JOINING JESUS ON THE JUSTICE JOURNEY

A GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Joining Jesus on the Justice Journey is a group study companion to Jesus on Justice by Don Posterski, available from World Vision Canada.

To order copies of Jesus on Justice, please call 1-800-268-5863 x3900 or visit churches.worldvision.ca/jesus-on-justice

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JOINING JESUS ON THE JUSTICE JOURNEY

Joining Jesus on the Justice Journey is a small group resource that will take approximately 90 minutes and will require a leader/facilitator.

It includes suggestions for group interaction and options for the leader/facilitator to add additional content. Joining Jesus on the Justice Journey enhances our understanding of what’s involved in the “justice journey” by defining social justice, identifying issues to be addressed and profiling Jesus as an advocate for the poor and vulnerable.

The leader can begin each of the sections by reading the introductory materials aloud or by having a participant read the material aloud.

Adapting Material:

If time is limited to an hour, the leader could choose to eliminate or simply reference Sections C and E. The workshop could also be divided into two sessions: Session One: A-D; Session Two: E and Conclusion.
A review of Jesus’ teachings on social justice will not reveal a clear criterion for taxing the rich or providing medical care as a human right. Neither will we find standards for minimum hourly wages or legislation to protect people working in unsafe factories. Explicit directions to respond to the bottom billion of the world’s population who live on less than two dollars a day will not be evident. There will be no prescriptions to define the role of the state in determining social policy priorities.

However, both Jesus’ teachings and his practices invite us to discern justice-related decision-making principles. The Scriptures invite us to construct a worldview that helps us balance our individual responsibilities with collective commitments. They offer a map to pursue human rights and measures of equity for all people. We learn that budgets are more than just the distribution of financial resources. They are moral documents. We become aware that social policies are value-laden. They reveal what we believe about our obligations to share our resources with those who have little.

The direction for the journey is neither ambiguous nor tentative. Jesus’ actions are definitive.

Repeatedly Jesus— included the excluded, challenged cultural practices, confronted the powerful, and advocated for the oppressed.
Part B.
Defining Social Justice

Social justice invites a vision of the world where people are treated equally without prejudice and are able to access a fair share of the world’s resources; while living with dignity, people are given opportunities to pursue and sustain their well-being as responsible citizens contributing to their communities.

The justice mission mandate envisions a world where people everywhere have...

- Access to food security, shelter and healthcare
- Opportunities for education and employment
- Freedom of religion and the press
- Good governance and social order
- Fair treatment in the courts
- Human rights to thrive while contributing to the well-being of others

GROUP INTERACTION

Encourage participants to reflect and assess their own country and local situation. How do they rate their status and progress in terms of the justice mission mandate? Using a scale of 1-10 (1 is low and 10 high), invite them to use their fingers to indicate how they rate their contexts. Briefly discuss the reasons for these assessments.
Injustice has the upper hand when... Eight-year-olds cannot read, Families cannot drink water without getting sick, HIV-positive women cannot protect their newborn babies, Funerals displace preventable deaths.

Injustice has the upper hand when... Children go to bed hungry seven nights a week, Parents bury their children because they have died of malaria, Women, young girls and boys are exploited as sex slaves, Workers labour for scandalous wages to fashion designer clothes.

Injustice has the upper hand when... The earth is abused without regard for future generations, Skin colour and social status padlock doors of opportunity, The healthy and educated cannot use their strengths to work.

Injustice has the upper hand when... The righteous disregard the impoverished and unclean, God’s compassion is closeted in sanctuaries and temples, The strong and the privileged disregard the weak and the oppressed.

When Injustice rules... Countless lives are squandered, Our shared humanity is disgraced, And darkness prevails.

The spirit of justice cries out: “It’s not fair!”
Part C.  
**Historical Social Justice Difference Makers**

Invite participants to think of people who have made a difference for social justice. The leader can offer the following examples:

**Aung San Suu Kyi**
Myanmar political activist

**Martin Luther King Jr.**
Champion of racial rights

**Malala Yousafzai**
Pakistani teenage advocate for girls’ education
William Wilberforce
Political strategist for abolition of the slave trade

Nelson Mandela
Anti-apartheid revolutionary

Mother Teresa
Exemplar of dignity for the poor
Part D.
Every social issue has a human face

Injustice has both individual and social dimensions. Every social issue has a human face. Personal injustice is often the consequence of structural injustice.

GROUP INTERACTION

Invite participants to identify examples where injustice currently reigns and exploits people, both locally and globally. It may be helpful to revisit “Defining Social Justice” (Section B).

1. Create a chart with two categories: “global” and “local.”
2. Collect responses from participants and add to chart.
3. Leader can add the following examples to the discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Injustice</th>
<th>Local Injustice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>Pedophilia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trafficking</td>
<td>Gender inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slave labour</td>
<td>War and civil unrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe factories</td>
<td>Political corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child labour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee camps</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Part E.
Learning from Jesus: Protesting Gender Exclusion

In Jesus’ context and time, women were considered inferior to men. The New Testament culture was lived in the shadow of Old Testament norms where the legacy of Eve, “the temptress” in the Garden of Eden, lived on. Married women were influential with their children in their homes but their husbands held real power. When divorce was initiated, it was a one-sided choice at the prerogative of the husband. Talking to strangers or testifying in courts was forbidden. Women were under the authority of men—as if they were a possession rather than a person. Rather than living as dignified human beings, their status was “slave-like.” The elevation of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the inclusion of...
... the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) in Scripture stands in contrast with cultural practices of the day.

Jesus was a cultural maverick, a social revolutionary and a religious innovator. Jesus included women in his life when other people of influence excluded them. He elevated women to a new level of life. He bestowed dignity on the female gender in a cultural context where women were repressed and assumed to be inferior.

**GROUP INTERACTION**

Ask the participants to make a list of the instances when Jesus actively related to and interacted with various women. (This will include Mary and Martha, the woman at the well, Mary Magdalene, the woman with her perfume, and the woman who was healed of hemorrhaging, among others.)

What do these instances teach us about Jesus’ inclusion of women, his views, relationships and practices concerning women?

The leader can point out two or three of the following key learnings if the group does not mention them:

- Jesus’ inner circle of people included women
- Jesus was approachable - he freely gave women access to his time and attention
- Jesus engaged in candid conversations with the women he knew
- Outside the tomb in the early morning light, Mary recognized the sound of Jesus’ voice - the voice of the one who had taken time to be her teacher
- At a most critical time in Christian history, Jesus revealed himself first to a woman
- In a culture that did not recognize a woman’s testimony in a court of law, Jesus trusted Mary to be the first person to spread the resurrection message
JESUS ON JUSTICE

Part F.
Learning from Jesus:
Challenging Cultural Practices

John 8:1-11
Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”
(NRSV)
GROUP INTERACTION

Separate group participants into two conversation groups. Instruct them to read John 8:1-11 together, appoint a discussion leader and a recorder and ask them to respond to the following questions:

1. What can we learn from Jesus behaviour?

2. What direction can we receive that informs us how to live in our situations?

The leader can point out two or three of the following key learnings if the group does not mention them:

**Jesus’ Behaviour:**

- Discerned who was vulnerable and needed protection
- De-escalated a threatening situation
- Turned the accusers’ threats into self-reflection of their sin
- Refused to further condemn the woman’s actions
- Addressed the woman in private without causing further embarrassment
- Balanced the virtues of compassion and conviction

**Direction for Living:**

- Develop the capacity to “detect vulnerability”
- Resist the instinct to judge rather than understand
- Stand up for people who are being treated unjustly
• Reflect on the virtues of compassion and conviction

• Develop a understanding of which virtue is naturally stronger in self

• Seek to strengthen the weaker virtue

Part G.
Learning from Jesus: Confronting the Powerful

As a tax collector, Zacchaeus was part of the Roman revenue machine that should have been contributing to social order and justice for all—but wasn’t. The Jewish cultural consensus was clear: tax collectors were sinners and scoundrels on a number of counts. Working for the Romans was considered collaboration with the enemy. This perception was reinforced by the Roman practice of selling tax-collecting franchises to the highest bidder. Tax collectors could use whatever tactics necessary to extract all they could from the populace, so long as they paid their quota to the Roman authorities.

Spiritually speaking, tax collectors were judged as people who had sold themselves to a life of sin in deliberate disregard of God’s ways. Zacchaeus was rich at the expense of others and, hence, he was socially marginalized. He was considered the chief of sinners. Given the circumstances, Jesus was criticized for his lack of judgment in going to Zacchaeus’ house and having a lavish meal with this rich sinner.
Luke 19:1-10
Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”
(NRSV)

GROUP INTERACTION

Separate your participants into conversation groups. Instruct them to read Luke 19:1-10 together, appoint a discussion leader and a recorder and ask them to respond to the following two questions:

1. What can we learn from Jesus behaviour?

2. What direction can we receive that informs us how to live in our situations?
The leader can point out two or three of the following key learnings if the group does not mention them:

**Jesus’ Behaviour:**

- Jesus noticed Zacchaeus, took initiative for more contact; was ready to pay the price of relating to the “outsider” in the crowd

- Accepted hospitality and welcomed the intimacy of sharing a meal

- The outcome shows that Jesus “talked truth” about abusive business practices and named them as sinful behaviour

- Jesus prompted Zacchaeus to change his behaviour in ways that affected the social order in the community

**Direction for Living:**

- Notice people: how do people send signals of openness for contact?

- Be ready to let our schedules be interrupted

- Are we in relationships where “truth talk” would be beneficial?

- Are there situations where we have wronged people— and restitution or confession and seeking forgiveness is needed?

- Personal salvation is only part of the gospel—social change and honourable business practices are consequences of living the faith

*See page 20 for an optional combination of sections F&G*
As individuals, we have limits, but we also possess measures of interpersonal and personal power. When we live right, our lives make statements that underscore our values and beliefs. We can love our neighbours within our reach and those beyond our borders. William Bausch in his book, Once Upon a Gospel (Twenty-Third Publications, 2008), shares a beautiful story:

A taxi driver went to pick up a woman on a late August night. He arrived at 3:30 a.m. in front of small brick building where he saw a single light flickering in the ground floor window. Under the circumstances in this neighborhood, most drivers would sound their horn once, wait a minute and if no one appeared, they would drive away. But this cabbie got out of his car, walked to the door and knocked.

He heard a frail, elderly voice answer, “Just a minute.” He could hear something being dragged across the floor and then the door opened. There was a small woman in her eighties dragging a small nylon suitcase and wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat, looking like someone in a 1940s movie.

In that moment, the cabbie caught a glimpse of the tiny apartment with furniture covered with white sheets. He carried the suitcase to the car and returned to offer his arm for support. They walked slowly to the curb. She gave him an address and then asked if they could drive downtown.

“That’s not the shortest way,” he answered.

“I don’t mind,” the woman said. “I’m in no hurry. I’m on my way to a hospice. I don’t have any family left and the doctor says I don’t have much time.”
The cabbie then quietly reached over and turned off the meter. For the next two hours these two strangers drove through the city.

They drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had first lived. They pulled up in front of a furniture store that had once been a ballroom where she went dancing as a girl. She showed him a building where she had worked as an elevator operator. Sometimes she’d ask the cabbie to stop in front of a building and she would stare into the darkness and say nothing. At the first hint of the rising sun, the old woman suddenly said, “I’m weary, let’s go now.”

They drove to a tired-looking, small convalescent home. Two orderlies who were obviously expecting her came out to the car. The cabbie went to the trunk and took her small suitcase to the door. The woman was already sitting in a wheelchair.

Reaching into her purse she asked, “How much do I owe you?”

“Nothing,” he said.

“You have to make a living,” she protested.

“There are other passengers,” he replied.

In what seemed so natural, the cabbie bent down and gave the woman a hug. She held him tightly. “You gave an old woman some moments of joy,” she said. “Thank you.” He squeezed her hand and walked back into the dim light. Behind him a door shut. It was like the closing of a life.

Let the cabbie finish his story in his own words:

“I didn’t pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly, lost in thought. For the rest of that day, I could
hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, and driven away? On a quick review, I don’t think I have done anything more important in my life.”

And now listen to his wise insight:

“We’re conditioned to think that our lives revolve around the great moments. But truly great moments often catch us unaware, beautifully wrapped in what others may consider a small one.”

Together we can strive for a justice vision where...

Children learn and play,
Mothers and fathers work, lead and love,
Families build houses and live in them,
Neighbours are loved,
People sing and dance,
Creation and nations thrive,

And God smiles...
GROUP INTERACTION COMBINING F & G

Divide participants into two groups and have one group read John 8:1-11 and the other group read Luke 19:1-10.

Reconvene the total group so that both Biblical passages are discussed at the same time and the feedback involves both groups.
Don Posterski completed his tenure with World Vision International as the Director of “Faith and Development.” His primary mandate included working with World Vision’s global leaders and developing policy, program ministry and staff strategies relating to Christian formation, Christian witness and church partnerships. His work required him to travel extensively and interface with the cultural dynamics of other world religions.

Utilizing research data, Don has written several books connecting the Gospel with culture. His latest Inter Varsity Press book continues to advocate “Principled Pluralism” as a creative response to the increasing diversity that swirls around us (Enemies with Smiling Faces: Defeating the Subtle Threats that Endanger Christians). Current consulting contracts include working with Muskoka Woods Christian Youth Resort and the International Salvation Army in New York City as they establish a global social justice centre. He recently served as the research director of Elastic Morality: Leading Young Adults in our Age of Acceptance.

Don and his wife Beth reside in Toronto, Canada.
OUR MISSION

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. As followers of Jesus, we are motivated by God’s love to serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

www.churches.worldvision.ca

JESUS ON JUSTICE - THE FULL BOOK

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