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Session 5



GLOBAL EDITION

EDITED BY: JASON FILETA



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Session Five

Justice and Advocacy: Using Your Voice to Campaign for Justice

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice you
have chosen the side of the oppressor.”

- Desmond Tutu

“It is impossible to ignore the political implications
of biblical justice.”

- Joel Edwards

Definitions

G8 (or Group of 8): A forum for the governments of eight of the leading economies in the world, who periodically come together to discuss issues of global concern. The member states include: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Advocacy: Influencing the decisions, policies and practices of powerful decision-makers, to address underlying causes of poverty, bring justice and support good development. Advocacy never just raises awareness of an issue, problem or situation. It always seeks to change the policies, practices, systems, structures, decisions and attitudes that cause the issue, problem or situation so that they work in favour of people living in poverty and injustice.

Campaigning Works by Ashley Walker

Elinata Kasanga lives in Nguluka Village, Zambia. Elinata remembers a time in her village's history when there was a lack of basic necessities. People couldn't afford health clinic fees or school fees. Most villagers survived on one meal a day and on water from contaminated local streams. The lack of basic necessities was made worse by the fact that the government of Zambia owed billions of dollars to governments of wealthier countries. Money spent servicing debt payments, but failing to keep pace as the interest grew, was money not going to help the impoverished.

People around the world began to take action, with Christians at the forefront, believing it was unreasonable to enforce debt payments at the expense of basic necessities of life. Thus the Jubilee 2000 campaign began, advocating for the cancellation of debts that impoverished nations could not afford to pay to richer countries in the Global North and to the World Bank, as a way to celebrate the Millennium in the year 2000. The Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) was built upon the as-

sumption that left unchecked, the social, political, and economic order would tear communities apart because of greed and unjust practices. Jubilee was a chance to hit reset, and Jubilee 2000 was a chance to apply that biblical principle in modern times.

More than twenty-four million people signed the Jubilee 2000 petition. Signatures, including thumbprints and email petitions, were collected from more than 155 countries. The petition was delivered to the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000. There were national organisations and campaigns in more than sixty countries, which lobbied, campaigned, protested and educated. Activities varied from grassroots letter writing campaigns targeting MPs, to national rallies with high-level celebrities, united by the symbol of human chains.

Jubilee 2000 succeeded in getting large amounts of debt cancelled for qualifying countries, but it didn't stop there. People around the world have continued to campaign, and since 1996, over \$130 billion of poor countries' debts have been cancelled.

Because of this, the public health centres in Elinata's community are now fully stocked with medicine and schools are free for grades 1 to 7. For the first time, Elinata and her community have access to clean water.

Beyond Nguluka Village, after debts were cancelled:¹

- 1.5 million children returned to school in Uganda, after the government eliminated school fees
- 500,000 children in Mozambique received vaccinations
- Free health care was provided for millions living in rural areas in Zambia, many of whom had never had access to any form of modern health care before

¹ Statistics from www.jubileeusa.org, www.one.org and www.oxfam.org

- 2,500 new primary schools were created and 28,000 extra teachers were trained, resulting in 98 per cent of Tanzanian children being able to enroll in primary education

Desmond Tutu once said, “There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in”. Jubilee did just that, and continues to transform lives to date. Many people were changed by taking part in the campaign, seeing that a huge injustice can be a normal part of how the world works, and finding their voice to help overcome it.

Social Sin **by Ronald J. Sider**

It is possible to make oppression legal. Legislators devise unjust laws, and bureaucrats implement the injustice. But God shouts a divine woe against rulers who use their official position to write unjust laws and unfair legal decisions. Legalised oppression is an abomination to our God. Therefore, God calls his people to oppose political structures that perpetuate injustice.

There is a long tradition of God's people challenging the political structures of the day, beginning with Moses going to Pharaoh, Esther to the Persian King, William Wilberforce to end the transatlantic slave trade, Dr. King and the US civil rights movement, all the way up to Christians of today speaking out against corruption and policies that perpetuate injustice.

However, neglect of the biblical teaching on structural injustice or institutionalised evil is one of the most deadly omissions in many parts of the church today. Christians frequently restrict ethics to a narrow class of "personal" sins such as drug abuse and sexual misconduct, but ignore the sins of institutionalised racism and unjust economic structures that destroy just as many people.

There is an important difference between consciously willed, individual acts (like lying to a friend or committing an act of adultery) and participation in evil social structures. Slavery is an example of the latter. So is the Victorian factory system that had ten-year-old children working twelve to sixteen hours a day. Both slavery and child labor were legal, but they destroyed millions of people. They were institutionalised, or structural, evils.

God hates evil economic structures and unjust legal systems because they destroy people by the hundreds and thousands and millions. We can be sure that the just Lord of the universe will destroy wicked rulers and unjust social institutions (see 1 Kings 21).

Another side to institutionalised evil makes it especially pernicious. Structural evil is so subtle that we become ensnared without fully realising it. God inspired the prophet Amos to utter some of the harshest words in scripture against the cultured upper-class women of his day: “hear this word you cows of Bashan...who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘bring, that we may drink!’ The Lord God has sworn by his holiness that, behold the days are coming when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks” (4:1-2).

The women involved may have had a little direct contact with the impoverished peasants. They may never have fully realised that their gorgeous cloth and spirited parties were possible partly because of the sweat and tears of the poor. In fact, they may have even been kind on occasion to individuals in oppression. But God called these privileged women “cows” because they participated in a structural evil - lives sustained by the oppression of others. Before God, they were personally and individually guilty.

If we are members of a privileged group that profits from structural evil, or whose lives are sustained by the oppression of others, and if we have at least some understanding of the evil yet fail to do what God wants us to do to change things, we stand guilty before God.

Unfair systems and oppressive structures are an abomination to God, and “social sin” is the correct phrase to categorise them. Furthermore, as we understand their evil, we have a moral obligation to do all God wants us to do to change them. If we do not, we sin. That is the clear implication of Amos’ harsh attack on the wealthy women of his day. It is also the clear implication of James 4:17, “Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin”.

In the New Testament, the Word cosmos (world) often conveys the idea of structural evil. In Greek thought, the word cosmos referred to the structures of civilised life, especially the patterns of the Greek city-state that were viewed as essentially good. But the biblical writers knew that sin had invaded and distorted the structures and values of society.

Frequently, therefore, the New Testament uses the word *cosmos* to refer, in C. H. Dodd's words, "to human society in so far as it is organized on wrong principles". "When Paul spoke of 'the world' in a moral sense, he was thinking of the totality of people, social systems, values, and traditions in terms of its opposition to God and his redemptive purposes".

Pope John Paul II has rightly insisted that evil social structures are "rooted in personal sin". Social evil results from our rebellion against God and our consequent selfishness toward our neighbours. But the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins create "structures of sin" that are both oppressive and "difficult to remove". We will not see transformed systems simply by converting every CEO, employee of multinational corporations, and member of Congress. We will see transformation by preaching the gospel while dismantling unjust structures and systems through effective advocacy, passionate prayer and living justly.

Read Esther 3:1-11, 4:13-14 and 8:3-8 Together

- 1 After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles.
- 2 All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.
- 3 Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?"
- 4 Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.
- 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged.
- 6 Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.
- 7 In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the *pur* (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.
- 8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them.
- 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury."
- 10 So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.
- 11 "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."

Esther 4:13-14

- 13 “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape.
- 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

Esther 8:3-8

- 3 Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews.
- 4 Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.
- 5 “If it pleases the king,” she said, “and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king’s provinces.
- 6 For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?”
- 7 King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up.
- 8 Now write another decree in the king’s name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king’s signet ring - for no document written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.”

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is Esther hesitant to speak to the king at first?
2. What is the value of Mordecai influencing Esther to advocate for her people, and what are the implications for our understanding of political advocacy today?
3. Both Esther's advocacy, and the Jubilee 2000 movement, were inspired by the call of those in oppression for advocacy to challenge injustice. Can you think of examples of this in modern advocacy movements?
4. What are the risks if those who are experiencing injustice have no voice in our advocacy?
5. What is God saying to you, and what are you going to do about it?

Together²

Act out a drama of a scenario where you advocate for your community to a factory owner and his staff regarding the impact of the chemical factory on your community. Choose two to three people to play the factory owner and staff, and the rest of you will be the community.

THE FACTS:

- The factory is 1km upstream from your community
- The factory has been operating for four years and during the past three months the community has been experiencing problems
- Large areas of land have been fenced off, blocking the main route to take cattle to other pastures further up the valley
- When clothes are washed in the river they get stained and there is more illness due to water pollution from the factory

THE CONTEXT:

- You've already discussed the issues as a community and decided the right thing to do is talk to the owner, whom you have not seen since he first told the community about the chemical factory five years ago

TO CONSIDER:

- What are you trying to achieve in this meeting?
- What is your core message?
- How do you approach the meeting? What is your tone toward the owner?

2 Adapted from the Tearfund (2015) Advocacy Toolkit (ROOTS 1&2)

Solo Work

What is one way you can promote justice or speak out and be a voice for justice to your leaders? Commit to something specific - maybe it's a promise to organize an advocacy training for your church or a commitment to write one letter a month to your government on a justice related issue. Add this commitment to your action plan.

Prayer

Lord, give me courage to take risks the way Esther did, and to challenge injustice. Even if it is at great cost to me. Help me to steward my voice and advocate for justice with my elected officials. Be with our government and leaders who make major decisions that impact people all over the world. Give them wisdom, tenderness, and sensitivity to the cries of those living in poverty.

END

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