

A STUDY OF GOD'S HEART FOR MERCY AND JUSTICE

SELECTIONS FROM JOHN WIMBER'S
THE **GOSPEL** WITH THE **POOR**

vineyardjustice®

“All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do all along.”

– Gal. 2:10

THE GOSPEL WITH THE POOR

As he sought approval to embark on the world's first church-planting movement, the Apostle Paul recounts the *one thing* the key elders of the Jerusalem Church required of him. This sole consideration – *did you remember the poor?* – is a significant plumbline.

What do the poor mean to us? In the profound moment when Jesus says, “...Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40), he teaches us not just to see the poor as “underprivileged” or “needy,” but to see *him*. Jesus identifies himself with the poor and apparently takes how we treat them personally.

MAKING THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

We suggest that you take two days to cover each study. You might want to work through the material more quickly, but if you take your time, it's likely to give you greater benefit. Aim to learn well. Study the material with missional openness. Then partner with the Holy Spirit to build these concepts into your life and the life of your family, community, and others.



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Bible Notes for In-Depth Study
By John Wimber

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Unless otherwise indicated. Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

DISCOVERING OUR ROOTS

with Carol Wimber and Cheryl Pittluck

John Wimber used to say, “We need the poor like the poor need us. We need each other in working out our salvation.”

At one point, John did extensive research on the church fathers and was convinced that service to the poor was integral to their ministries. He felt that ministry to the poor was always to be primary in our churches; not an afterthought and not simply put off until other “important” components are in place. He often taught on “redemption and lift,” casting vision for the flow of community redemption: first through relationship with Jesus Christ and, second, as a natural product of the reconciling, renewing, and healing power of a church’s collective witness, financial and social redemption and lift for the whole community. Carol Wimber still speaks passionately on the subject and continues to serve in the Anaheim Vineyard’s Compassion Ministry. Her admonition to the Vineyard movement today: “Don’t forget the poor. It is our

obligation and our privilege to give to, be involved with and serve alongside the poor.”

In the original 1994 study, John Wimber reflected on the verses above and recounted how he led the Anaheim Vineyard to respond through disaster relief to Mexico and Cambodia, distributing over 2.2 million meals and 70,000 items of clothing each year through their Compassion Warehouse, rebuilding hundreds of homes locally, and coming alongside and serving countless people suffering from mental illness when the governor of California slashed state asylum funding and discharged them to the streets.

“The church isn’t an institution but an organism,” John Wimber used to say. He challenged the selfish and materialistic outlook of many Christians and exhorted followers of Jesus to give themselves in humble service to others. His challenge to the church still holds today.





An invitation from VINEYARD JUSTICE NETWORK

Remember the poor. Be reconcilers. Do justice.

Since 2013, Vineyard Justice Network (VJN) has equipped churches and leaders by connecting the work of heart, head, and hands with key issues of structural injustice and leadership. Some significant entry points into addressing systemic injustice include freeing slaves, ending poverty, tending creation, and nurturing reconciliation.

John Wimber once said that the purpose of the Vineyard could be summed up with two words: *worship* and *compassion*. Wimber also regularly highlighted Jesus' mission on earth to "release the oppressed." As Kingdom-minded people formed through intimacy in worship and by Jesus' compassion for us, we then embark on this same mission to set things right, especially for the captive, poor and marginalized.

VJN recommends this Wimber study as an introduction to understanding how worship and compassion lead us to God's heart for mercy and justice. Throughout this study, Wimber shows how oppression must be equally addressed on a spiritual, physical, cultural, economic, and political level. The Holy Spirit empowers us to expose and heal imbalances and abuses of power. We can embody the Good News that God's Kingdom is at hand *today* by loving mercy, doing justice, and walking humbly. Acts of mercy and justice serve as signposts to the reality of serving a King who teaches that "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last." When we and our churches participate in prophetic acts of God's justice, we experience justice for *ourselves*. To that

end, our King calls us to “tear down the dividing walls of hostility”¹ between “the rich” and “the poor,” between “us” and “them.”

Wimber explained that “the Kingdom of God is advanced when we pray for those in need; preach the gospel to those in need, help meet their physical needs; secure justice for them, and help them realize their own purpose in the world. There is great blessing in life for those who remember the poor.”

Throughout this study, we invite you to allow the Holy Spirit to speak and shape you so that *your* Kingdom vision goes beyond a “Haves vs. Have-Nots” divide. Instead, we can embrace a vision of the Kingdom of God advancing through “praying *with* those in need, preaching the gospel *with* those in need, helping *each other* meet physical needs, securing justice *together*, and helping *each other* realize *our* purpose in the world.”

John the Baptist’s followers interrogated Jesus saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”² Jesus responds, “The blind

receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” Our world, groaning for shalom, similarly interrogates the Church today: “Are you the ones we are looking for, or should we look somewhere else?”

Slowly, together, we walk the narrow path of seeking God’s Kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven – a kingdom where we find our shalom, our peace, by seeking the shalom of our community. The Holy Spirit invites us into the resurrection work that God is already doing amongst those who are suffering and marginalized. Such lives produce the aroma of mercy and justice—the fragrance of Jesus. Will you join in? May it be done to us and our churches, according to God’s Word. Holy Spirit, come.

¹Ephesians 2:13-18

²Luke 7:18-23

“The Gospel takes away our right forever, to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor.”

– Dorothy Day

STUDY 1: INSTITUTION OR ORGANISM?

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

– Matt. 22:37-39



FROM WIMBER:

Many Christians confuse the church as an institution with the church as an organism. In other words, they really haven't grasped how active the church's role should be in the community. Wimber recounts the following story.

On one occasion a man came up to me. He'd been trying to get hold of me for several days and had refused to talk to any of the other church leaders because he wanted to see "The Pastor". When he finally got hold of me he was incensed and his face was bright red as he poured out his tale of woe.

"I found this guy in the park," He was thin and dirty; he didn't have any decent clothes; he was sick and he was on drugs. I wanted to help him, so I brought him here. But the church building was locked and there wasn't anyone around to meet his need. So, I ended up taking him home, feeding and clothing him. He's been at my place for the last three days. I've been trying to get him to look for a job but he doesn't know how to work. He can't read or write, and I don't know how to cope. Why isn't the church doing anything?"

I replied, "It [the church] is. The church is picking up guys in the park, taking them home, feeding and clothing them and looking after their needs." He looked at me as though I'd hit him in the face. Then he said, "What do you

mean?" And I replied, "That's the church. That's what we're talking about." His eyes sort of clouded with tears and he said, "If that's the church, I don't think I like it!"

Many people are happy to take care of the poor at a distance. But when the poor turn out to be unstable and want what you've got, then you withdraw. If it were easy to minister to those with needs, everyone would do it. But it's not, so very few are involved.

Materialism has gripped the church, yet the pursuit of things has brought, not satisfaction, but disappointment and a constant craving for something new to excite us. While we race off after personal satisfaction, thousands of desperate people roam the streets. Should we be looking to the government or the social services to meet their needs? No. The work should be spearheaded by the church.

God has been challenging me over all this. His Spirit is prompting me to cry out, "Lord, stir up the church. Begin speaking to individuals. Let them understand your heart for the poor."

STUDY 1:

INSTITUTION OR ORGANISM?

ASK THE QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be “poor” – according to the Bible? In our current culture?
- Be completely honest and analyze your reaction with someone you encounter who is homeless. (Think about a specific occasion in the past.)
- What did you think about them? Write it down exactly.

MEDITATE ON THE WORDS

We must love others. Read and reflect on Luke 6:17-36

IDENTIFY FOR OURSELVES

- Look up the words *institution* and *organism* in a dictionary. What do each of these mean in the context of the church?
- In what ways can we remember the poor?
- What is your church doing in each of the areas identified in the previous question?

MOVE TOWARDS ACTION

- a) Spend time in prayer about your reactions to the poor.
- b) Ask the Holy Spirit...
 - 1) To reveal any hidden prejudices you have.
 - 2) To show you His heart for the poor.
 - 3) To speak to you as you work through this study about what you should be doing to help the poor.
- c) Write down what you hear.



“God has always wanted the vulnerable in society to be cared for. He never intended for them to languish in poverty, abuse, slavery, homelessness, or other types of devastation. When we care for individuals who are trapped in these ways, when we show them love and help them move toward freedom and wholeness, we participate in bringing a little part of God’s Kingdom back into alignment with His greater plan. We do justice and God smiles.”

— John M. Perkins



STUDY 2: CATCH GOD'S HEART

“He will defend the afflicted
among the people and save
the children of the needy; he
will crush the oppressor.”

– Ps. 72:4



FROM WIMBER:

God's heart is broken over the poor, the helpless, the oppressed, the homeless and the mentally ill. If your timetable makes no room for them, you must reconsider it. Countless generations have heard that God cares for the needy and wants His people to reach out to them. Few people have obeyed.

In the Old Testament there are several words concerning the poor that share the same Hebrew root. In English these words are translated: weak, helpless, impoverished, oppressed and needy. In God's eyes, these various aspects of poverty illustrate what it feels like to be poor.

I've found about thirty verses in which the Lord tells us that He will be the protector of the poor. He has set Himself up as judge over the affairs of all people – particularly to rescue them from oppression. He watches when employers line their own pockets and fail to pay their workers a just wage. He notices the landlords who demand exorbitant rents from their tenants. He sees those who sell substandard goods, which look like bargains, but which will fall apart in no time.

God remains steadfast in his call, from the Old Testament, to serve the poor by becoming poor himself! John Wimber highlights the powerful meaning of the Incarnation: Jesus didn't suddenly arrive in the world as a mighty king and take up residence in a fabulous palace. He came as a tiny baby and was born into a poor household.

His identification with the poor demonstrates His great love for us and breaks the heart of every believer in time and eternity.

Today God looks for individuals who listen to His Word and respond to it. "Remember the poor," he says. "Preach to them; lead them to Jesus; cast out their demons; minister to their physical and emotional needs; help them to find employment and show them the way through the bureaucratic maze in your nation."

Later I want to consider more closely the subject of justice. But for the moment, I'm keen that we see our responsibility to relieve the poor and to enhance their circumstances. Not only with food and clothes. We must also help them access therapeutic, educational and employment support. We must seek to restore their dignity and community participation.

The principle is always the same: you can give someone a fish. You can teach someone to fish for themselves. And finally, you can give someone a license so that they can fish whenever they like. Many individuals and churches have gotten as far as phase one. We need to progress beyond that. Those in need don't cry out for just a "fast food" solution. They cry for a radical welcome, like the welcome of Jesus, that includes a seat at the table next to everyone else.

STUDY 2:

CATCH GOD'S HEART

ASK THE QUESTIONS

- Who are “the oppressed poor”?
- Write down any reasons you have had for not ministering to the poor.
- Do any of these stand up to the Word of God?

MEDITATE ON THE WORDS

God's word reveals His heart is for the poor.

- Read Matthew 25:31-46.
- What is the context of this parable?
- What motivation to minister to the poor does it reveal?

IDENTIFY FOR OURSELVES

- Jesus said that He was anointed “to preach good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18).
- What does that “good news” consist of?
- How does this compare with your understanding of the gospel?
- How diverse is your church, in terms of gender, ethnicity, education level, cultural, socio-economic diversity? How would you measure the welcome of your church to “the oppressed poor”?

MOVE TOWARDS ACTION

- a) Write down the needs in your local community. (Gather information from local newspapers, internet searches, personal observation, and conversations with neighbors.)
- b) How are these needs being met? (Speak with civic leaders, local non-profits and other churches. List the current programs that address local needs.)
- c) Compare the information. Identify any gaps between local needs and local programs. List the gaps.
- d) *VJN Recommends*: Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and direction. Are these needs represented by the people in your church? Write down what you or your church could do about it. Invite people to join a team to help close the gaps.



“The church is called to embody the boundless love of God by being a community of radical welcome to all God’s children.”

– Rev. Alexia Salvatierra



STUDY 3: VAIN WORSHIP

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

– Is. 1:17

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...”

– James 1:27

“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”

– Amos 5:24



FROM WIMBER:

Another Old Testament teaching that I want to consider concerns the protection of the rights of others. God particularly wanted the Jews to reach out to three types of people – the oppressed, the fatherless, and the widow. He calls the church to do the same. Justice for others is crucial if we want to maintain and deepen our relationship with Him.

If God dealt with us according to His justice, we'd all be in a sorry state. But He comes to us with mercy and grace, and has forgiven our sins and given us eternal life. In view of His mercy to us, we must extend mercy to others – especially to those who are often insignificant in the eyes of the world. We must pray for them and work hard to see that they get justice.

The prophet Amos was raised up to address great injustice among the Israelites. The people had turned to pagan gods – although they were giving the impression that they were remaining faithful to the Lord. Their hearts were full of sin, but they were continuing to hold their annual religious festivals and were actually looking forward to the “day of the Lord”.

God wasn't impressed by their hollow devotion. In fact, it sickened Him. He was looking for righteousness in their dealings with others. He wanted to see them demonstrating a proper fear of Him by upholding the cause of the poor. But they were exploiting the needy as if there was no God at all. They didn't have a proper rela-

tionship with the Lord, so they didn't treat others fairly. As far as God was concerned, their celebrations and sacrifices were useless because their lives weren't right. For their lack of care and compassion for others, God detested their worship.

Some Christians practice injustice during the week and join others to sing God's praises on Sundays. Their hearts are full of bitterness and anger. They steal, lie and cheat and then expect God to accept their worship and gifts. They fail to realize that when they're unjust towards their fellow human beings, they cut themselves off from God and render their devotion meaningless.

God's heart is for justice and righteousness, not outward show. The Israelites had turned religion into a ritual and Amos told them that the Lord would judge them for their hypocrisy. There is no way in which we can look forward to the coming of Jesus – the day of the Lord – unless our hearts are right; unless we're practicing justice and righteousness every day.

STUDY 3:

VAIN WORSHIP

ASK THE QUESTIONS

- Who apart from the widows, fatherless, and orphans need help in society?
- In what ways can you reach out to each of these groups?

MEDITATE ON THE WORDS

Jesus sees through outward show. Read and reflect on Matt. 23:23-24.

MOVE TOWARDS ACTION

- a) How different are you on Sundays from the rest of the week?
- b) List the changes in your behavior/attitudes that need to take place for you to be consistent all the time?
- c) Read through the book of Amos, making notes as you go on the sort of sins God pinpointed in the people. What sin is God pinpointing in you? Seek to make it right.
- d) Identify and commit to one action in which you personally can feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, invite the stranger, clothe the needy, and visit the sick or imprisoned.



“The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everybody. Our greatest problem is not hunger, but loneliness. The lack of love, the terrible indifference towards our neighbor who lives at the roadside assaulted by exploitation, corruption, poverty and disease.”

– Mother Teresa





VJN Spotlight: A DIFFERENT KIND OF FASTING

VJN Steering committee member Cheryl Pittluck's story of how she started her journey into tackling injustice.

A decade ago I got involved with the Anti-Human Trafficking Movement. I fell into it when a friend asked me to teach on the subject at an upcoming women's event. After four to five weeks of googling, I finally had the facts, figures, and stories to present my well-ordered teaching designed to educate and inform. I was scheduled to give the same teaching three times in a row.

As I stood before about 50 women, I began my first presentation. Partway through, I was suddenly and unexpectedly overwhelmed with emotion. I could hardly speak. I struggled through, finished and, after a 10-minute break, started all over with the second group. The same thing happened, only this time it was worse. By the third delivery, I had to literally steel myself against the emotion and plow through it as quickly as possible.

For the next several days I felt as though I had been hit by a truck. What I finally realized was that in speaking the words

out loud, the reality of what I was saying had gone from my head to my heart. While preparing the teaching, I had actually prayed that God would make the information "real to me" so that I could be genuine, but I never expected this kind of answer. God impressed upon me that His compassion was breaking into my heart in a new way. So I went to His Word: "*Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice... to set the oppressed free... to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter...?*" (Isaiah 58)

What does God value? How can I demonstrate God's compassion to the world? I must put my money where my mouth is and my hands where God's heart is, because God's heart is overflowing with compassion for the poor, the orphan, the alien, the widow, the lost, the lonely, the last, and the least.

VJN Spotlight:

LIVING INCARNATIONALLY

Judy and George Marshall reflect on the mission of Harvest Vineyard Church in Waterloo, Iowa.

There is a great difference between doing ministry to and for the poor versus doing ministry *with* the poor. The birth of our church grew out of a free community meal offered bi-weekly under the trees in one of our city parks. This “Picnic in the Park” became the vehicle to spread God’s love in a practical way to those who experience marginalization in Waterloo’s downtown neighborhood. Serving made us feel good, but it did not take long to sense that there had to be more to living out our faith than blessing others through acts of charity. We began to recognize that the to/for approach to ministry tends to keep the giver and receiver isolated from one another.

We have spent the past 15+ years learning about what it means to truly be with our community, moving from a “to/for, or “you, them, & theirs” mindset, to a “we, us, & ours” partnership. We all have something to give and something to learn, no matter our socio-economic disposition. By intentionally moving our church into the neighborhood, we have gained a clearer understanding of the real problems facing the poor. Taking it a step further, we purchased a house in the Walnut Neighborhood one block away from our church. This is where my husband and I are learning (and at times, living) the struggles, pains, and joys of our neighbors.

The first year in the neighborhood was learning how to be just that...a neighbor. Not a savior, not a fixer, but a listener and a learner. The second year, we built Grace Gardens: a raised-bed garden on the corner of our property. We met more neighbors, and we added a wooden bench and an outdoor corkboard for posting neighborhood & church news. This attracted more relationships, deeper conversations, and ministry! Seven years later, we have earned enough trust with neighbors to help form a coalition of Kingdom-minded partners to aid in the revitalization of the Walnut Neighborhood to address the chronic problem of poor housing and vacant lots.

Jesus teaches us to be incarnational with our lives and in our ministry. He teaches us to take risks. Whether it is opening our home to the inmate coming out of prison, a church member found sleeping under the bridge, or an evicted mother and her six children - the Lord is showing us how to be *with* and among His people.

STUDY 4: YOUR KINGDOM COME

“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”

– John 14:12

“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”

– Phil. 2:12b-13

FROM WIMBER:

Sometimes there is a tendency to emphasize the importance of salvation by faith to such an extent that good works seem nearly irrelevant for the believer.

The scriptures, however, often emphasize the importance of faith *and* works. The Christian life is not about holding onto our salvation; it's about working out our salvation. It's not primarily about having a good time while we wait for our call to heaven; it's about getting on with establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, daily.

Now the Kingdom and the church are not one and the same thing. The church is the community of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the reign of God – which is far greater. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus exhorts us to pray to the Father, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10).

The Kingdom and the will of God operate together. You can tell when the Kingdom is present in a situation when you see harmony in it – people are right with God and with one another. When you don't see harmony, it's a clear sign that God's rule has been thwarted and something must be done about it.

Jesus wants us to be involved in bringing in His Kingdom. This means that whenever we see things that don't harmonize with the will of God, we combine faith and works – we pray for His Kingdom to come and do

something to alleviate the problem. It's a both/and proposition.

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus deals with issues that don't reflect the Kingdom – poverty, alienation, sickness and imprisonment. As judge, He examines the responses of those who were close enough to these issues to do something about them. Did they seek to establish His Kingdom or not?

The group that He commends are the "sheep." "Come you who are blessed by my Father," He says, "take your inheritance... For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat..." (Matt 25:34-35).

The word "For" here connects the blessing of God with works of people. Those who enjoy the favor of God are individuals who are reaching out to others in practical ways. These folks realize that they're channels of God's love to the world. They want His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven and they're prepared to do something about it.

STUDY 4:

YOUR KINGDOM COME

MEMORIZE

Memorize Deuteronomy 15:10:

“Give generously to him (your needy brother) and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.”

MOVE TOWARDS ACTION

- a) Read and reflect on James 2:14-26.
- b) What is the value of faith without works? What is the value of works without faith? In what way do these passages challenge you?
- c) Write down three examples of how we can combine faith and works.
- d) What skills & abilities do you have which could to help the poor? List them.
- e) *VJN Recommends*: Do an act of service: wash and clean someone’s car, bake cookies for someone, help a person fill out legal forms, do all the chores for your household, help serve a meal at a homeless shelter, tutor in an after-school program, mow someone else’s lawn, pay the groceries for the person behind you at the store. Don’t make a big deal of what you’ve done!



“Social action is not just an implication, an addendum to the Gospel; it is an intrinsic part of the Gospel. The preaching of the Gospel is more than a verbal exercise; it is an engagement, a living among men and women that serves notice of the Kingdom that has come.”

– Dr. Melba Maggay



STUDY 5: GOD OR MAMMON?

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?’”

– Heb. 13:5-6



FROM WIMBER:

Question: why do we hold back from giving to God's work? Answer: we love mammon. Society tells us that when the economy is in a certain state, we must respond by cutting back – or we won't have enough. "You can't possibly give more," people say. "Don't take the risk – you'll regret it." So we hold on to what we've got.

We can all think of famous and wealthy people who lived like this. They were terrified that they wouldn't have enough, so they stored up their wealth. But far from giving them happiness, it made them miserable. Their money controlled them. They died imprisoned by their anxieties – rich in the eyes of the world, but poor in the opinion of God.

The reality is that the sins of wealth and accumulation can plague all of us. Many of us aren't involved in flagrant sins like immorality, drunkenness, stealing and lying, but we are bowing down to another, more subtle enemy. We're worshipping at the temple of mammon. "I must have prestige and identity," we say. So we focus our attention on our clothes, our possessions, our cars and our houses. Mammon tells us, "You must ensure that you have enough to get all you want". And we all too often, readily agree.

Our savings and possessions become our idols. The more of them we have, the greater our sense of security becomes, and the more we're entrenched in materialism. Then when God challenges us about being gener-

ous, we panic, give away a small sum, and cling like crazy to the rest.

God wants to break us out of this. How can He reach the poor when we're so greedy for gain? How can He be our security when we're so caught up with the god of this world? How can He prove that He'll supply all our needs if we're not willing to launch out and give?

We can't serve God and mammon. We can't listen to messages from the world which advertise extreme caution when the Bible advocates extreme generosity. The two are mutually exclusive. Either we follow one or the other. There is no middle way.

It's time we realized that we're citizens of heaven and sojourners on the earth. One day, worldly gain will burn and all our savings and possessions will go with it. In light of this, does it really matter what clothes we're wearing; what luxuries we're enjoying; what car we're driving; or where we're living? Isn't it more important that we pour our lives into things that are going to last forever? If we say yes, we enter whole-heartedly into embracing the economy of our extravagantly generous God.

STUDY 5:

GOD OR MAMMON?

ASK THE QUESTIONS

- Look up Luke 12:22-32. Are you trusting the Lord for this kind of provision?
- Make an honest assessment of where your security lies. Is it fully in the Lord or is it in your possessions, income, etc.?
- Ask the Lord to reveal any hold that materialism has over you. Ask Him for more faith in the area of your finances.

MEDITATE ON THE WORDS

Beware of greed and your desire for more wealth and possessions. Read and reflect on Luke 12:13-34.

IDENTIFY FOR OURSELVES

Tight-fisted _____ **Open-handed**

- Mark on the line above the point where you feel you stand in your giving to the poor.
- What needs to happen for you to be able to put your mark on “open-handed”?
- What do you propose to do about this?

MOVE TOWARDS ACTION

- a) *VJN Recommends:* Research how you can financially give or partner with the poor locally or globally, particularly in ways that promote their leadership and empowerment, equipping, and sustainability.
- b) Create a generosity fund in your church that serves those experiencing need in your community.
- c) Pray that the Lord will show you who to and how much to give.



“Justice requires an end to our accumulation. A new commitment to economic sharing and simplicity will both break our bondage to affluence and bring a vitality and integrity that most of our congregations have never experienced.”

– Jim Wallis





TENDING TO CREATION

Selections from i-61 Ministries and an interview with Tri Robinson

Distressing facts and statistics about environmental decline and degradation are everywhere. It's overwhelming.

And it should be. When Jesus said, "Today's troubles are enough," he was speaking on a personal level of subsistence – food, clothing, shelter – not a global one encompassing the crises screamed at us in online social media and news outlets. The environmental crises of energy, climate change, and food and water permeate the globe and have long-term effects. It was true for the ancient people and it's true today: the poor will be the first to suffer.

Many downstream issues of poverty can be linked to the upstream issue of environmental decline: deforestation, abuse of natural resources, greedy and careless food production, and a basic short-sighted value for consumption that has and will continue to devastate

the earth. When you compare the current population exceeding 7.5 billion people, with the overuse of the land and the freshwater supply, the future looks bleak.

So where is the hope? The hope has always been in the cross, embodied by the church, the body of Christ. As the church unites to take a stand for God's creation and brings back his order to the planet, his healing and redemptive power will bring life where there has only been death. Like an oil spill, bleeding out into the oceans of life, the cancer has been spreading. But with raising our voice and taking a stand for the polluted, the violated land, the greed-driven habits of consumption, and the selfish mindset that drives the whole crisis, we can see hope come. The problem may never be eradicated until his second coming, but we can participate in his redemptive story by partnering



with him to bring care back to his creation. And in doing so, we also prevent future devastation to the poor, who are always the first victims of global environmental crisis.

One of the things Boise Vineyard and i-61 Ministries did early on was put together a recycling task force within the church and, because we were not very good at recycling, started a ministry called “Tithe of Trash.” We encouraged people who didn’t have good recycling in their own neighborhood to bring their trash to the church on Sundays. Our task force would take that to a recycling company at the end of the week. What we found out, however, that the company was actually taking the plastic and burning it, which is even worse for the environment! So we quit doing that and went to our local sanitation department instead, who said they’d pick up the recycling but charge us \$100

a month to do it. So we are now going to the mayor. We have been at this for a year and a half, now, so we have some credibility and a voice.

We have a tendency as human beings to look at the global environmental condition and we get overwhelmed. We think it’s a lost cause. We think it’s so steeped in politics that it’s out of our control. But the one thing I would say is that when God came and spoke His commission to Noah, at some point in time Noah had to pick up a hatchet and cut down a gopher wood tree. He had to do something. And if that’s recycling aluminum cans or cell phones, if that’s starting to print your materials on recycled paper, if that’s encouraging your people to shop with cloth bags that you provide for them, whatever it is, God blesses small beginnings. Just do something.

STUDY 6: HERE AND NOW I GIVE

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”

– Acts 2:44-45

“No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had... There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.”

– Acts 4:32, 34-35



FROM WIMBER:

The early church caught the spirit of Zacchaeus. Just as he had “stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor...” (Luke 19:8). So the early church declared *in action* that they were reaching out to others.

They weren’t activists whose focus was merely social good. They were people who were motivated by love for God. He had saved them and blessed them and now He was stirring them into action. It’s possible that the likelihood of persecution stimulated many of them to sell their holdings and bless others in a remarkable way.

In Acts 6, we read about a problem regarding the distribution of food. The Hebraic widows, with extended family in the area, were receiving support over and above the daily food allowance. The Grecian widows, with no relatives who could help them, were struggling to make ends meet.

When the apostles heard about the problem, they didn’t ignore it. They told the disciples to choose seven people who would be responsible for the food distribution. The consequence of this good administrative decision with regard to the needy was that the church continued to grow. The daily care of the poor was clearly a characteristic of New Testament church life.

Some churches have, for years, been actively involved in caring for the poor. They’ve worked out programs

and teams that minister in homes and on the streets. Individuals to have taken up the challenge. Some of the most generous people that I know don’t have much in the way of the world’s resources, but they give whatever they can.

Their hearts mirror the heart of God. For them, “helping the poor” isn’t just about “writing another check.” It’s about giving themselves. They bake cakes and share them, or repair equipment, or mow lawns, or decorate homes. The amazing thing is that many of them have major needs of their own – but the additional pressures bring out the sweetness in them.

Maybe you say, “But I don’t have the time or the energy.” I believe that you reap what you sow. If you plant beans, you’ll get a harvest of beans. So, if you don’t have much time or energy, share what little you do have and God will give it back to you.

STUDY 6:

HERE AND NOW I GIVE

MEDITATE ON THE WORDS

We must give ourselves to others. Read and reflect on 2 Cor. 6:11-13 and John 3:16-21.

IDENTIFY FOR OURSELVES

- Make a list of any widows or single parents in your church.
 - o What is the church doing to support them?
 - o What can you do to help?
- Make a commitment to pray regularly for them that their needs will be met.

MOVE TOWARDS ACTION

- a) Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.
- b) Using your notebook, rewrite this passage in your own words using analogies which are relevant to your situation.
- c) What is this passage saying to you?
- d) *VJN Recommends*: Give away 3-5 things that would be of value to someone else, or make an anonymous donation to someone in need.



“Our calling is not simply to change the world, but perhaps as important, our calling is to be changed ourselves. Justice is not trendy, glamorous, cool, or sexy. God’s justice is renewing the world to where He would have intended it to be.”

– Rev. Eugene Cho³

³ Eugene Cho, *Overrated: Are We More in Love with the Idea of Changing the World Than Actually Changing the World?* David C. Cook: Colorado Springs, CO.



STUDY 7: JUSTICE AND JUSTICE ALONE

“He has shown you, O mortal, 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

“Do not have two differing weights in your bag – one heavy, one light. Do not have two differing measures in your house – one large, one small. You must have accurate and honest weights and measures...”

– Deut. 25:13-15

“Appoint judges and officials... in every town... and they shall judge the people fairly. Do not pervert justice or show partiality... Follow justice and justice alone.”

– Deut. 16:18-20



FROM WIMBER:

In this study I want to focus on some Old Testament teaching that will help us understand the way that the Jews regarded the matters of justice and righteousness.

First, let's look at the principle that God's people should act justly in all their business transactions. This is emphasized in Leviticus 19:35-36 and Deuteronomy 25:13-15. The Jews used weights in the trading of goods. If they had two differing weights, they could make something appear heavier or lighter than it actually was. It was this kind of cheating that God wanted to prevent.

Society says, "Rake in as much as you can and don't worry too much about others". But God says, "Look at every business transaction from both sides of the table". If we operate solely in our own interests, God will accuse us of using "dishonest standards." Our goal is to give the other person the better part of the deal. As we do this, God will take pleasure in our work. We are blessed. We'll never come out the losers.

Secondly, in Israel, justice was demanded in the courts. God was concerned for the rights of everyone: the rich and influential, the poor and needy, the citizen and the sojourner. This protection is mentioned in Deuteronomy 16:18-20, but it also appears in several other places in the Scriptures.

God looks for a similar justice among us today. He wants to see leaders judging righteously in our nation and in our churches. He watches us; to see whether we deal fairly with others. Do we in any way "pervert justice or show partiality"? Do we favor a relative above a stranger? Do we judge people by their looks, their intelligence, or their job?

We may not be guilty of "bribes", but in pursuit of position or recognition, we may compromise, doing all the outwardly acceptable things. We might allow others to control the way we think, to "bribe" us into acting against our consciences for the sake of personal gain.

"Follow justice and justice alone", (Deut. 16:20) God said. Imagine how society would be transformed if everyone lived by that!

STUDY 7:

JUSTICE AND JUSTICE ALONE

ASK THE QUESTIONS

- Read Exodus 23:1-9.
- Review your own lifestyle – do you act with justice in every area of your life?
- What would a non-Christian colleague/friend/relative say about your standards of justice?

MEDITATE ON THE WORDS

God loves justice. Read and reflect on Matthew 7:9-12.

IDENTIFY FOR OURSELVES

- Premise: Christians today are more concerned with individual sinful acts than with their participation in unjust social structures.
- What is meant by “unjust social structures”?
- Do you agree with the statement above? Give reasons.

MOVE TOWARDS ACTION

- a) Read, watch, or listen to your local news every day this week. Note any stories about injustice.
- b) List ways which you, personally, or your church could work towards seeing justice established.
- c) *VJN Recommends*: How can you respond politically or publicly, as Jesus might, without being trapped by partisan political binaries? For example, it is illegal in over 80 cities across the United States to feed the homeless in public spaces.
- d) Write a letter to your state and congressional representatives about your state’s policies toward the homeless, mentally ill or low paid. Be prepared to persist and follow up any replies you may receive.



“When I give food to the poor,
they call me a saint. When I ask
why the poor have no food,
they call me a communist.”

– Dom Hélder Câmara



STUDY 8: JESUS IN DISGUISE

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

– Matt. 25: 35, 36, 40



FROM WIMBER:

Too often we distance ourselves from the needy. We know that Jesus wants us to reach out to them, but we interpret this to mean taking some fruit to the harvest festival, donating a few old clothes to the Salvation Army, or sending a card to someone who's ill.

Now the elderly or disabled may not be in a position to do more than this kind of thing. Jesus gets that and knows their hearts. But He's not impressed by able-bodied Christians who keep a gap between themselves and the needy. On the Day of Judgment, I can imagine His saying to them, "For I was hungry, and you put some money in a tin and walked off". He's looking for people who will roll up their sleeves and get involved – something that many of us would rather leave to others.

Jesus calls us to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked. That doesn't mean tossing someone a sandwich and a bag of worn clothing. It means getting alongside him and demonstrating the compassion of God. At Vineyard Anaheim, we have a huge Compassion Warehouse of good secondhand clothing and people are actively engaged in feeding the hungry.

There are also the strangers. They may be foreigners or lonely students who are away from home. They miss their families, but are rarely invited out. Perhaps we simply don't think about them. We have a warm home. Yet, we don't remember to be hospi-

table with the strangers in our area.

What about the sick? Jesus didn't say, "I was sick, and you healed me". But that doesn't mean that we stop praying for healing. On the contrary, Jesus has clearly commanded us to heal. So we pray for healing. If nothing happens, we continue to reach out. Sometimes, the most loving thing is to spend time caring for someone who's ill.

Finally, there are the prisoners. I thank God for the development of the ministry to them. At the Vineyard, we have several ex-prisoners who were converted as a direct result of visiting church members. There are also other "prisoners" – housebound, nursing home-bound. These folks crave company now and again.

Be aware. Jesus is in disguise among us. He's looking for people who are willing to reach out to Him. Do you see Him? Are you helping?

STUDY 8:

JESUS IN DISGUISE

ASK THE QUESTIONS

- Read the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37).
- What do you think was behind the behavior of the Priest and the Levite?
- Do you recognize these attitudes in yourself, other Christians, or your church?

MEDITATE ON THE WORDS

Jesus was compassionate to the needy. Read and reflect on Matt. 14:13-21.

IDENTIFY FOR OURSELVES

Circle the attitudes that have motivated you to help the poor in the past:

- Pity
- Embarrassment
- Compassion
- Bad conscience
- Desire to please God
- Seeing the need
- Following Jesus' example
- Duty

Which is a right motivation? Support your answer from Scripture.

MOVE TOWARDS ACTION

- a) Read Malachi 1:6-14.
- b) Write down the ways in which you offer your sacrifices to God.
- c) What complaint might He make about you?
- d) *VJN Recommends*: Ask God to direct you to “a stranger, invisible person, or prisoner” in your church or community. Invite this person out to a coffee or schedule a visit.



“The question before us is very serious. It is: Do you want to be healed? Do you want to become whole and live into all of your identities? Or do you want to continue to cannibalize your multiple identities and privilege one identity over the other?”

– Ruby Sales





VJN Spotlight: SANCTUARY FOR FEET

Hannah Esterbrook shares a reflection on her experiences at Sanctuary Night. Sanctuary Night is an outreach developed by leaders in the Franklinton Abbey, a Vineyard monastic expression in Columbus Ohio, for women caught in the traumatizing cycle of prostitution/human trafficking.

We talk a lot about feet at Sanctuary Night.

Yes, feet.

Every woman who walks through our doors speaks of tired feet, and often asks if we have socks and a certain shoe size. Sanctuary Night has always been a ministry of presence. Practically speaking, this means we take care of many feet.

I think of my friend Liz* - a woman who has been on the streets many years, but came into our drop-in center last week after a recent release from jail. She had been incarcerated for several months, so I had not seen her, and frankly, barely recognized her. She sat down to eat and said a prayer over her food. I asked her about her prayers, and we ended up having a beautiful time of talking and praying together. She prayed out loud that the women on the streets would

feel “hugs and kisses” from God because of how loved they are. Later, I asked her about this prayer and she said that sometimes the wind felt like a hug from God, and a shooting star, a kiss.

In her weariness, she also prayed that God’s feet would go beneath her feet as she walked as if to say: Even here, even as I walk, I need Your presence. She was remorseful in her confession of sin, more a disease than choice, that she walks with daily. Your feet beneath my feet. This has become a new centering prayer in my life with God. Thank you, Liz.

So it makes all the difference when volunteer Christina was humbled to the ground, literally, and compelled to wash the feet of a woman who was probably quite tired of walking through the snow in sandals.

Humility comes from the Latin humilis, meaning lowly, or literally - on the ground. It is this quality that I hope to be the mark of our Sanctuary Night presence. Do justice - yes. Love mercy - yes. But let us not forget the last part: walk humbly. We have to walk close to the earth. Sometimes we have to get down on the ground.

Jesus answered, "You don't understand now what I'm doing, but it will be clear enough to you later ... My concern, you understand, is ho-

liness, not hygiene. So now you're clean ... You must now wash each other's feet."

– John 13

May we be like feet beneath weary feet.

**Name changed to protect her identity. The volunteers who host SN have expertise in the area of human trafficking and stand shoulder to shoulder with survivors to collaborate and co-host a space where women can consistently come in off the streets and receive acceptance and support.*

VJN Spotlight:

HOMELESS JESUS

The story of Vineyard Canada's Sarnia Vineyard fight to love the homeless

Observing the realities of homelessness can make people very uncomfortable. River City Vineyard started Sarnia's only homeless shelter in 2006. In 2014, after complaints about noise and loitering, the city took the RCV to court after it refused to comply with orders to close its shelter.

Eventually, the church did comply but on the same day they revealed a striking sculpture - Sarnia's "Homeless Jesus" - featuring an enshrouded figure laying on a park bench with a crucifixion wound in his one exposed hand. "When we put people on the street, we are putting Jesus on the street," said pastor George Esser who made the sculpture with his nephew and Clay Williams, a Michigan artist. Police were contacted Sunday after someone mistook the statue for a dead person, Esser noted.

Further, the church appealed to the Ontario Court of Appeal on the grounds that the government could not prevent the Church from believing in and therefore obeying the 2,000 year-old commands of Jesus Christ to care for and love the poor. In 2015, the highest court in that province overturned the ruling, in favor of the church!

By the end of the process, Sarnia had spent over \$100,000 in legal costs in attempts to shut down the shelter. Imagine how these resources could have been used differently to engage the root causes of homelessness and poverty!

STUDY 9: SERVANT OR LORD?

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them ... But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves ... I am among you as one who serves.”

– Luke 22:25-27



FROM WIMBER:

Jesus didn't lord his authority over people; He served them. We are to do the same. Sadly, we forget that we're His servants and become self-centered. We think, "The church is here to serve me". Then we make all sorts of demands on others. Jesus wants us to return to His original plan; to serve. Only when we serve are we truly fulfilled.

Jackie Pullinger is the sort of person who jolts us out of our self-centeredness and into the reality of service. For many years she's been ministering to the poor on the streets of Hong Kong. Those she helps are often drug addicts or prostitutes – but she reaches out to all with love and compassion of Jesus.

God has blessed her work. Many people have been saved and are now ministering in houses Jackie has set up to cater for the needy. Christians write her, from all over the world, offering long or short-term help. Many go out and return with a fresh passion in their hearts to reach the poor.

Once, when Jackie was in America, I talked to her about our sending a few members of the Vineyard to Hong Kong every three or four months. She answered, "Do you realize what they'd be committing themselves to?" I hadn't the slightest idea, so she told me.

"They will work from fifteen to eighteen hours a day," she said. "Every day.

There will be no breaks – no opportunities to get away from people – they will be on duty all the time. And they will have to be ready to step in if some of the boys came at each other with knives – which sometimes happens."

"What sort of work do you want them to do?" I asked her. "How about teaching?" "If they can speak any of the three Chinese dialects, yes," she replied. "But what we're really looking for are individuals who will scrub floors, clean toilets, cook food and make beds." Then she added, "Few people want to do these things for eighteen hours a day, seven days a week. But that's what we need."

If we're chasing after personal recognition, we'll never humble ourselves to do menial tasks. If our goal is to serve, we'll jump at any opportunity to bless others – particularly those who can't help themselves. Look at your contribution to church life and ask yourself, "In practice, am I a servant or a lord?"

STUDY 9:

SERVANT OR LORD?

PRAY

- Pray for Jackie Pullinger and her workers.
- Pray also for any particular individuals who are serving God in difficult situations.

MEDITATE ON THE WORDS

Servants must serve. Read and reflect on Mark 10:35-45.

IDENTIFY FOR OURSELVES

- Read Luke 16:10-12.
- Are you prepared to do anything for God, however trivial or mundane?

MOVE TOWARDS ACTION

- a) Read John 13:1-17. List the characteristics of a servant.
- b) Write down a couple of ways you can practice those characteristics this week.
Share your plan with a friend and do it!



“If there is no friendship with them [the poor] and no sharing of the life of the poor, then there is no authentic commitment to liberation, because love exists only among equals.”

– Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez



STUDY 10: OVER TO YOU

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.”

–Matt. 9:35

“...As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”

–John 20:21

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

– Isa. 6:8



FROM WIMBER:

Let me encourage you – don’t wait for the local church to reach out to the needy before you do anything. Ask God for a burden for the lost. Find out what He is doing and do it alongside Him. He will give you the opportunities to minister.

Jesus had a plan for His disciples. First, He called them to Himself. Then He took them round with Him and modeled what they were to do. Next, He sent them out on their own. Finally, He ascended and left them to carry on with the Holy Spirit.

The Twelve were with Jesus for about three years. Every day they followed Him into the streets and watched how He related to people. They saw Him associate with the poor, the needy, the rich and influential. He proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom wherever He went and healed all kinds of diseases.

During the early days of Jesus’ ministry, those disciples must have been completely overwhelmed by what was happening. Crowds pressed in on them wherever they went. Miracles went on all around them. Opposition from the religious leaders increased. They must have been anxious for themselves *and* amazed at the incredible impact that Jesus was having. I wonder how they reacted when one day, the Lord said to them, “Okay, now it’s your turn”.

Some Christians think it’s enough just

to be numbered with Jesus, let alone act on His behalf. For them, salvation is about believing the Bible is true, being good, and waiting for the rapture! However, Jesus doesn’t call us into passivity. We don’t just read about and admire His works. Our ultimate goal is to do them. When Jesus sent out His disciples they “did the stuff” that Jesus did. When He ascended, they, and now we, simply carry on doing it.

All that Jesus gave the Twelve to do, He also gave to the church. Everything. The book of Acts shows that the early believers didn’t just preach, they cared. They weren’t like the rich young ruler – relying on legalistic obedience to see them through. They felt compassion for individuals and were motivated by love.

The nations are waiting for a message of hope. We have it. While people die in their sins, will we sit back and watch? Are we content to allow secular relief agencies to overtake us in their concern for the needy? Or will we rise up, recognize our calling and fulfill it?

“Remember the poor,” God says to you. It isn’t the responsibility of “everyone else” to reach out and help – it’s yours. Too many people ignore the needy. Will you? Examine your heart. Pray for guidance. Do the stuff!

STUDY 10: OVER TO YOU

PRAY

- Can you honestly say “Here I am, send me” to the Lord?
- Pray about anything you feel hold you back from volunteering freely.
- Ask the Lord to set you free from any fears.

MOVE TOWARDS ACTION

- a) Review all the preceding studies.
- b) Write down in a notebook what the Holy Spirit has been saying to you through these studies.
- c) How have you changed?
- d) VJN recommends: It’s better to start by doing a few things well.
 - Get to know your neighborhood or city: Go on a prayer walk or use a community assessment tool (www.vineyardjusticenetwork.org, click “Ending Poverty”) to help discern how God want you to engage with His heart for your city.
 - See what other people in the Vineyard are doing at vineyardjusticenetwork.org or listen to their stories on the VJN podcast.
 - Book Recommendations
 - Starting Points: *The Justice God is Seeking*, David Ruis
 - Transforming Society*, Melba Padilla Maggay
 - Ending Poverty: *Toxic Charity*, Robert Lupton
 - Freeing Slaves: *The Good News About Injustice*, Gary Haugen
 - Tending Creation: *Saving God’s Green Earth*, Tri Robinson
 - Nurturing Reconciliation: *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change*, Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson
 - Learn from others: Find a mentor who is already doing compassion and justice work and ask to join them
 - Start small: Build a relationship with one local organization or project. Commit time, energy, and resources for at least two years.
- e) What are your future goals with regard to those in need in your church and community? Write them down and put them in a visible location as a reminder of what God has called you to do. Make sure to include both compassion (i.e. helping hurting people) and justice (e.g. stopping human systems that hurt people) goals.

“Christians were never meant to be normal. We’ve always been holy troublemakers, we’ve always been creators of uncertainty, agents of a dimension that’s incompatible with the status quo; we do not accept the world as it is, but we insist on the world becoming the way that God wants it to be. And the Kingdom of God is different from the patterns of this world.”

– Jacques Ellul





THE VINEYARD JUSTICE NETWORK EXISTS to empower Vineyard pastors and leaders to pursue and enact the justice of God's kingdom. VJN will equip you by connecting the work of heart, head, and hands with key issues of structural injustice and leadership.

We focus on the interconnectivity of freeing slaves, ending poverty, and tending creation. As our network continues to expand, we've also embraced other key areas of injustice, such as nurturing reconciliation. Together, we will foster depth in our dialogue, ask better questions, and challenge ourselves to empower the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed to lead the way in our common struggle to participate in and enact the Kingdom of God today. Our resource site is dedicated to showcasing the work of Vineyard churches and Kingdom-minded leaders as they confront injustice, create solutions, and share their struggles.

vineyardjustice®

www.vineyardjusticenetwork.org