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## What Is Our Concern?



### ... AND JUSTICE

**R**obert Mugabe took over Zimbabwe following the collapse of the white-ruled government in 1980, and he held on to power for more than three decades. Initially, his own people and other African leaders hailed him as a great advocate for social justice and for peaceful transition to black rule. In fact, many considered Robert Mugabe to be similar to Nelson Mandela: not only a governmental leader but a moral and spiritual leader.

Unfortunately, Mugabe turned out to be nothing like Mandela. He drained the Zimbabwean treasury to purchase luxury items for himself and Grace, his former secretary who is now his wife and who is forty-one years his junior. Grace is infamous for her extravagant shopping sprees in Paris. Mugabe purchased new limousines while the citizens of his country literally starved to death. This dictator wrecked the country's economy so that the inflation rate in Zimbabwe at one point exceeded 11,000 percent! (In the United States, we get upset if the inflation rate goes above 4 percent.) In Zimbabwe, prices on goods changed twice daily. When the few wealthy men in the country played golf, they purchased their drinks at the beginning of the golf outing because by the time they got through playing eighteen holes, the price

of the drinks had doubled. Mugabe surrounded himself with thousands of secret police who were feared throughout the country because of their brutal methods of torture and murder. In one particularly cold-hearted act, Mugabe sent his men out to bulldoze the shacks of 700,000 squatters scattered throughout the country. The campaign to knock down the squatter shacks was cruelly called “Take Out the Trash.”

Mugabe amassed more and more land for himself. Using his secret police, he went to the farms of white landowners and seized the land for his own private possession. Then, out of the government treasury, he hired government workers to build roads to his newly seized farms and to work the farms for his own personal enrichment. Along with Mugabe’s violence and suppression of all political and religious opposition, he abused power through the unjust taking for himself of property that belonged to others.

Frederick Douglass, the great American social reformer and leader of the abolitionist movement, said, “Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither persons, nor property will be safe.”<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT IS INJUSTICE?

When we say that something is unjust, what are we talking about? In one of the most moving books that I’ve read in recent years, *Good News About Injustice*, Gary Haugen, the president of International Justice Mission, writes, “Injustice occurs when power is misused to take from others what God has given them, namely, their life, dignity, liberty or the fruits of their love and labor.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, injustice is fundamentally about an abuse of power.

World Vision, a Christian relief agency, introduced Haugen to a ten-year-old girl named Kanmani in India. From eight in the morning until six o’clock at night, six days a week, Kanmani sits in the same place on the floor at a factory that manufactures cigarettes. Her job is to close the ends of the cigarettes with a little knife. She is required to complete two

thousand cigarettes a day; if she doesn't work fast enough, her overseer hits her over the head with a club. Her ten-hour work day is broken up by a single thirty-minute lunch period. At the end of a long work week, she receives her wages. And what does this girl earn for working ten hours a day, six days a week? She earns seventy-five cents. Kanmani has worked at this job for five years, since she was five years old.

Kanmani is a bonded laborer, which means she is forced to work to pay off a family debt. In a moment of economic crisis, her family borrowed fifty dollars. But to secure the loan, Kanmani's parents agreed to send her to work for the moneylender. By the terms of the agreement, the entire debt has to be paid off in a lump sum, but the family is never able to put fifty dollars together at one time. They need Kanmani's seventy-five cents a week to survive. All the while, the moneylender makes thousands of dollars off this little girl.

What is injustice? It is the abuse of power. God gives each of us power, but it is to be exercised in the way that God exercises power. God exercises power on behalf of the weak and to lift people up, heal people and reconcile marriages. God uses power to give and to bless, but the unjust use their power to take from the weak.

### WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF US?

Richard Stearns, in *The Hole in Our Gospel*, writes, "Being a Christian, or a follower of Jesus Christ, requires much more than just having a *personal* and transforming relationship with God. It also entails a *public* and transforming relationship with the world."<sup>3</sup>

In one of the most famous verses in the Bible, the prophet Micah tells us, "He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8 TNIV). Micah was the last of the four great eighth-century B.C. prophets. The other three were Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. Commentators have noted that in this one verse, Micah summarized the three great themes of the prophets Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. Amos urged Israel to do justice. Hosea spoke about loving mercy (better

translated as “having steadfast love”). And Isaiah spoke about the importance of the quiet faith of a humble walk with God. Micah, being the last in the line of the prophets, underlined for the people of Israel what they had been hearing for a century: act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God!

But how does “doing justice” add to what churches and Christians generally do in showing mercy?

The typical Christian church feeds hungry people either through its own food pantry or by working with other churches and nonprofits in giving food away to hungry people. Running soup kitchens, giving away Christmas dinners and donating money to feed the hungry are all common activities for churches and for individual Christians. It is the rare church that doesn't have a hospital visitation ministry or a visitation ministry to nursing homes and shut-ins. Likewise, it is common for Christians to be involved in prison ministry, to volunteer time at a homeless shelter, to help build houses with Habitat for Humanity and to give money to relief agencies for sheltering those who have been left homeless after a natural disaster. Many refugee resettlement agencies are run by Christians, and it is common for Christians to assist international students to feel at home while they study in our country. The world would be an infinitely harsher place without the abundance of Christian acts of mercy. So why must we be concerned with justice as well?

In recent years, some vocal people on the conservative right in America have severely critiqued doing justice. Glenn Beck, an American conservative radio talk show host and political commentator, said this to his listeners: “I beg you, look for the words ‘social justice’ or ‘economic justice’ on your church’s website. If you find it, run as fast as you can. Social justice and economic justice, they are code words. Now, am I advising people to leave their church? . . . Yes, leave your church! Social justice and economic justice. They are code words. If you have a priest that is pushing social justice, go find another parish.”<sup>4</sup> Beck went on to claim that “social justice” was the rallying cry of both the Nazis and the communists, because both wanted totalitarian government.

Beck is not the only critic of social justice. On her radio show, Sandy Rios critiqued Wheaton College, one of America's premier evangelical institutions, for embracing "anti-American" and "pro-Marxist" theories under the guise of social justice. The show focused on a Wheaton education department document that included phrases such as "social justice" and "becoming an agent of change." In a response, Wheaton College provost Stan Jones said that the Rios show quotes "significantly misrepresented how social justice is addressed at Wheaton College." He continued: "We equip our students to think carefully and biblically about issues of justice, and encourage them to commit to act justly through their lives as defined by a biblical worldview. . . . There is an enormous difference between recognizing as a justice issue of concern to God the tragic state of so many rural school systems and inner-city school systems that serve disproportionately minority constituencies, on the one hand, and a radical, naturalistically-driven call for a Marxist redistribution of wealth on the other."<sup>5</sup>

If God teaches us to act justly, then why is there such a negative reaction from people—especially from some who claim to be Christians—when we talk about justice? Obviously, talking about justice touches something deep in our hearts. Because there is much confusion around the word *justice*, and because some Christians are afraid to uphold the biblical command to "do justice," let's discuss exactly what justice is. What did God command us to do through the prophet Micah?

### JUSTICE IS GIVING PEOPLE THEIR DUE

Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff said "Justice is present among persons, groups and institutions when their rights, their legitimate claims, are honored."<sup>6</sup>

But what is a person's due? Some people argue that justice only demands that procedures be fair. Thus, the fourteenth amendment to the United States Constitution requires states to give individuals "due process." Due process includes such things as having an impartial ar-

biter who makes the final decision, the right to adequate notice of a proceeding, the right to present evidence on one's own behalf and often the right to counsel. But are individuals due more than just, fair procedures in court or from our government? Does justice also require the just distribution of food, shelter, healthcare, money and goods and services necessary to sustain life?

According to the Old Testament prophets, "doing justice" includes more than providing fair courts and fair procedures for litigants. It certainly includes impartial judicial proceedings (see Exodus 23:1-3, 6-8 and Leviticus 19:15), but justice concerns economic justice as well. We read in Deuteronomy, "He [God] defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, *giving them food and clothing*" (Deuteronomy 10:18). And Isaiah condemns the injustice of his people, in which some selfishly grab everything for themselves and others are left with nothing. Thus, we read,

He [God] looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;  
for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

Woe to you who add house to house  
and join field to field  
till no space is left  
and you live alone in the land. (Isaiah 5:7-8)

Providing people with the basic necessities to sustain life is rooted in the biblical principle that every person is made in God's image and likeness and is, therefore, endowed with inalienable dignity. This is true regardless of who we are, where we were born or what we have accomplished (Genesis 1:26-27). As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops stated: "[In light of our creation] we are called to treat all people—especially those who are suffering—with respect, compassion, and justice."<sup>7</sup> Our private "ownership" of property is relative, because "the earth is the LORD's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). Because everything ulti-

mately belongs to God and not to individuals, corporations or governments, God demands as an act of “justice” (as opposed to “charity”) that every individual be given *access to the means of production*. So in ancient Israel, God gave every single family a plot of land so that every family could earn a living. According to the extraordinary principle of Jubilee, if a family lost its land because of the death of the father, negligence, physical handicap or some other cause, every fifty years the land was returned to its original owners or their descendants (Leviticus 25). In God’s just economy, no family would be permanently denied access to the means of production.

How can it be just to take property from the wealthy—those who, in our economy, would be labeled the “most productive”—and give it back to the poor people who had lost it—and who, in our economy, would be labeled the “least productive”? God’s justification is this: “The land must not be sold permanently, *because the land is mine* and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers” (Leviticus 25:23).

How might the Jubilee principle apply to a modern economy? Today land is generally not the means of accessing the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, clean water and shelter. Rather, a good education is one way of accessing resources. Likewise, having adequate healthcare is essential in giving people the opportunity to become productive. Might justice in the twenty-first century demand that individuals have the opportunity to receive basic healthcare and a solid, publicly supported education so that access to the means of production is maintained?<sup>8</sup>

## JUSTICE IS NAMING THINGS CORRECTLY

Through the prophet Isaiah, God pronounced a woe on those who deliberately misname things.

Woe to those who call evil good  
and good evil,  
who put darkness for light  
and light for darkness,

who put bitter for sweet  
and sweet for bitter. (Isaiah 5:20)

One of the characteristics of the totalitarian state ruled by Big Brother in George Orwell's novel *1984* was its regular mislabeling of things. Orwell's totalitarian empire had four ministries housed in huge pyramids. The ministry called the Ministry of Peace was responsible for conducting the country's ongoing wars. Its Ministry of Plenty rationed and controlled food and goods. The Ministry of Truth was the propaganda arm of the regime and controlled information and rewrote history. Finally, the Ministry of Love was responsible for identifying, arresting and torturing dissidents. The three slogans of the regime were: War Is Peace; Freedom Is Slavery; Ignorance Is Strength.<sup>9</sup>

Injustice is often perpetuated through the constant misuse of language. The Nazis put the slogan "*Arbeit Macht Frei*"—"Work Will Set You Free"—over the Auschwitz concentration camp. Even the term *concentration camp* rather than *death camp* was designed to cover up the truth. The Nazis talked about the "Final Solution" rather than the extermination of Jews. Their policy of "relocating Jews" was a cover-up for killing Jews.

We perpetrate injustice whenever we call things by the wrong names. It is injustice when we call all Muslims "terrorists," when we call the poor "lazy" and when we call those who grab a disproportionate share of wealth for themselves "successful" or "job creators." It is injustice when we call those who oppose war "un-American" or "unpatriotic," when we call pro-life people "anti-choice" and when we call environmentalists "tree-huggers." It is injustice when children born outside of wedlock are called "illegitimate." Whenever a government, corporation, political campaign, marketing company, church or individual engages in doublespeak, injustice is likely being covered up.

## JUSTICE DEALS WITH ROOT CAUSES

When you feed hungry people, you are showing mercy. The search for justice begins when you ask *why* the hungry are hungry. The late Harvie



Conn, in distinguishing between charity and justice, asked, “What will the instrument of the church be in affecting . . . change? Not simply charity, but also justice. Charity is episodic, justice is ongoing. One brings consolation, the other correction. One aims at symptoms, the other at causes. One changes individuals, the other societies.”<sup>10</sup>

Ron Sider has often distinguished between mercy (or charity) and justice by telling a story:

A group of devout Christians once lived in a small village at the foot of a mountain. A winding, slippery road with hairpin curves and steep precipices wound its way up one side of the mountain and down the other. There were no guardrails, and fatal accidents were frequent. The Christians in the village’s three churches decided to act. They pooled their resources and purchased an ambulance so they could rush the injured to the hospital in the next town. Week after week, church volunteers gave faithfully, even sacrificially, of their time to operate the ambulance twenty-four hours a day. They saved many lives, although some victims remained crippled for life.

One day a visitor came to town. Puzzled, he asked why they did not close the road over the mountain and build a tunnel instead. Startled, the ambulance volunteers quickly pointed out that this approach, though technically possible, was not realistic or advisable. After all, the narrow mountain road had been there for a long time. Besides, the mayor would bitterly oppose the idea. (He owned a large restaurant and service station halfway up the mountain.)

The visitor was shocked that the mayor’s economic interests mattered more to these Christians than the many human casualties. Somewhat hesitantly, he suggested that perhaps the churches ought to speak to the mayor. After all, he was an elder in the oldest church in town. Perhaps they should even elect a different mayor if he proved stubborn and unconcerned.

Now the Christians were shocked. With rising indignation and righteous conviction they informed the young radical that the church dare not become involved in politics. The church is called to preach the gospel and give a cup of cold water, they said. Its mission is not to dabble in worldly things like changing social and political structures.

Perplexed and bitter, the visitor left. As he wandered out of the village, one question churned in his muddled mind. Is it really more spiritual, he wondered, to operate ambulances that pick up the bloody victims of destructive social structures than to try to change the structures themselves?<sup>11</sup>

People need both mercy and justice. When we serve people by providing them with medical or dental or vision care at our two free medical clinics, those are acts of mercy. When we start to ask the “why” questions—as in “Why don’t people have the ability to get medical care at a reasonable price in our country?” or “Why are there so many uninsured people?”—then we are dealing with issues of justice.

A pastor in a suburban community wrote to me and said, “Rich, you talk a lot about justice and racial diversity in your sermons. I’ve been listening to your messages for years. But our church is in a wealthy suburb outside of the city and, frankly, we don’t have much racial diversity in our church. So we’ve decided to concentrate on age diversity. We want to have a mix of people of different ages in our church. Isn’t age diversity sufficient?”

I wrote back to this young pastor and said:

Yes. I think that God does want age diversity in church. Young people need spiritual parents and spiritual grandparents. There is something wrong with the way the contemporary church has been organized according to age-specific groupings and age-specific churches. We need each other. Older people need the idealism, energy and innovation of the young. And young people need the wisdom, experience and counsel of the old. We need

each other. Nevertheless, age diversity is not enough. We also need to be around people who are very different than us. The body of Christ should be a visible sign to the world of what the future kingdom of God is going to look like. People need to see evidence now of what it will look like when the Lord returns. That's what the church is meant to be. People should look at the church and say, "Okay, I get it! One day, the human race will be reconciled before the throne of God. I get it. Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world. I get it. I see it in the church!"

So I pressed this young pastor, "How radical do you want to be in making your church an outpost of the kingdom of God? How far do you want to go?" I continued,

One thing you could do is begin to build a bridge of friendship with an inner-city pastor with whom you share common values. There are many churches in the city that would value a friendship with a suburban church. Many city churches are facing tough situations. Church members often have relatives in prison. Many churches often have a hard time fixing the furnace or the leaking roof of the church building. People in your church need the faith and vibrancy of the church in the city. Friendship with a city church could be exactly what your church needs and what an inner-city church needs.

I continued, "But if you want to be still more radical, you need to ask 'Why?'"

Why is your community 99.9 percent white? Asking this question may lead to the discovery of some very uncomfortable truths. For example, your community zoning requires three- to five-acre plots for home building. On the surface, requiring three- to five-acre plots may seem racially neutral, but these zoning laws exclude the poor, who are disproportionately brown and black. Do you want to lead

your church to fight against the zoning commission? You also might want to explore your community's racial history. Have the banks historically loaned money to people of color? Did realtors steer African Americans away from your community? What can you do to push your community to create some lower-income housing?"

Asking the "why" questions force us to deal with how far we are willing to go to do justice.

### JUSTICE DEALS WITH SYSTEMS

One of the least understood areas in the evangelical church is what theologians call *institutional sin*: sin that goes beyond any individual and that is bigger than any one person. A spider web is a great illustration of institutional sin. Institutional sin is systemic sin: sin that affects an entire system. Let me illustrate systemic sin by a true story from our church.

Jane (not her real name) was a member in our church. By all outward appearances, Jane's family was normal. They were a bright, middle-class, attractive family. But this family was anything but normal.

Jane's mother beat Jane severely when she was a child, and her father regularly gave her the silent treatment even though she did well in school while her two siblings used drugs, cut classes and stole from stores. "I always felt like an unwelcome guest in my family," Jane recalls. "No one really seemed to want me." She came home from college one holiday to find a "Sold" sign in front of her parents' home. It never occurred to her parents to mention to her that they had moved.

Only as an adult did Jane discover that there was a lot more to her family's history than she had realized. Her mother had had an affair with her dad's brother. As the web of lies began to unfold, Jane discovered that it was as a result of this affair that she was conceived, so the person she had thought was her uncle was actually her father. The whole family system was polluted and distorted by sin. A sick system distorted everything that it touched.

Especially when dealing with children who are having serious problems in school or with the law, therapists often insist on doing family therapy. “We don’t believe that the child is the only patient here,” they say. “We believe that the whole family is the patient. There is something wrong with the whole family system.” In other words, an individual’s behavior cannot be explained unless we look at the whole family unit. Doing justice often requires us to look at an entire system, not just the problems of an individual or a group.

A modern example of institutional sin would be apartheid in South Africa. If a white person grew up under apartheid, it didn’t matter if he or she was a good person or a bad person. They were caught up in a sinful structure that distorted everything in their lives. I have friends from South Africa who have told me, “It is so distressing now to realize what we were taught as little children to believe about blacks by our parents and even our churches. It’s painful to discover that we grew up in a society that was so radically unjust and that we simply took for granted.” Apartheid was a spider web of sin involving the legal system, the army, landowners, big business, families and, sadly, churches, which offered a theological defense for the separation of races.<sup>12</sup>

## JUSTICE WORKS FOR CHANGE

Back in 1968 the singing group Crosby, Stills and Nash sang what became an anthem for a generation. It is best known for its famous chorus: “We can change the world.” The song was written in reference to the Democratic National Convention that was held in Chicago that year. The Vietnam War and civil rights were white-hot issues, and rioters gathered to protest the convention. Mayor Richard Daley told the police that they could use all necessary force in subduing the rioters, so the police literally beat thousands of young people into submission. It was in this context that Crosby, Stills and Nash sang, “Won’t you please come to Chicago? No one else can take your place. We can change the world!”<sup>13</sup>

“We can change the world!” The children of the baby boomers who

listened to this song flocked to Senator Barack Obama's presidential campaign in 2008, which had as its slogan, "Change we can believe in." And the crowds chanted throughout the campaign, "Yes, we can!" In other words, "Yes, we can change the world!"

But sinful systems resist change. Just because we determine that we're going to do justice and try to change a sinful system doesn't mean that the system is going to roll over and say, "Okay! We give up! You're right!" If a family has a secret—that Dad is an alcoholic, for example—and that secret is exposed, it doesn't mean that Dad will immediately admit his problem and go into rehab. If Mom had an affair with Dad's brother and that secret is exposed, it doesn't mean that the whole, sick family system will change. Family systems fight change and use every weapon to resist it: guilt, threats, appeals to loyalty and even violence. It's a sociological reality that systems generally change individuals far more than individuals change systems.

During the Montgomery bus boycott that launched the civil rights movement in 1954, a white woman named Juliette Morgan was a city librarian from a well-known family. She was involved in an interracial women's prayer group (which, incidentally, had to be hosted in a black church, because no white church would host an integrated gathering). She wrote a letter to the editor of a Montgomery newspaper in admiration of the boycotters. She said in her letter that the boycotters' willingness to suffer for great Christian democratic principles should inspire deep admiration among decent whites.

But sick systems resist change. Vocal opposition to the system of segregation was silenced. Morgan, the white librarian, was harassed. Stones were thrown through her windows at night. A cross was burned on her lawn, people insulted her as she walked down the street, and her neighbors shunned her. The massive rejection by everyone she knew, along with the isolation from her community, led Morgan to a complete breakdown. One night she took an overdose of sleeping pills and killed herself.

The change that Juliette Morgan wanted to see didn't happen for

years, but it did come. In recognition of her great work, Montgomery has renamed the main branch of the library the Juliette Hampton Morgan Memorial Library.

When systems fight back—whether they are family systems, office systems or political systems—most people who fight for change give up. It is easy to become cynical and to begin to believe that change is impossible. It's easier to say, "Let's just let sleeping dogs lie." As Christians, we may be tempted to give up and say, "I will serve a *privatized* Jesus, who only cares about blessing me and who answers my prayer to get a good parking spot when I'm going to the movies." Or we may be tempted to say, "I'm going to believe in a *charitable* Jesus, who assists me and my church to perform individual acts of charity for people in need." But it's simply too hard to serve a *just* Jesus, who wants us to partner with him to change the world.

Changing sinful systems demands deep reserves of faith in Christ. Without deep roots in the worship of Christ, personal devotion to the calling of Christ and connection to the community of Christ, we will fall away. Jesus tells us what will happen to us when we confront sinful systems: "Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away" (Mark 4:16-17). People who are not deeply rooted in Christ can never shake any system.

But change is possible! History is full of examples of change by people who worked in partnership with Christ. Just think about the extraordinary change for African Americans as a result of the civil rights movement, which largely sprang out of Christian churches in the South.<sup>14</sup> Southern life was segregated in every sphere, a system undergirded by state-sponsored terrorism in which the police, the courts and the government, together with the Ku Klux Klan, conspired to terrorize Southern blacks through lynchings, bombings and church burnings. Blacks were disenfranchised through literacy tests and poll taxes.

But today, less than six decades after the famous Montgomery bus

boycott, there are over five hundred African American mayors now in the United States, including the mayors of some of our largest cities. Since 1870, when Senator Hiram Revels of Mississippi and Representative Joseph Rainey of South Carolina became the first African Americans to serve in Congress, a total of 132 African Americans have served as U.S. representatives or senators. Today, forty-four African Americans serve in Congress (eighteen from the former Confederacy, where for one hundred years there wasn't one). Two of our most recent secretaries of state have been African American, and of course, Barack Obama became the first African American president of the United States when he took office in 2009.

Changing the world and tearing down sick systems is possible through partnership with Christ.

### JUSTICE DEMANDS ADVOCACY

As I mentioned earlier, in almost all churches, doing mercy comes naturally. Doing justice may be on the agenda for a small minority of churches, but most evangelical churches are not involved in advocacy.

Unjust social structures can only be changed by legislation. Laws can't make bad people good, and they won't give eternal life to people. But laws can restrain evil and promote the common good in society.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. understood both the benefits and the limitations of legislative actions. He wrote, "Morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrict the heartless. . . . Government action is not the whole answer to the present crisis, but it is an important partial answer. . . . The law cannot make an employer love an employee, but it can prevent him from refusing to hire me because of the color of my skin."<sup>15</sup>

So how should we now move forward? Borrowing from contemporary Roman Catholic teaching, which provides wise guidance for advocacy, I believe that churches should be:

- *Political but not partisan.* We should not tell people how to vote or for whom to vote, but we must not avoid advocating for certain "political" changes that are expressions of biblical justice.<sup>16</sup>



- *Principled but not ideological.* As Christians, everything we do in life should be driven by the principles taught by Jesus. However, our principles must not lead us to cease dealing with present realities. Just because we can't fix everything does not mean that we can't fix some things. We must do what we can, whenever we can, to help whomever we can.
- *Civil but not soft.* As modeled by Dr. King, we should courageously stand up against injustice everywhere, but we should do so with civility. Answering evil with evil is not an option for the followers of Jesus. The means by which we achieve the end is, in some ways, more important than the end itself.
- *Engaged but not used.* Engaging in the political arena always comes with its own set of challenges and temptations. As followers of Jesus, we should be fully engaged, but we must be wary of being used as a tool for political gain.<sup>17</sup>


  
 HEART. SOUL. MIND. STRENGTH.

### THE BOTH-AND OF MERCY AND JUSTICE

Karen was a single mom with two children. Her years of personal poverty made her sensitive to the needs of people around her. One day Karen decided to start a program to feed homeless people in the city of Columbus. She and her two kids went to the day-old bakery outlet and bought several loaves of bread. Then they went to a grocery and got a big tub of peanut butter and made dozens of sandwiches. They wrapped the sandwiches in napkins “borrowed” from a local McDonald’s, and then Karen and her two kids drove the streets of Columbus, handing out peanut-butter sandwiches to homeless men and women.

After a while, a few of Karen’s friends asked her if they could join her in passing out sandwiches. One of her friends bought toiletries to pass out with the sandwiches. Another gave out wool caps and gloves. Pretty soon more than a dozen people accompanied Karen in showing mercy toward the homeless.

Eventually, Karen’s ministry became part of Vineyard Columbus.

With her inspiration, we opened a food pantry. Then, next door to the pantry, we opened a free medical clinic. But we realized that providing food and medical care was not enough. Mercy needed to be married to justice, and so our urban ministry began assisting people in finding jobs, advocating for the homeless before government agencies and providing a range of services for immigrants. Today dozens of activities of mercy and justice can be traced to one woman and her two children who decided to hand out a few peanut-butter sandwiches to the poor. Many would see in her story a modern-day recreation of Jesus' multiplication of five loaves of bread and two fish.

Let me encourage you to pray this prayer to God: "Is there one area that you would have me assist in doing mercy or in fighting injustice—just one area?" Perhaps the Lord will speak to you about "adopting" some children through a relief agency and providing those children with education, food or housing. Perhaps he will speak to you about getting involved in an organization that deals with global sex trafficking. Perhaps God will prompt you to get involved in an organization that provides medical care for AIDS victims in sub-Saharan Africa. Or perhaps God will fill your heart with a fresh idea like he did with Karen.

William Penn, the English philosopher and founder of Pennsylvania, said, "I expect to pass through life but once. If therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow being, let me do it now, and not defer or neglect it, as I shall not pass this way again."<sup>18</sup>

How will you do justice in this world?