

the Story

The unfolding account of God

5-Day Devotional Study on Matthew 5:14a, 16; Micah 6:8; Isaiah 1:17 *(Scripture on page 20)*

What does the Bible have to say to you? It is a very big book. You could spend a lifetime enjoying and reading it, and never quit learning new things. The Bible is not just a book of concepts or lessons; it is the account of God's involvement in the world.

In this study series, we are reading through the stories in the Bible. We are focusing on the basic truths of Who God says He is and what He says He has done. **We are looking at the story of God Himself** that He has unfolded in the past, what He is writing in the present, and what remains to be written.

God's Justice

"In English the terms *righteousness* and *justice* are different words, but in both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament there is only one word group behind these two English terms...God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is Himself the final standard of what is right.

"Speaking of God, Moses says, 'All His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He' (**Deuteronomy 32:4**). Abraham successfully appeals to God's own character of righteousness when he says, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (Genesis 18:25). God also speaks and commands what is right. 'The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart' (Psalm 19:8)...I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right' (Isaiah 45:19)...So...what is right? In other words, what ought to happen and what ought to be?" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*)

Where do you get your sense of what is right? There seems to be an innate sense of justice that we are born with, but righteousness is another matter. Righteousness calls us above and beyond any standard that we would imagine, had God not set it in place.

Prayer focus: Use **Psalm 23:3** as your prayer focus.

journal your thoughts below

1

Missing the Point

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness..."

Matthew 23:23

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word 'justice'? Does it have a positive or a negative connotation for you? Since most of us, on some level, are in touch with the fact that we have fallen short of God's righteousness, there is typically some sense of fear or dread connected with it. But what does justice look like in our own lives?

All of us have an inner Pharisee, as Brennan Manning points out in his book *Abba's Child*. We prefer to make strict rules about things that don't matter so we can feel like we are righteous. But God uses justice as His measuring line, and righteousness as His level (**Isaiah 28:17**).

Do justice, mercy and faithfulness seem difficult for you, or easy? What are the things you have added to God's law so you can feel like you have attained righteousness? Do you hold others to a higher standard in certain areas than the one to which God holds them?

Prayer focus: Acknowledge that God can see your heart as you use **Matthew 5:6** as your prayer focus today.

journal your thoughts below

2

Practicing Justice

"We waste our time looking for justice; we have to see that we always give it to others. 'If you are my disciple,' Jesus says, 'people won't play you fair; but nevermind that. See that you play fair.'"

—Oswald Chambers

In a country that has gone litigation-crazy, we may have an overdeveloped sense of justice when it comes to our own rights. But justice, in God's definition, is not something that we claim; it is something that we extend to others – and something that we protect for those who can't protect themselves.

"Justice is conscience, not a personal conscience but the conscience of the whole of humanity. Those who clearly recognize the voice of their own conscience usually recognize also the voice of justice."

—Alexander Solzhenitsyn

What is the most unjust situation you know of in the world? Dafur? Sudan? What can you do about that situation?

Can you think of unjust situations in your own home, neighborhood or office? How could you address those? Watch for chances to practice justice today.

Prayer focus: Use **Proverbs 14:34** as your prayer focus, and pray for your nation and the world.

journal your thoughts below

3

Justice and Mercy

Most of us would prefer to see God as merciful than just. But C.S. Lewis makes the point that one cannot exist without the other:

"The Humanitarian theory wants simply to abolish Justice and substitute Mercy for it. This means that you start being 'kind' to people before you have considered their rights and then force upon them supposed kindness which no one but you will recognize as kindnesses and which the recipient will feel as abominable cruelties. You have overshot the mark. Mercy, detached from Justice, grows unmerciful. That is the important paradox. As there are plants which will flourish only in mountain soil, so it appears that Mercy will flower only when it grows in the crannies of the rock of Justice: transplanted to the marshlands of mere Humanitarianism, it becomes a man-eating weed, all the more dangerous because it is still called by the same name as the mountain variety."

It has been said that we want justice for others and mercy for ourselves. How would it change the world if we were to reverse that?

Have you ever prayed for justice in your life? Can you trust God to extend justice so that you will understand mercy?

Prayer focus: Use **Matthew 5:7** as your prayer focus today.

journal your thoughts below

4

Justice Exposed

...let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. —Amos 5:24

"The attributes of God were visible in their fullness on the day Jesus died. God's nature poured out on Golgotha in a cosmic flood of revelation, and the world quaked. Justice was done, mercy was granted, redemption was accomplished, power was displayed, holiness was vindicated, community was reestablished, perfect wisdom was demonstrated, and love ran wild. God ripped the veil of the invisible and sang through the life, death and resurrection of his son, 'Here I am. This is what I look like. Worship!'

"When the world asks, 'What is God like?' we should be able to say, 'Look at the church.' We are to be like Jesus so that we reveal God to the world... That means we strive to do justice, show mercy, pursue holiness, speak truth, enjoy beauty, create community, maintain unity, practice wisdom, and show love." (Wm. Haley)

How would it change the world if justice were as plentiful as water? If goodness nourished all relationships – between people, families, countries, governments? What might be the effect on the community if the body of Christ became known for justice, mercy, holiness, beauty, unity, wisdom and love?

Prayer focus: Use **2 Peter 3:13** as your prayer focus today.

journal your thoughts below

5

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