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Session 8



GLOBAL EDITION

EDITED BY: JASON FILETA



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Session Eight

Justice and Relationships: Authentic Relationships Are the Heart of Justice

“When people begin moving beyond charity and toward justice and solidarity with the poor and oppressed, as Jesus did, they get in trouble. Once we are actually friends with the folks in struggle, we start to ask why people are poor, which is never as popular as giving to charity.”

- Shane Claiborne

“You can’t lead the people if you don’t love the people. You can’t save the people if you don’t serve the people.”

- Dr. Cornel West

Sacrificed on the Altar of Justice by Jason Fileta

Picture the scene: me, a young idealistic organizer for Micah Challenge USA in New York City for the United Nations. I was sitting around the dinner table with the men I someday hoped to become. These were my living heroes, men who led internationally known and respected justice organizations. Here at the UN to give testimony, speak at rallies and urge global leaders to keep their promises to the impoverished.

They challenged me to have authentic relationships with the impoverished, to stand with the oppressed rather than simply for the oppressed. They were some of the few voices in New York that week lifting up the voices of the oppressed, telling their stories and bringing their concerns to halls of power most people in extreme poverty would never have the chance to speak into.

I read their books, had paid money to hear them speak on several occasions and prayed that one day I might become like them...that is until we reached dessert.

One leader asked another about his son. His response was something along the lines of:

“He’s OK, out of treatment now, but still not sure who he is or what he is doing”.

One by one they all shared the deeper struggles of their families. Broken relationships with children, estranged children, drug abuse, alcoholism, suicide attempts, depression, and the list goes on. My heart hurt for them, but I also wondered how could men who bring so much healing to the world have so much brokenness in their own homes?

After the sharing was complete one of them raised his glass, “Well, what we do isn’t easy on the family, is it?”

And to that we clinked our glasses and drank. I decided at that moment that there had to be a better way. That my calling to seek justice did not have to come at the expense of my calling as a husband or father. If it did, then whose justice was I seeking? Certainly not God’s

I thought. Little did I know it would take years for me to truly learn this lesson.

So often when we think of relationships and justice we think of how those in positions of power must be in genuine, dignified, authentic relationships with those in oppression. This is an important conversation, but we must also consider our personal relationships with those God has called us to walk through life with; our families and loved ones.

Don't get me wrong, justice will always cost us something, but the currency of our families and loved ones is far too precious to be sacrificed on the altar of justice.

Relationship: the Foundation of Justice **by Sunia Gibbs**

Where I live and work I can't walk very far without seeing or passing someone who is homeless. When I first moved into the city, there were mornings I would walk out my front door, and I would find one or two individuals taking shelter on the porch to avoid the rain or sleeping off a hard night. In the beginning I wanted to give and share with every single person. I handed out sleeping pads and blankets, shared food, prayed and offered advice. But the longer I lived in the city, the more I gave, and the more frequently I heard a knock on my door, the more I became tired and numb. The need was never ending but my compassion was not. I felt used. I worried about how much I could give without compromising my children or our home, and I didn't really know if anything I was doing even mattered. I was disillusioned and disappointed.

To endure in the work of justice we must determinedly walk through the wastelands produced by greed, lust and loss and not run away when overwhelmed with disparity. The anecdote for quitting or disillusionment is not simply greater zeal, but increased love and compassion that comes from the Spirit of God living in each of us.

Every relationship, from our immediate family to the stranger we care for ought to be founded, directed and empowered by love. In 1 Corinthians 13:3 Paul tells to us that if we give everything to the poor, or even become martyrs, but do not have love, there is no benefit.

This is an important reminder for those who dedicate their lives to the work of justice. The just life we are called to live cannot ignore the needs of our spouses or children or closest friends. At the same time, the just life we are called to live cannot ignore the needs of our brothers and sisters on the street or around the world because their burden is ours. Jesus demonstrated the solidarity we ought to have in Matthew 25:40 when he said, "Whatever was done to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me". These words brought

encouragement to the disciples who were being sent into the world. They would remember that whatever was being done to them was felt and known by Jesus, their brother, Saviour and friend. As the body of Christ, are we aware of the pain in other parts of the body? How can we act/speak in solidarity with one another just like Christ does for each of us?

Love for God and love for neighbour empower and eradicate the distance between every human being. When we begin to truly comprehend that the Word became flesh and walked with us (John 1:14), we will have a deeper understanding of humility and self-sacrificing love. Think of it: the one who is divine and holy put on frail humanity and made his home with us. Emmanuel – God with us.

Who are we with? If we ignore or avoid the vulnerable around us, how can we be motivated to act with them for deliverance? If our eyes only see people exactly like us, if we just work really hard in order to purchase shiny new objects, or if all our energy is spent striving for higher positions of power or fame, we have given into the values of the world around us instead of becoming more and more responsive to the Spirit of God, who reminds us of our abundance and compels us to go deeper and generously into our communities.

Jesus lived with the poor. He saw them and was moved with compassion and met their needs. Are we empowered and free to do the same? 1 John 3:16-18 encourages us in this way, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

We demonstrate love through our relationships with one another. And this love must be more than the words we speak, but also the actions we take to relieve one another’s burdens. It is the only way our love can be sincere. It is the way in which we prove we know God’s

love. It's not in how many verses we've memorised or in keeping our religious rituals, but in how we love one another.

May our relationships with one another radiate and demonstrate the abundant and generous love of God. May we have the courage and empowerment to live justly with and towards one another.

Read Matthew 25:31-46 together

The Sheep and the Goats

- 31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.
- 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
- 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.
- 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.
- 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,
- 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’
- 37 Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?
- 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?
- 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’
- 40 The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’
- 41 Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
- 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,
- 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

- 44 They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’
- 45 He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’
- 46 Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Questions for Discussion

1. Jesus says that what we do for the “least of these” we do for him. Is there a difference between doing it “for” him versus doing it “to” him?
2. In today’s world we often don’t see those in need face to face in our everyday lives. Does that make it easier to “refuse” to help to them? Are we less obligated to help those outside our communities?
3. Who are the “least of these” in our world today? How would your encounters with them look if you treated them as you would treat Jesus?
4. What is God saying to you, and what are you going to do about it?

Together

Humility and vulnerability should be at the core of all of our relationships. In the context of seeking justice this is true both with those we are seeking to help and with our loved ones. This next exercise is a practice in both!

Start praying together as a group. Pray that you will form authentic relationships with one another, for opportunities to be in relationship with people in oppression and for strong relationships with your loved ones. Pray as the Holy Spirit leads you.

As you are praying have one person begin by washing the feet of the person on their left. Afterwards, that person washes the feet of the person their left, and so on until all of you (who wish to) have participated.

Solo Work

Reflect on your own relationships. Make a list of the ten people you engage with most regularly. What does the list tell you? Are all the people on the list the same ethnicity as you? Are they all the same socioeconomic status as you? The list could indicate that you are very family oriented, or very connected to your church community or your neighbourhood. Who is missing from this list that you wish was on it?

Think of three ways you can stretch yourself in relationships this year. Perhaps make a commitment to get to know a new family in your neighbourhood, village or town, to befriend a family from a different ethnic group in your church or simply to reach out to a family member you've become distant from. Put this commitment into your action plan.

Prayer

Lord, help me to remember that your heart is for the people, not just the cause. Give me a tender heart toward those experiencing injustice; keep me from apathy. As I passionately seek justice, help me to not do so at the expense of my family and friends, but may my pursuit of justice bring my entire community closer to you.

END

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