



In partnership with

Jubilee+

JUSTICE

Reflections and ideas for practical action, by Jubilee+



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Bible references throughout this booklet have been taken from the NIV version.

INTRODUCTION

We are delighted to have commissioned Jubilee+ to write this booklet on Justice for local churches, which includes theological reflections alongside ideas for practical action.

The Trussell Trust is based on, shaped, and guided by the Christian values of justice, compassion, community and dignity. These values have strong roots in Christian teaching and practice, whilst also being accessible and meaningful for people, whatever their background. They provide a strong shared foundation for collaboration towards our vision of ending the need for food banks in the UK.

Hunger is an injustice. People in the UK are being pushed to the brink because they don't have enough money to live on. This cannot go on.

As a community of food banks, we are motivated by justice and refuse to stand by while so many of us can't afford to eat, keep warm and pay the bills. That's why we work locally and across the UK for a more just and compassionate society where no one needs a food bank to survive.

Churches have long been at the forefront of movements to tackle injustices. The campaign to abolish the slave trade was championed by a Christian, William Wilberforce and supported by many churches. The US civil rights movement was led by a Baptist minister, Martin Luther King Jr, while the Roman Catholic Archbishop Óscar Romero was an iconic figure in the campaign against breaches of human rights in El Salvador.

This shows the incredible impact churches can have when they use their collective voice to call for justice. Now, in the UK, we hope to see more Christians standing up in solidarity and calling for justice on issues of hunger and poverty.

Nobody should need to use a food bank to get by. We hope this resource inspires and motivates you and your local church to use your voice, your actions and your resources to call for justice.

Jess Foster
Head of Church
Engagement,
the Trussell Trust





Bella Italia PIZZA PASTA & DRINKS

North
West
for

“Universal Credit is not working for people and it more and more are finding themselves receiving credit. It is not what it is possible.”

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add your skills, make it happen

We're helping change that! We're helping you get your skills up to date, so you can get the most out of your job. We're helping you get the most out of your job. We're helping you get the most out of your job.

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INTRODUCTORY FILM

Start by watching this short film which introduces the subject of Justice.



Scan the QR code or visit trusselltrust.org/justice-film

Justice matters, and it affects us all.

Not all of us will be living with painful and traumatic injustices, but most of us have experienced injustice on some level. Maybe someone hit your car, but claimed it was your fault and you had to pay out as a result. Perhaps a lazy colleague was awarded a pay rise while you were overlooked. It could be that your landlord evicted you for no reason.

As well as big injustices, we face smaller injustices all the time – those of us who are British tend to feel deeply slighted when anyone pushes in front of us in a queue! Even toddlers quickly learn the words: “It’s not fair!”

We feel this acute sense of injustice from even a very young age because each one of us is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; James 3:9). We have an innate sense of justice – an in-built sense of right and wrong.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR JUSTICE?

Who gets to decide who deserves justice, and who doesn't?

Each one of us bears the image of God, but we do so imperfectly (Genesis 3; Romans 3:23) and so, though we feel aggrieved when we don't get justice, our view of what is just and unjust is flawed. We can tend to want justice when we are wronged, but mercy when we are in the wrong. (If you have ever got

a speeding ticket or a parking fine, you will probably be able to relate!)

Our sense of justice cannot always be trusted. It can fluctuate depending on how close we are to the victim or how close we are to the offender. It can go up or down depending on how much we care about the specific issue of injustice. We are rarely impartial. Our sense of justice is imperfect.

GOD OF JUSTICE

But God is not like us.

In the Bible we see that God's justice is consistent, perfect and trustworthy. God is described as *"a God of justice"* (Isaiah 30:18) who is always perfectly just: *"All his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he"* (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Justice is not just something God does, it is who God is. God loves justice (Psalms 33:5 and 37:28) –and hates injustice. And God does not just love it – He practises, exercises and delights in it (Jeremiah 9:24),

and works justice particularly for the vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed (Psalms 10:18 and 103:6) – for people who have no power and no one who will listen to their voice.

God's justice is always proportionate, measured, balanced and fair. He is not harsh towards some people and lenient towards others. God is all-knowing, which means knowing all sides of the story. Not only that, but He even knows the motives of everyone involved in each situation. And that is why justice is a high priority in the Kingdom of God.

A PEOPLE OF JUSTICE

Throughout the Bible, we read of God calling people back to justice – reminding them that they are to be a people of justice, reflecting who God is to those around them.

Justice is built into the Law that God gave to Moses. It was woven into the very fabric of the Israelite society. God wanted the Israelites to flourish as a community, to be set apart, distinct, from every other group of people around them, and justice was one of the hallmarks of this.

We see it in the law of gleaning (Leviticus 19 and 23). As farmers gathered their crops, some would fall by the wayside. They might have been tempted to go back a second time to pick up every morsel so they would have plenty of food for their extended family, or to sell to others. That makes sense. But God told them not to do that. He told them to leave the gleanings for people in poverty, so they could eat. More than that, God told them not to reap to the edge of the field, to guarantee some would be left for people who would otherwise go without food.

Other laws God put in place so that there would be justice and

compassion among the community were paying wages on time (Leviticus 19 and Deuteronomy 24), not making a profit on food and not charging interest on loans (Leviticus 25).

Going further still, God set in place the Sabbath Year, where debts were cancelled so that there would not be anyone in need among them (Deuteronomy 15). In the same chapter, we read His command that people must not harden their hearts towards anyone in their community but be open-handed in both the attitude of their hearts (verses 9-10) and their actions (verse 8).

And again, God's justice is yet more abundant, not simply releasing people from their debts, but ensuring they have all they need to support themselves so that they have the best chance of not falling into poverty again (verse 14).

Through the Law of Moses, God built justice into the foundations of the economic system. He modified the extremes of wealth and poverty, so that people could not get richer and richer at the expense of people in need, and people were never in a hopeless situation.

With the institution of the Sabbath Year, and the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25), God limited the injustice of inequality. He also said

that if people followed all these ways of justice, not a single person among them would face poverty (Deuteronomy 15:4-5).

A CALL BACK TO JUSTICE

But the Israelites did not follow the ways of God. So, what we find again and again in the Bible is the repeated prophetic call back to justice. Those who follow God are told to seek justice (Isaiah 1:17). The righteous in God's sight find justice to be a joy (Proverbs 21:15). We are to act justly (Micah 6:8) and speak up for the rights of people who are being treated unjustly (Proverbs 31:8-9).

The Bible makes it clear that we can carry out lots of religious duties and still miss the heart of God if we do nothing about injustice (Isaiah 58 and James 1:27). We can read the Bible, say prayers, go to church, worship, serve, give – but we do not reflect the heart of God to the people around us unless we *“loose the chains of injustice ... share [our] food with the hungry”* and take care of the people facing hardship. (Isaiah 58:6-10).

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for this specific thing. Though they were very precise in religiously tithing their herbs and spices, Jesus warned them that they had *“neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness”* (Matthew 23:23).

Jesus spent much of His ministry righting wrongs and over-turning injustices. He brought the Kingdom of God near to the people around Him. Often when we talk about that, we think in terms of healings and miracles. Those are wonderful, but it is just as important to recognise that Jesus came with a zeal for justice (Isaiah 9:6-7 and Matthew 12:17-21). When He brought the Kingdom of God, He was bringing the Year of Jubilee and then some (Luke 4:14-21), as the good news came especially to people trapped in poverty and injustice.

BRINGING THE KINGDOM OF JUSTICE NEAR

And one day, there will be perfect justice. When Jesus returns, He will be worshipped for His *“just and true”* ways (Revelation 15:3 and 16:7). On that day, every wrong thing will be made right. We live now in between Jesus bringing the Kingdom of justice near, and that final day when justice will fully come.

So, we are called to bring a foretaste of that day now – even as we pray: *“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10).

What does it look like to do this? The Bible is clear in several places that it starts with making sure people have food to eat and the other essentials they need. This is why organisations like the Trussell Trust are calling for a fairer economic system that protects us whether we are in work and out of work, so that no one has to rely on emergency food.

As a society, we value justice and compassion. We believe people facing hardship should be supported, particularly when facing

adverse life experiences such as the loss of a job, a bereavement or a long-term illness. This is why we have a social security system. However our social security system is falling short and is not providing the safety net we all need. It is one of the leading causes of the dramatic rise in the number of emergency food parcels being given out across the Trussell Trust’s network of food banks.

One of the key things each one of us can do therefore, to *“seek justice [...and...] bring justice”* (Isaiah 1:17), is speak up and speak out. All of us have spheres of influence, even if they might be small. Sometimes the hardest thing is to speak with our own family and friends, but it is so important that we challenge misconceptions and myths – among those closest to us, in our workplaces, and even in our churches.

Despite the surge in the number of people facing hardship across our communities, there are still prominent voices telling us that the need is not real. This might make us angry – and it should!

Righteous anger is godly – but we need to hold our anger well, channelling it into tearing down arguments, not people.

Each one of us can play a part in tackling false narratives when we hear them – whether it is over the water-cooler at work, at the school gates, or having the opportunity to

talk about it with a local councillor or MP. But we need to do it with gentleness and humility, listening as much as we talk, praying as much as we try to persuade.

Nevertheless, if we want to reflect God's heart of justice, we must speak up.

ACTING JUSTLY

We also need to act. Nehemiah gives us a biblical paradigm for speaking up for justice and acting justly. There was a severe cost of living crisis in Jerusalem when Nehemiah went there to rebuild. We do not know all the details, but what is clear is that food was scarce, and when it was available, it was so costly that the people were re-mortgaging their homes and land, getting into debt, and even selling their children into slavery (Nehemiah 5:3-5).

But not everyone was affected in the same way. Some were profiting from the misfortune of others (in direct violation of the Law of Moses). Inequality was growing. Injustice was rife.

Nehemiah could have been written today.

Who would speak up on behalf of the people? Nehemiah took it upon himself – he saw it as his responsibility.



LISTEN THEN SPEAK

Nehemiah started by listening. We can start there too. The first step in helping someone get justice is always listening. Feeling heard matters. Having an opportunity to voice anxiety, stress, disappointment, grief, pain and fear is important. When Nehemiah listened, he got “very angry” (Nehemiah 5:6). He felt God’s righteous anger at injustice. This kind of anger is not hot-headed or volatile but controlled and measured. The outworking of this anger is that it compelled Nehemiah to engage with those in positions of power who could make a difference.

In his anger, Nehemiah was not impulsive, but he took time to think (5:7) before speaking up. Then, when he did speak, he was specific – his accusations were not vague or scattergun. He was specific about what those oppressing the people were doing wrong, and He was specific about what they could do to put it right.

Our society is deeply polarised, so it is very important that we think, research and pray to share

the specific injustices we want to see put right, sharing statistics and stories that will help others to see the situation more clearly, and providing solutions so that we are part of the answer. Nehemiah did not revert to name-calling or unkindness. He didn’t just tell them what they were doing wrong. He gave them ideas. When we want to see change, we need to do likewise.

Nehemiah also set them an example. Not all of us are close enough to people in power to do this, but most of us can use our general sphere of influence (through social media, for example) and our close sphere of influence (the people we know) to live in such a way that others notice a difference in how we conduct ourselves.

God requires us to act justly. It is a high calling that draws us to pour ourselves out for any who do not have essentials (Isaiah 58:10). It is not always easy. But it is one the primary ways in which we get the privilege of reflecting Jesus to those around us.

WHAT NEXT?

The following section gives ideas for how you might be able to take action to demonstrate justice as an individual or as a church.

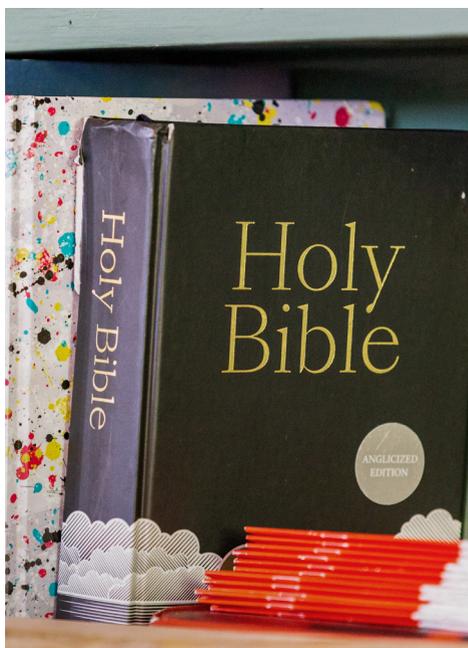
Many of these ideas relate to ways you can support people facing hunger, poverty or injustice in your community, particularly in partnership with your local food bank. If you don't know where your closest food bank is, you can find out on the Trussell Trust website at trusselltrust.org.

REFLECT

What injustices have you personally experienced? Write them down (including those that come to mind even though they might seem insignificant to you).

Look up Bible verses that either speak directly to each one or speak of God's just nature. You might want to look back at some of the verses mentioned previously in this booklet. Write a verse down alongside each injustice you have listed, and pray through them, asking God to a) bring justice; b) redeem the injustices you have suffered; and c) use them to bring hope to others.

Spend some time thinking about how your experiences might be able to help others. God loves to transform the areas of our lives we may be embarrassed by – those of us who have experienced debt often end up going on to help others out of debt, those of us who have suffered with addictions often become passionate advocates for others in the same situation, and so on.



RESEARCH

Over the next week, if you have means to do so, buy three newspapers each day (or look online if that's easier). Before you start reading, ask the Holy Spirit to highlight injustices to you. As you read, circle or jot down stories that include an injustice (whether it is mentioned as an injustice or not).

Pay attention to how different newspapers cover the same stories. Where there are differences, write them side-by-side, adding a third column for what the Bible says

about this issue. Pray through each situation, incident or story. Add a fourth column and write down what you or your church could do to help in a small way.

You may also want to read the report by the Trussell Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (jrf.org.uk/report/guarantee-our-essentials) to learn more about how inadequate social security is the main driver of food bank need and the changes being called for.



RESPOND

Thinking about the areas of injustice you have experienced and read about, begin to pray (with others if possible) about how God might want you to respond. We can often feel overwhelmed by the big issues in our society, but what are the first few small steps you can take to bring justice and loose the chains of injustice, particularly in your local area?

Is there a way to do this in partnership between your church and local foodbank? For example, could you support the food bank in their work providing advocacy for people who are facing injustices in areas such as debt, employment, housing, health, education, and so on?

REPRESENT

An important part of tackling injustice is to help ensure that the voices of people experiencing the issues are heard. It is important that everything we do is informed and influenced by people who are facing the issues we are considering, and whose experiences may be different to yours. See the 'Community' booklet on how to do this sensitively.

You might also want to have a look at the Trussell Trust's resources for churches about the Guarantee our Essentials campaign which focuses on calling on the UK government to ensure that social security is set at a level that ensure everyone can afford the essentials. This pack outlines many practical ways for churches to get involved and promote the campaign within their communities, including:

- **Hosting a Sunday service to raise awareness of the issues**
- **Creating spaces to pray together**
- **Activities for children and young people**

Download your pack at:
trusselltrust.org/GOE-Church-Pack

You might want to consider starting a Jubilee+ Voices group that enables you to bring together people experiencing injustices in your community to listen and consider how they might want to use their voice and experience to create change locally. Poverty Truth Commission is another model for doing this that you might want to explore.

Also speak with those who have the power to make decisions affecting people trapped by injustice. Perhaps start by asking your church leader or leadership team if you can meet with them.

It is also important to consider how we can use the influence and power we have in our community to benefit others. Local elected officials, police teams, fire service and health leaders are often willing to meet with local churches due to their position in the local community. You could encourage your church leader to reach out to these individuals, to arrange a time to meet with them or to invite them to a Sunday service. The aim is not to argue with them or promise them anything, but simply to hear their

opinions on the issues of injustice facing your community, to share the stories you have heard from others and to discuss what your church can do to help.

As an individual you might also want to consider getting involved in a local opportunity for affecting change. Find out what is available in your community – you might be able to join a residents' association, a school governing board, a local authority focus group, or a political party. If that is not really your thing, you could start by encouraging a churches together group to pray and discuss how you can bring change to your local setting. You could also get in touch with your local food bank to see how you might be able to support them.

RECOMMIT

Finally, today is an opportunity to commit ourselves once again to becoming more like Jesus. Whether we have only cared about issues of justice that affect us, or have been deliberately or accidentally complicit

in injustice, we know we can turn back to God for forgiveness. We can be sure of God's love for us and can recommit ourselves to cultivating a desire for justice, and to acting justly in all areas of our lives.



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