Then midwives were told to kill the baby boys. Moses is born into this oppression and cruelty. We probably remember the story of the reed basket, the Nile, and one of the king's daughters...
- Moses grew up, adopted by the king's daughter. How did he feel, what did he know? He would definitely have seen oppression, cruelty. When he was grown up the Bible says he saw 'his own people hard at work'. Then he saw an Egyptian beating one of them. Moses killed him<sup>2</sup>...and fled
- Later, we read that the Israelites were crying out to God – God heard their cries, and decided to act. Then comes a key passage in chapter 3:
  - The Lord said: I have seen how my people are suffering as slaves in Egypt, and I have heard them beg for my help because of the way they are being mistreated. I feel sorry for them, and I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians. I will bring my people out of Egypt into a country where there is a lot of good land, rich with milk and honey. I will give them the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live. My people have begged for my help, and I have seen how cruel the Egyptians are to them.
  - Now go to the king! **I am sending you** to lead my people out of his country

Step 1: the injustices, step 2: Moses has had enough, step 3: God agrees, **but then step 4: God sends Moses.** God acts through his people, God is looking for people who are stirred up about something, angry, moved to tears about a situation, agitated about an issue, people who think something needs to change, people who will step out and do something.

*...to get a vision for justice we must first experience 'holy discontent'...*

### Action Point 7

Is there anything that causes you 'holy discontent'? Write it down. Share it with someone. Pray about it. Research it.

Think – Speak - Action



<sup>2</sup> This is not a model that we are called to follow!

## FAITH AND ACTION

Consider these statements:

- Engaging and taking action is central to our faith
- Faith puts the needs of others first
- Faith says “no more injustice”
- Faith is the declaration that love is real
- Faith has the audacity to say, “no more”
- Faith without action is dead
- Faith saves us from hopelessness
- Faith points us to Jesus
- His model is involvement
- Our response is to follow him where the need is greatest



## JUSTICE ISSUES

Earlier we said that there are so many issues of injustice. Let's explore just a few.

- **Money** 8 million people in the UK struggle to pay their household bills
- **Food** although there is more than enough food for everyone in the world, 800 million will go hungry each day. Many of those will be smallhold farmers who grow most of the food in the world, but who cannot get a fair price for their crops
- **Animals** 100 bird species will soon go extinct due to practices such as cattle farming and the planting of palm oil crops. This can only be stopped by a change of practices in our supermarket shopping habits
- **Waste** in 2016 we created 242 million tons of plastic waste – that's the same weight as 3.4 million blue whales!
- **Fashion** the trend towards disposable 'fast fashion' has led to girls of 15 being too exhausted to continue working in sweat shops after constant 16 hour shifts

### Action Point 7

Do any of these give you a sense of 'holy discontent'? If so, find out more about them and consider what action you might take.

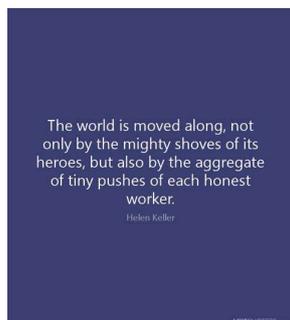


## FIND SOME HEROES

There are people all over the world who are taking up the justice challenge about all of these issues and more. Young and old, famous and people you may never have heard of. We can learn a lot from the actions that others are taking, and we can be inspired to become involved too. Here are a few names of some 'justice heroes', there are many more:

- Greta Thunberg – climate change
- Celia Hodson – period poverty
- John Bird – homelessness
- George Clooney – genocide in Darfur/Sudan
- David Attenborough – climate change
- Ruth Valerio – justice activist and author
- And many from previous decades- Gandhi, Helen Keller, Emmeline Pankhurst, Martin Luther King Jr.

## BECOMING A HERO



Finding some heroes who can inspire us is a really good step on the journey to becoming actively engaged with justice issues. But we can use that inspiration to become 'heroes' ourselves.

Helen Keller said, "the world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker."

That's us! We may think, as was said earlier, that we cannot fix the world, but the truth is that we can change some part of it. We need to determine what that part is, and then get on and change it!

## TINY PUSHES

Here are four things to consider as we begin to push those justice issues that cause us 'holy discontent'.

- **GIVING** – making one-off donations, or setting up regular giving to a charity, group or organisation to enable the work of others
- **ACTING** – actively getting involved and pursuing justice in a situation
- **PRAYING** – simply praying that God will change us, and then allowing that change to take place
- **SIMPLE LIVING** – consider our lifestyle so that others may simply live

Four tiny pushes, which may not be that tiny once we get going! Giving, Acting, Praying, Simple Living – **GAPS**.

### Action Point 8

Consider your thoughts from Action Point 7. What could you do, using the GAPS ideas?

## SEVEN AREAS TO CONSIDER

Here are seven areas that might help us to focus our concern for justice and righteousness. There are so many things that we could mention in each area, the ones listed here are just a start to inspire us to look deeper.

### 1 GLOBAL CONCERN

The world has become a very small place – in the sense that we are all connected with each other in many different ways.



This is a photograph of South Sudan, recently identified in the 2019 'Happiness Survey' as the unhappiest country in the world. South Sudan has extensive oil reserves, but for a variety of reasons (mostly not good ones) 99% of that oil is exported to China, where it is used to help power the incredible rise in Chinese industry.

In 2017, the UK imported goods to the value of £45 billion from China, that's about £750 for each one of us. Do you see the connections? In just two steps we are connected with events in a country that is the world's unhappiest, and one of the world's poorest, war-torn nations.

How can we not have a global concern?

### Action Point 9

Why not try and learn about life in a country that is very different to ours? Connecting with Libby and Honda in some way to find out about the needs in Burundi perhaps. Reading about world news, getting in touch with Tearfund for a prayer diary, watch television documentaries, responding to disaster appeals...

## 2 LOCAL CONCERN

What about the things going on right here, on our doorstep? Every town in the UK is faced with a number of justice issues, and Burton-on-Trent and its surrounding towns and villages are no different.

Homelessness, people trafficking, loneliness, crime, marginalized young people, education issues, food waste, litter – these are some of the issues that were raised in the survey that we carried out as part of this series.

There are so many things we can do – either alone, or by setting something up with others, or by joining in with something that is already established.

### Action Point 10

Buy a copy of the Big Issue, and read it!

## 3 ECOLOGICAL CONCERN

When we considered the Biblical case for engagement, we saw in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 that God created the earth and everything in it. He took soil from the earth and made mankind in order to take care and look after it. It is what we were created for. What does that mean for us today?



A few things to consider are:

- Plastic – we are probably all aware of the disastrous effects that the widespread use of plastic is causing. Why not take a look at how much you use?
- Energy – consider how much we use and how we use it. If you can, investigate green energy suppliers who use renewable sources
- How we travel, particularly by car and plane. Can you make that journey by any other means?
- What we eat, especially our consumption of meat. Why not research the impact that the meat industry is having on our world?

A challenging quote “If I cannot apply my standard of living to the whole world and still find nature flourishing, my standard of living is immoral”

### Action Point 11

Carefully consider that quote and then consider the practical steps that you can take. Next time you shop, keep thinking about it, and what you can do to reduce the amount of excess packaging you take home

## 4 MONEY AND POSSESSIONS

What is our approach to money and possessions? How is our level of contentment and satisfaction with what we have?

Read Philippians 4: 11-13 and then read Hebrews 13:5 Now let the words and sentiment there challenge you.

We read earlier that in Acts 2:44 generosity and hospitality were key features of the early church, giving to whoever was in need. Is that a hallmark, a distinctive of our lives?

Money can easily rule our lives; instead we need to rule our money. Remember, "A budget tells your money where to go; otherwise you wonder where it went"

### Action Point 12

Consider sharing your approach to money and possessions with a trusted friend, and together think about how you can practice generosity – then get practicing!

## 5 CONSUMERISM

We have talked about both retreating from and engaging with the world. The way we consume, and the amount that we consume is where we can apply that principle.

We can consume less, and then when we consume, we can do it more thoughtfully and positively. We can attempt to buy ethically whenever we can by researching who the good guys are...and who isn't.

This is an insider's view of the fashion industry. It's the words of Paige Colthart:

Picture this: you're looking at a cheap-as-chips shirt, wondering what on earth happened to make it that cheap, and before you know it, you've gone and bought it. It happens to most of us. But today, we're getting thoughtful about our threads. What's the history behind our clothes? And what makes ethical clothing generous?

There are many things I love about working in fashion but one thing I battle with is just how unethical it can be. Visiting factories where garments are manufactured really opens your eyes to the reality of fast fashion and what it's costing our world. I work for Ted Baker, which is known for its quality and quirkiness. The prices of our products can be quite high for your regular spender, but what I love is that we have an entire team ensuring that all products are produced ethically, called Ted's Conscience Team. It means the factory workers are paid above minimum wage, they aren't doing too much overtime and they work in a safe environment.

When we buy clothes, there's much more to think about than simply the cost to our wallets. Everything we buy has a meaning. It's a decision that can

affect everything from the economy to the environment to perhaps someone's life on the other side of the world. Working in production, I have a good idea of all the factors that contribute to the price of clothing. Some brands have 80% profit margins which means that the other 20% has to include the cost and testing of the fabric, the trims, the packaging materials, the freight and then the make price. And somewhere in that 20% is the wage of the person that is making the garment for you. If you pay £3 for a T-shirt, how much do you think the person making that T-shirt is getting paid after all the other costs have been factored in?

So perhaps next time you need a winter coat, save up and buy one that will last, from a brand that you know pays enough for their factory workers to have the quality of life they deserve. Or you can always buy second-hand at charity shops, or websites like eBay and Vinted.

Jesus taught us to love our neighbours as ourselves and, more than that, as he has loved us – sacrificially. As we know from the story of the Good Samaritan, 'neighbour' means more than just the people we live near. We have a duty to care for even those we have never met.

## 6 BECOMING AN ACTIVIST



You have a voice, and to be an activist in some way you are going to need to use it.

Think – Speak – Action is a useful way to remember that it is not enough to just think that 'something should be done'. We need to voice it and then we need to take action.

Identifying our areas of holy discontent is an important first step, now we must follow that by finding our voice.

There are many ways in which we can become an activist and use our voice. Perhaps we are on the inside of an organisation or company and we can use our position to speak out and act (see the story of Joseph). Sometimes we use our voice from the outside, boldly campaigning about issues of injustice (see the book of Amos).

There are so many ways of communicating our message today, and social media has given us a whole range of opportunities (if we use them wisely). You do not need to be a great public speaker to find, and use, your voice as an activist

### Action Point 13

Think about ways that you can find your voice – share ideas with others

## 7 SPENDING OUR TIME

So you might be thinking, "I just don't have the time for all this..." Please accept this challenge and consider: but is that really true?

---

This is a quote from writer Ruth Valerio:

“Actively caring for the lives of people around the world caught up in injustice and poverty; actively caring for the world we live in and all its inhabitants; developing a Christian approach to money and material goods; becoming an ethical consumer; involving ourselves in our local communities and opening up our homes; engaging in advocacy and actively working for good in our different contexts – all of these, I believe, are essential components of how we can live faithfully as followers of Jesus in our consumer society.”

#### Action Point 14

Ask yourself – is that worth some of your time...?

### UPGRADE AND DOWNGRADE

Our society is built around a culture of me, me, me.

We find ourselves in a throw-away, gadget-rich and time-poor nation, where we are constantly encouraged to upgrade our phones, clothes, cars as often as we can.

Upgrading is a never ending cycle. How can we possibly get our mobile phone out in front of our friends, it's 2 versions older than theirs! I must upgrade. The neighbours have had another new car, that's the third since I last changed mine. I must upgrade my motor. Have you seen this year's new styles for the summer? I must upgrade my wardrobe.

#### Action Point 15

This is a big challenge, which some of us won't find easy.

Downgrade!

At the end of your contract, keep your phone and move to a SIM only contract. Keep your car for another year, or two. Resist that fashion item. Use the money that you save to make a difference elsewhere – a charity, a gift, generous acts.

But also, Upgrade!

Where you can and if you are able, upgrade to fair-trade, upgrade to green energy suppliers, upgrade and buy clothes from a company with good ethical credentials.

## **ANOTHER LIST FOR YOU!**

OK, so you've had quite a few lists to consider, and a number of action points to work on. But here is one final list. If you feel that this has stirred something within you, then this list gives you ten ways to get serious about justice issues.

### **1 Shout loudly**

Speak up for those who are silenced. Write letters, campaign, tell others. Make a noise!

### **2 Spend wisely**

Use the pound in your pocket well. Speak to your favourite shops about what you want from them – fair-trade, ethical, less plastic...

### **3 Read avidly**

Gather information wisely and intelligently. Actively seek it out so that you can speak with wisdom about your topics

### **4 Live responsibly**

Use some of the ideas in this study to make changes to your lifestyle. Live a greener life.

### **5 Give lavishly**

Practice generosity and work out what changes you can make to your giving. If you do not have much money, why not see what fund raising activities you can get involved in.

### **6 Travel meaningfully**

That could mean less travel, but it could mean making a life-changing visit to somewhere that really needs your help.

### **7 Think Biblically**

Use the Bible verses above as a starting point, then go further to see what the Bible says about justice. Memorise some key verses and share them with friends.

### **8 Study purposefully**

You might like to go deeper with your reading and join a course on justice, peace or reconciliation. There are many on offer.

### **9 Volunteer enthusiastically**

Give some of your time. There are numerous opportunities all around us. Every hour that you give will be so valuable.

### **10 Pray continually**

Pray that God changes you so that you can change things. Pray for a charity, cause or initiative. Organise a prayer meeting with like-minded friends.

## STOP, START, CONTINUE

What are you going to do with all of this? What are your “tiny pushes” going to be?

Think about it in three ways:

- STOP – what am I going to stop doing?
- START – what will I now do that I haven’t been doing?
- CONTINUE – I’m not doing too badly with that! I’ll make sure I keep it going



## FINALLY

Thank you for engaging with this study. Hopefully you have been challenged, encouraged and moved to become an activist for justice.

If you have any questions or want to know more please contact The Community Church:

[info@tcc.org.uk](mailto:info@tcc.org.uk)

May God bless us with discontent and discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with the gift of tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to our world.