

God Loves Justice

Justice is about righting the underlying wrongs that create problems in the first place.

There's an immigrant i know who struggled to find his place when he was a teenager. He couldn't master the accent and local customs, and learning "ghetto" slang was like learning a third language. Worse, the neighborhood old-timers all seemed to know something about his family that he hadn't figured out.

His schoolmates were especially cruel. Sometimes the mocking got to him. He wanted to retaliate, but his mom forbid it, promising that someday the rejection would make sense.

At times he'd recall the refugee camp and the midnight flight from his childhood home to escape genocide. At other times he'd hear the echo of his mom's voice telling him about his birth—in a barn! No way would the other kids ever find out about that!

Perhaps you know this friend of mine. He's not a teenager anymore. He now rules the earth, and He is both revered and reviled around the world. His name is Jesus Christ.

After growing up as an at-risk youth, Jesus laid the foundation for His ministry with a powerful mission statement that revealed His heart for justice: "Preach good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind, release for the oppressed and the year of the Lord's favor" (see Luke 4:18-28). In fact, He loves justice so much that He built it into His response to the most fundamental evangelical question: "'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?'"

“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself,’” He answered when asked that question (Luke 10:25,27, NKJV).

Jesus told a story about a busy pastor (the priest) and a worship leader (the Levite) who pretended not to see injustice, leaving a social outcast (a Samaritan) to right a wrong that resulted in a human being left to rot in a ditch. The hero, reviled for being biracial, mirrored God’s kingdom love.

Compassion compelled his initial response, but justice required him to attend to the injured man’s need. The Samaritan not only sat with him in the ditch, gave him water and bandaged his wounds (a compassionate response) but also transported him to an inn and prepaid his medical expenses (a just response).

Jesus ended His account of the Good Samaritan with the command, “‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10:37). Learn to love as the Samaritan loved. Then you’ll truly live.

What does doing “likewise” mean in an age in which there are as many definitions of “justice” as there are agendas that employ the word for political or commercial purposes?

My 5-year-old son, Judah, helped me understand justice through a relationship we had with a homeless man named Lonnie. For a year, Judah faithfully prayed that Lonnie “would not be homeless anymore,” that he would have a place to live and get back together with his family.

Intuitively, Judah understood that justice is more than just

acknowledging difficulties when they exist. It's more than covering problems, masking symptoms or throwing money at them to make them go away.

Justice is about righting the underlying wrongs that create the problems in the first place. It's about restoring balance, renewing hope and reconciling fractured communities.

Kids understand this truth. Cries of, "Play fair!" ring out on playgrounds every day. Prayers to heal broken relationships echo in homes every night.

Judah taught me that justice, at its core, is about righting wrongs. It's why Jesus came—to right the wrongs of sin in our lives in order to restore relationship with Him. He expects us to follow His example and right the wrongs we see.

But somehow as we age, the belief that things can fundamentally change tends to diminish. At the very least, lifetimes of hurt and disappointment jade us. Sometimes they make us cynical, and we forget that justice is possible.

Perhaps that's why Jesus said we must first become like children—and Samaritans—before we can enter His kingdom.

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