

FOLLOWING JESUS IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

A SIX-WEEK STUDY FOR SMALL GROUPS

BY DAN FRANZ

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Beth Crawford, General Editor, VCC

GOALS FOR THIS SERIES

To understand God’s heart for social justice, and to respond to His invitation to join Him in a lifestyle of justice and love.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS SERIES

Throughout the Bible, God’s compassion for the weak and vulnerable members of society is evident. It is also clear that the mercy and grace that God wants to bring to people in need encompasses their whole lives—body and soul. In the Greek way of thinking, the body is bad and the soul is good, so only the soul matters. But in the Hebrew way of thinking, God values both the body and soul. In the Bible, the blessing of God on a person’s entire life is called “shalom.” In kingdom-based social justice, Messiah Jesus brings the “shalom” of God to people in need. He brings the “good news” of the gospel for their souls, along with food, clothing, comfort, justice from oppression, or other help. The way He accomplishes this since returning to heaven is largely through the body of Christ—you and me. In these studies, we’ll look at some Scriptures that reveal how important social justice is to His heart.

We also want to look at the inner life of what it means to follow Jesus in His ministry of social justice—as individuals and as members of a ministry team. The apostle Paul serves as a good example of someone carrying on Jesus’ work with compassion and commitment. Through the years Paul traveled planting churches among unreached peoples, he learned the joy of finding Jesus in giving away his life to others. When Paul wrote about practicing a life of love expressed in social justice, he spoke as a fellow disciple whom Jesus had taught in order that we might learn to imitate the same Master.

In these studies, when we refer to **social justice**, we mean “a commitment on the part of Christians to improve the lot of human beings in this world, particularly...the most marginalized... the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, the unborn and their mothers. The God of the Bible is both a God of **justification** (He declares us right with Himself) and **justice** (He is concerned about putting the world to rights)” (Rich Nathan, 26 Feb. 2008).

The way we often engage in social justice is on a personal level. At Vineyard Columbus, we follow the motto, “Build a bridge of friendship and let Jesus walk over it” (Dan Franz, 3 Jan. 2008). However, we may also approach social justice by working at a community-wide, national, or global level.

As we follow Jesus, let’s act on His words and imitate His deeds. We suggest that you contact your church staff about ministry opportunities locally, nationally, or globally. Then pray as a group about how you might serve. You may want to engage in several outreaches to see how justice issues touch all spheres of life.

WHAT IS SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Study 1—Isaiah 61:1–4; Luke 4:14–21; Matthew 9:35–38

By Dan Franz

Following Jesus in Social Justice

STUDY GOALS

To understand what Social Justice is and how God frees us to join Him in good deeds.

BACKGROUND

The prophet Isaiah began his ministry in 740 B.C. The Old Testament book that bears his name records the messages that God gave him for the people of Judah prior to their exile in Babylon. In Isaiah 61:1–4, he prophesies the mission statement of the coming Messiah.

Luke traveled and ministered with the apostle Paul on his mission trips. Luke wrote both the gospel of Luke (about the life of Jesus) and the book of Acts (about the Holy Spirit's acts through the apostles and early church) probably before Paul's death in A.D. 64. In Luke 4:18–19, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61 as He begins His ministry.

The apostle Matthew wrote his gospel in the middle of the first century A.D. He wrote an eyewitness account to convince a mainly Jewish audience that Jesus of Nazareth was God's Messiah and Lord.

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

What comes to mind when you hear the term “social justice”? Why?

This study looks at God's definition of social justice ministry—how He pictured it and how He demonstrated it.

PRAYER

Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your minds and transform your hearts so that you share the Father's heart for the poor and needy.

STUDY THE PASSAGES: ISAIAH 61:1—4; LUKE 4:14—21

Ask one or more group members to share in reading these passages. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

1. If this passage in Isaiah is the prophetic message of the coming Messiah, who is Jesus telling the people in Nazareth that He is?
2. How do you react to the truth that Jesus directs His proclamation at the poor and oppressed? Why?
3. Over the last 100 years, many have interpreted Jesus' words in Luke 4:18 as applying exclusively to spiritual poverty. In this view, Jesus is not actually concerned with poor, hungry, imprisoned, blind, or oppressed people suffering in difficult and painful conditions. Instead they teach that He is offering forgiveness for our sins. Others insist that Jesus is primarily addressing economic, political, and social needs. Why might Jesus be concerned with both forgiveness of sins *and* human suffering?
4. If Jesus is concerned with *both* forgiveness of sins and human suffering, then what should the "good news" (*gospel* means "good news") look like when we share it with people around us?

Leaders, you could discuss that this might involve food, shelter, clothing, medical care, fair treatment by legal agencies, and other acts of compassion and justice that bring a whole experience of the "good news" of Jesus Christ. Use the following to transition to the next scripture:

If Jesus expressed His mission statement in Luke 4:18—19, let's see what it looked like when He lived it out.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 9:35—38

Ask a group member to read the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

5. Does Jesus wait for people to come to Him, or does He take His message to them?
6. When Jesus sees the crowds, how does He respond? Why do you think that God's compassion results in God's action?
7. Does Jesus judge the needy people who are coming to Him by whether they have made mistakes that cause their neediness? Do the mistakes we make exclude us from the love and mercy of God?
8. As Jesus looks at many broken people who want to experience the love and power of His kingdom, what does He say to His disciples?

As followers of Jesus, what do His words mean to us and about us today?

APPLICATION

Select **one** of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- How do you usually view or treat other people who seem needy or “harassed and helpless”? Why? How can your response to them be more like Jesus? How can we help one another minister to those around us who are struggling against overwhelming odds?
- How can our group take the message of Jesus' Kingdom to those who are “harassed and helpless” in our community? What ministry can we partner with to bring His “good news” in all its dimensions?

WRAPPING IT UP

Jesus came to bring God's “good news” to all—especially to those who were suffering and oppressed. God our loving Father has offered us forgiveness, new life, His Presence, direction, and all kinds of provision. It's our privilege to share this “good news” with others—both in word and deed.

ROOTED IN CHRIST IN SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY

Study 2 — Romans 3:10–12, 21–24; 5:1–2

By Dan Franz

Following Jesus in Social Justice

STUDY GOALS

To understand that God wants us to be reconciled with Him first, and then act as agents of reconciliation and justice in His Name.

BACKGROUND

Romans is a letter Paul wrote to the believers in Rome prior to visiting them. He explains the “good news” that both Jews and non-Jews are saved by faith in Jesus alone. He explains some of the major points of our salvation by grace and how the Holy Spirit helps us. He urges unity in the church and living in a way that is worthy of God’s gracious gift of His Son.

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

What is one of the most generous gifts someone has given you? How did receiving this gift change you? Why?

God has lavished His love and forgiveness on us through the gift of His Son, Jesus. In this study we will look at why we need to soak up God’s love in order to carry out His social justice ministry.

PRAYER

Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you see how to be rooted in Jesus and depend on Him in His social justice ministry.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: ROMANS 3:10—12

Ask a group member to read the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

1. What does Romans 3:10—12 tell us about the condition of human beings apart from God’s grace? How does this help explain why our world is full of conflict, violence, injustice, and suffering?
2. Even if we want to make the world a better place, does the Bible say that social justice is about “good” people doing good things for others who are in need? Why or why not?
3. Why are we who want to do good deeds prone to view social justice as a way to earn points with God? What happens when we think that we’ve earned points with God? Who gets the glory, subtly or otherwise, when the good things we do become the way we justify ourselves? What happens when we think that we haven’t accomplished this? What happens when we think we’ve failed to justify ourselves?

STUDY THE PASSAGES: ROMANS 3:21—24, 5:1—2

Ask one or more group members to share in reading these passages. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

4. What does Romans 3:23 tell us about the condition of *all* people?
5. What has God offered to all of us through the life and death of His Son (vv. 22, 24)?
6. Does knowing you have been “justified freely” by God’s grace through Jesus make you feel free from having to earn God’s favor? Why or why not?

Justify, as used here, is a legal term that means that God has declared us not guilty in His sight. Jesus has taken our place and paid the death penalty, thus removing our guilt for offending Holy God.

7. What does Romans 5:1–2 state God has given us? Why has He been so kind and generous?

If God reached out to us while we were undeserving, helpless, and in need, how should that motivate us to reach out to others in need?

APPLICATION

Select **one** of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- If our relationships with God were based on whether we were being “good” or “bad,” or whether we were consistently acceptable to God or not, we would live on a roller coaster of feeling proud of our actions or guilty and afraid of where we stand with God. What might you want us to pray about with regard to your relationship with God?
- How can we avoid a prideful mindset when engaging in Jesus’ social justice ministry? What are some ways we can imitate Jesus in His humility and generosity?
- How can our small group display God’s love and acceptance to others in need this week?

WRAPPING IT UP

Romans 3:21–24 tells us that God declares us to be rightly related to Him when we repent of sin and put our faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1–2 tells us that we have peace with God that Jesus Christ alone earned for us through His death and resurrection. To all who repent and believe in His Son, God offers undeserved forgiveness and favor which we call grace. This is the foundation that we can stand on as we face Him and the world. It is only by beginning on this foundation of grace that we can freely follow Jesus in His ministry of social justice. Then we can selflessly and joyfully give Him all the glory for what the Holy Spirit empowers us to accomplish.

UNITED IN CHRIST IN SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY

Study 3 — Philippians 2:1–8

By Dan Franz

Following Jesus in Social Justice

STUDY GOALS

To understand that social justice ministry is not just about Jesus and me, but rather that He has called me to participate with other brothers and sisters in carrying out His work.

BACKGROUND

The Philippian church was important to Paul. It began as God worked in power when Paul preached the Gospel there (Acts 16:11–40). Paul wrote Philippians from jail to thank these believers for their financial support, to encourage them in suffering, and to address some issues disrupting their unity. The passage we're studying today explains the importance of Christ-like humility as the motivation and guide for our relationships with others.

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

How well do you function as a team player? Why? When do you feel most effective—working on your own or with others?

As the Body of Christ, we need one another to carry on Jesus' ministry—whether feeding the hungry, praying for the sick, visiting those who are isolated, or working to defend rights of the oppressed. This study will help us look at the teamwork we need to develop as we imitate Jesus, the Socially Just One.

PRAYER

Pray that the Holy Spirit will open you eyes to the beauty and necessity of working together with other believers in Jesus' social justice ministry.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: PHILIPPIANS 2:1—8

Ask one or more group members to share in reading the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

1. What does verse 1 say God has given those of us who now have life in Jesus?
2. In verse 2, what does Paul want us to do based on what we have received from God? What do you think “being like-minded” means?
3. How should we view other people in the Body of Christ (v. 3)? How should we view ourselves?

Humility is agreeing with God’s view of us, not beating ourselves up or pretending we have nothing to contribute to the Body of Christ.

4. How should we prioritize our own interests with those of others (v. 4)?

How might that apply to the interests of those in our community, nation, and world?

5. What example did Jesus set for us (vv. 5—8)?
6. Why do we need to build our unity based on receiving life from Jesus? Why can’t just being interested in the same cause preserve our unity?

APPLICATION

Select **one** of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- How can being united in Christ and His mission make us one in spirit and purpose, especially if the Holy Spirit is empowering us? What obstacles do we often encounter in team situations? How could our small group resolve those in order to minister to hurting people?

- How could we bring joy to God's heart and hope to the downtrodden in the world, as we love one another? How could our small group or church be a signpost this week that God can unite diverse people in His love?
- If we functioned together as a unified team, how could we promote Jesus' social justice in our community, nation, or world? What is one specific step we could take this week?

WRAPPING IT UP

God created each of us in love. When our sin had broken our relationship with Him, He sent His Son to reconcile us to Himself. Now we are united with Him through faith in Jesus. But He also wants us to be united with the rest of His family, the vast Body of Christ. He calls us into a practical unity, love, and submission to one another in order to express His reconciling love to the world. In being one in spirit and purpose with the rest of Christ's Body, we help complete it and bring joy to God. And through us, God can bring hope and help to a hurting world. This week, let's pray for each other, that we would be more united in Jesus and more effective in our efforts to display His love and compassion to the world.

CALLED BY GOD JUST AS YOU ARE FOR GOOD WORKS

Study 4 — Luke 18:9—14; 2 Corinthians 1:3—5; Ephesians 2:8—10

By Dan Franz

Following Jesus in Social Justice

STUDY GOALS

To understand that God has called all of us as the unique people we are into His social justice ministry.

BACKGROUND

Luke traveled and ministered with the apostle Paul on his mission trips. Luke wrote both the gospel of Luke (about the life of Jesus) and the book of Acts (about the Holy Spirit's acts through the apostles and early church) probably before Paul's death in A.D. 64.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians before making a third visit to Corinth. He spends most of the letter defending his style of apostleship in which he reflects the humility and servant heart of Jesus. Paul had suffered much in his years of traveling, planting churches, and mentoring other leaders. He could authentically testify to the comfort and power of God that he received in those difficult ministry situations. He also urges the church members to contribute generously towards an offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem, which some of Paul's associates would be collecting.

Ephesians is another letter from the apostle Paul to some churches in the area around Ephesus. Paul clarifies God's loving plan of salvation and reconciliation of all things and people. He explains how this is taking place in and through the church, the fullest expression of Jesus after His resurrection. Paul talks in practical terms, too, how Christians ought to exemplify this in all walks of life.

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

What is one thing you do really well? How has God used your ability or gifting?

God has designed each of us as unique individuals and permitted us to have experiences that shape us differently. He has given each of us some gift or ability to contribute towards building a stronger church and reaching out to those who are not yet connected to Him. This study will help us examine His purpose in using all of us in His social justice ministry.

PRAYER

Pray that God would assure each person in the group that He has called us into what He is doing in His social justice ministry.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: LUKE 18:9—14

Ask a group member to read the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

1. To whom does Jesus tell this parable (v. 9)? Why?
2. Who are the two main characters in the parable (v. 10)? Contrast how each man approaches God and what we can learn from this.

How does the Pharisee, a committed worshipper of God, view others (v. 11)? How does he seem to view himself? Why?

How does the tax collector, someone who would be known for lining his own pockets at the expense of his countrymen, view himself (v. 13)? Why?

3. Which person does Jesus say leaves fully forgiven and reconciled to God (v. 14)? Why?
4. With whom do you identify in this passage? Why? How could our view of God, others, and ourselves impact our desires to engage in God's social justice ministry?

STUDY THE PASSAGE: 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3—5

Ask a group member to read the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

5. How does Paul describe God in verse 3?
6. What does God give us when we face trials (v. 4)? Why?
7. What does Paul say we have plenty of because of our union with Jesus Christ (v. 5)?
8. How does this passage dispel the myth that God can only use people in ministry whose lives are "all together"?

STUDY THE PASSAGE: EPHESIANS 2:8—10

Ask a group member to read the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

9. How does Paul explain the basis for our salvation (vv. 8—9)? Why can't we boast about our new status of being right with God (v. 9)?
10. How does Paul describe us now that our lives are being re-created by faith in Jesus (v. 10)?
11. What does Paul say we have been saved to do for God (v. 10)? What "good works" are you engaged in now? Why?

APPLICATION

Select **one** of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- If we are honest with each other, we are not people who “have it all together.” Yet God invites us to partner with Him in demonstrating His justice and love. Why does God use wounded and weak people, who rely on His grace, to help others? If you tend to hold back from participating in Jesus’ social justice work because you think you are too broken to help others, would you let us pray for you?
- How do you feel when someone shows they genuinely care for you? Why did very broken people feel at home and welcome around Jesus? How did God becoming one of us and living with us, Emmanuel, show God loves and understands us? How does our coming alongside people in pain give them a chance to experience God’s love, too?
- What are some ways we can encourage each other to lean into Jesus more this week when we feel ready to give up in difficult social justice efforts?
- How can we serve together as a group in offering God’s comfort to others who may lack hope or resolve to carry on in their struggles?
- What good works do you think our group could undertake this week with God’s help? How can we function more fully as God’s workmanship?

WRAPPING IT UP

We know that we’re sometimes weak and needy. But our helping others or following Christ in His ministry of social justice doesn’t depend on our “having it all together.” It depends on us allowing God to love and strengthen us. In the midst of all our pain and struggles, Jesus, our Lord and Friend, offers Himself as a place of refuge where we can find encouragement, comfort, fellowship, tenderness, and compassion. When we face trials, God will never leave or forsake us. And through our troubles, God will equip us to comfort others who are also suffering. Even the trials we don’t understand can have meaning because God can enable us to comfort those around us. With God’s leading and empowering, we can give away the grace that we have been given to someone else.

JESUS' EXAMPLE AND EXPECTATIONS IN SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY

Study 5 — Matthew 8:1—3; 25:31—46

By Dan Franz

Following Jesus in Social Justice

STUDY GOALS

To see Jesus doing social justice ministry and to see what it looks like for us to do it, too.

BACKGROUND

The apostle Matthew wrote his gospel in the middle of the first century A.D. He wrote an eyewitness account to convince a mainly Jewish audience that Jesus of Nazareth was God's Messiah and Lord. In Matthew 8, Jesus has just finished His Sermon on the Mount, and is walking down the mountainside with throngs of people pressing on Him. In the Matthew 25 passage, Jesus is speaking to His disciples about His return to judge all people based on their relationship and obedience to Him.

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

Have you ever wished you could have been present when Jesus was ministering to people? What would you have liked to see Him do or say? Why?

The Bible not only describes Jesus' ministry on earth but gives us His orders to keep on doing what He began. This study examines both how Jesus ministered to others but also how we are to continue in His Name.

PRAYER

Pray that your group would see Jesus minister and hear His call to join Him in social justice ministry.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 8:1—3

Ask a group member to read the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

1. Who approaches Jesus as He comes down from teaching His followers (vv. 1—2)? Why is this a bold move for someone normally isolated from society, avoided especially by those concerned with staying religiously pure?

Individuals with leprosy were not allowed to approach people and had to warn them that they were nearby by calling out, “Unclean, unclean!”

2. What does the man with leprosy believe (v. 2)? What is he unsure of at the same time?
3. What does Jesus immediately do (v. 3)? Why might He be willing to touch an unclean person and break a religious law? What might Jesus’ touch communicate to this man?
4. What does Jesus say and do after touching the sick man (v. 3)? What impact do Jesus’ words and actions have (v. 3)?

Note: We have omitted verse 4 in which Jesus counsels the man to follow the ceremonial law proving quietly to the priests that he is well (v. 4). *If you have any participants ask about this, you might ask how Jesus’ directions will permit the man to re-enter his family, his place of worship, and society. You could also mention that Jesus’ gospel is holistic, thus He cares about restoring this man in every dimension of life. Jesus, however, wants to keep His Messianic identity under wraps at this time.*

STUDY THE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 25:31—46

Ask one or more group members to share in reading the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

5. What will Jesus do when He returns to judge all the nations (vv. 31—33)?
6. What will He offer “the sheep” or the righteous (v. 34)? Why (vv. 35—36)?

7. What will surprise the righteous (vv. 37–39)?
8. How will King Jesus reply to them (v. 40)?
9. What will the King say to the goats (v. 41)? Why (vv. 42–43)? How will they react (v. 44)?
10. How will King Jesus reply to those who ignored Him (vv. 45–46)? How sobering is that to you? Why?

APPLICATION

Select **one** of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- What groups of people are often forgotten or excluded from church? Why? Whom might we identify in our city as being among this group? What could our small group do this week to reach out to these lonely or excluded people? What difference might we make in their lives or eternity?
- Whom do we treat as outcasts or untouchables in our culture today? Why? How might Jesus want us to break some barriers by ministering to these people? What could our small group do to reach out with friendship and help in Jesus' Name? What difference might we make in their lives or eternity?
- It has been said that 80% of the world's resources belong to 20% of the people in the world. What would happen if some of the privileged 20% began to befriend the other 80%? How could we, in Jesus' Name, make a difference in our city? In our country? In another needy place on another continent?

WRAPPING IT UP

Both the man with leprosy in the first passage and the vulnerable people in the second were looking for one thing—someone to befriend and meet them at their point of need. There is a difference in coming alongside of someone in friendship and treating someone as an object of our good deeds. Even when we feel clumsy and inadequate in our efforts to connect, it is rare that people will reject genuine kindness and respect. There are many in the world waiting for someone to take time to listen and care. Jesus was accused of being a friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19). Let us ask Him for the grace that the same may be said of us.

JOINING THE FATHER IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

Study 6 — Luke 10:27–37; John 5:19–20

By Dan Franz

Following Jesus in Social Justice

STUDY GOALS

To understand that God is willing to speak to each of us about who our neighbor is, and to direct us in participating in His social justice ministry.

BACKGROUND

Luke traveled and ministered with the apostle Paul on his mission trips. Luke wrote both the gospel of Luke (about the life of Jesus) and the book of Acts (about the Holy Spirit's acts through the apostles and early church) probably before Paul's death in A.D. 64. In Luke 10:25–37, Jesus is responding to a religious scholar who is trying to trick Him. In order to understand the startling point of Jesus' parable, you need to know that the Jews viewed the Samaritans as racially inferior and religiously impure.

The apostle John wrote his gospel late in his life and in the first century A.D. He was very close to Jesus and provides a unique eyewitness account of Jesus' teachings and actions. He also was a key leader in the early church and emphasizes that Jesus was God made visible in the flesh. John uses references to Jewish law, holidays, and symbols to prove also that Jesus is God's Messiah.

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

With so many needs around us, in our city, country, and world, how do you decide what to respond to and what you can't? How do you avoid burnout when there are pressing concerns everywhere you turn?

In this study, we will try to gain Jesus' mindset on who our neighbor in need really is.

PRAYER

Pray that the Lord will help us more accurately identify and respond to our neighbors in need. Ask His Holy Spirit to come fill and teach us.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: LUKE 10:27—37

Ask one or more group members to share in reading the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

1. What trick question does this expert ask Jesus (v. 25)? How does the man persist in probing Jesus (vv. 26—29)? Why?

The expert quotes both Deuteronomy 6:4—5 and Leviticus 19:18.

2. Who are the main characters in Jesus' parable (vv. 30—35)?
3. How do the priest and Levite view the victim (vv. 31—32)? Whom do you often see in need but try to avoid? What would it cost you in time, money, and emotional energy to assist these people?
4. How does the religious expert determine who the neighbor is (vv. 36—37)? Why would this be so startling to a committed Jew (John 4:9)? How often do you cross racial barriers even for friendship?
5. What is Jesus' command (v. 37)? What would that mean for this religious man?

STUDY THE PASSAGE: JOHN 5:19—20

Ask a group member to read the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

6. Jesus is being persecuted for healing others on the Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest. The religious leaders forbid many actions calling them “work,” although taking steps to save a life is permissible. How does Jesus explain why He is working on the Sabbath (v. 19)?

7. How does Jesus know what His Father is doing (v. 20)?
8. Do you think our ability to hear God depends on our listening carefully or on His being a great communicator? Why?
9. How does knowing what the Father is doing fit in with the Ephesians 2:10 statement that we are created for good works? How does it fit in with knowing who our neighbor is?

APPLICATION

Select **one** of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- John 5:19–20 is a passage of Scripture that has helped to shape the Vineyard movement. What we understand, as taught and modeled by Jesus, is that God is already working and that He will show us what we may join Him in doing to spread His love and truth. Let's take a few moments to invite Him to reveal His plans to us and to listen for anything specific He might want to say to our group.
- How available are we to stop and help a neighbor in need? Why? What changes might we need to make to have time for others? How could we pray for one another and help each other implement some new ways of dealing with our schedules, responsibilities, and so-called interruptions?
- Who are the neighbors in need that we see on a regular basis? How might we as a group begin to respond to them in kindness and practical help? What barriers might we have to cross? What could our befriending them cost us?

WRAPPING IT UP

In these past six weeks we have looked together at God's heart for social justice. We've talked about our own need for mercy, and how God has justified us eternally through our trusting in Jesus' life and death for us. We've looked at our need to remain united to and dependent on God and to continually grow in our relationship with Him. We've discovered how we are God's workmanship, recreated in Christ Jesus, to do good works along with Him by the power of His Spirit. Participating in what He's prepared in advance for us to do frees us *from* the pressure of having to make something happen and launches us *into* opportunities to serve with God. We began to take a look at the challenging question of "Who are our neighbors, both here in Columbus and globally?" We examined how God is willing to show

us what He is doing so that we can serve alongside Him. We also discussed “building a bridge of friendship and letting Jesus walk over it.” At the end of these studies, we have also provided a set of healthy boundaries for doing ministry in the community.

The question now is how we step out in faith from here. There are many opportunities in our church to serve as a small group, as an individual, or to do both. We offer ways to serve downtown with Fruit of the Vine, our Urban and Mercy Ministry, or through the Community Center located on the front of our church building. And there are many more ministries and avenues to serve within our church community, including the Pro-Life Ministry for at-risk pregnant mothers, the Bridge Builders Ministry for people living with disabilities, the Eco Environmental Ministry, and a large number of other meaningful opportunities. Check the monthly church magazine, *The Mix*, for more current and complete information.

May God bless you as you follow and find Jesus while faithfully bringing His Holy Spirit empowered friendship and social justice to the least, the lost, and the vulnerable locally and globally—our neighbors and ourselves.

Warmly in Christ,

Dan Franz
Pastor of Urban and Mercy Ministry
Vineyard Church of Columbus
dan.franz@vineyardcolumbus.org

APPENDIX: BOUNDARY GUIDLINES

By Dan Franz
Following Jesus in Social Justice

Here are boundary guidelines we practice at Vineyard Church of Columbus, based on extensive experience in leading and involving others in social justice ministries. These guidelines help us minister wisely as we seek to “build a bridge of friendship and let Jesus walk over it.”

1. You are not called to do everything, so how do you find out what you are called to do? Ask God. He is willing to tell you, and He’s better at speaking than we are at hearing (which is very comforting). This is the example Jesus set for us (John 5:19–20). Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” That means that you and I don’t have to brainstorm a program or ministry and then try to make it succeed by our own force of effort (as if we really could). That’s an enormous relief! After asking the Lord to show you specific things He has called you to, go ahead and serve wherever you’re needed. People who are already serving generally find it easier to hear from God. And as we are serving, we often discover the gifts and passions God has given us. Engaging in ministry also helps us build a personal history of seeing God’s grace work through us—occurrences where we know we didn’t accomplish good works on our own. These service opportunities can strengthen our faith for whatever else God has in store.
2. You are I are *serv*ing the Savior. We are never to try to *become* anyone’s savior. Ephesians 2:20–21 reminds us that the Lord alone is able to build the church, and assures us that He will. Also we remember in all we do that He alone is the Savior who can carry the pain and burden of the world on His shoulders (Isaiah 53:4–6). So run to Him with the pain you occasionally experience through serving others, and ask others you know to pray for you. It is inevitable that working with people who suffer will break your heart at times. But it need not be inevitable that this heartache crush you and put you on the sidelines. I have had to learn and relearn this over and over again. As fellow travelers serving in Christ’s ministry of social justice, we help one another because Christ made all of us in His Body interdependent.

3. Here is some very practical counsel: healthy boundaries do not indicate a lack of love. In our church outreaches, we share certain boundaries with volunteers before every ministry event. Here is what we always stipulate:
 - a. We ask that our volunteers not give money to people. Rather, when there is a financial need, our volunteers are to note this without making promises to anyone. Then when they report what's needed, we see what we can do to help individuals.
 - b. We ask that our volunteers not give out their last names and phone numbers to people on the street we do not know well. This is different than if you were reaching out to your own neighbors with whom you have a long-term relationship.
 - c. We insist that women and children at our outreaches never leave the group setting with anyone to whom we are ministering. We also ask that volunteers don't come back at another time to individually minister to people on the streets. We come as a team, we minister as a team, and we leave as a team.
 - d. We also insist that our volunteers are treated respectfully, in particular any women among us. We do not consider it a lack of love if a woman among us would rather shake hands with a stranger than get a bear hug from one, particularly if the stranger is drunk or high. We also do not tolerate disrespectful language. Rather than escalate a situation with angry words, we speak firmly but respectfully to any offenders off to the side. If they don't immediately see their error, we'll leave. After nine years of weekly visits (in all kinds of weather), no one wants to see us stop coming. So it is extremely rare that these kinds of occurrences ever happen. When they do, we address them immediately and, almost always, the respect we've demonstrated is returned, people offer apologies, and they change their conduct.
 - e. Before each outreach, we spend time with volunteers in prayer, submitting the outreach and ourselves to the Lord. We ask for safety and for His Presence to be in authority on the streets so that the friends we are going to visit might have spiritual freedom from anything in their lives that might afflict them.

f. We ask all of our volunteers to avoid an “us and them” attitude. We must always remember that all of us are made in God’s image and that we who belong to Jesus are sinners who have been saved by grace. Jesus welcomed us as friends before we became His followers (Romans 5:8–10). Likewise, we choose to use words that indicate inclusion to our friends on the street. For instance, in our bi-weekly evenings spent with our friends in homeless camps, we always gather in a circle any who want to pray before we leave. We ask that our volunteers pray for all of us, not for “these people.” We recognize that we are all human beings dependent on God for our next breath, and in the prayer circle we are united together in our need for God’s grace.

g. We remind our volunteers that as they’re spending time with the friends on the street (passing out food and blankets, talking about life in general, etc.), that they are sent by Jesus to bring the Kingdom as He did: to offer prayer for healing; to pray for encouragement or help; and to share the “good news” that Christ came to save us from the sin that enslaves our human race. We want them to know that Jesus welcomes them to receive a new life and follow Him. We say this because it’s true, because He is our salvation, and because we are welcoming them into our faith community where we will walk this out alongside them. We believe that we need the people we are serving at least as much as they need us, if not more. We serve people as friends—practically, consistently, and unconditionally, and none need say thanks or pray a prayer. That having been said, we are unapologetically Christians and believe quite literally that Jesus Christ came to save us and that that is truly very “good news”! We don’t push, we don’t hype anything, and we don’t feel a need to act “religiously.” However, we are aware and anticipate that God is drawing people to Himself, and since it’s the best thing that ever happened to us, we’re quite thrilled to share it with others!