

The Just Church – notes

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Foreword

- Justice was best seen as an extra-credit option to the “legitimate” work of the church – and worst, as a threatening distraction from the parts of God’s call that “really” mattered.
- God’s call isn’t to feel bad about injustice but to do justice. (Isa 1:17)
- This book is about the way God transforms his church and molds us all into the likeness of his son – it’s about discipleship

Introduction

- The church has begun to incorporate the language of justice, poverty, hunger, trafficking, slavery and abolition.
- 1940s-1950s dramatic increase in the number of Christian humanitarian organizations.
- The justice issues in these pages are those involving the violent oppression of the most vulnerable in the world – most often in the 2/3 world.
- Because the suffering endured by victims of injustice in our world can be overwhelming – affluent evangelicals the world over have often chosen to isolate themselves from such horrors
- The scriptures speak with remarkable clarity about the issues of injustice
- God’s people have always been his solution to the suffering of the world’s vulnerable
- As churches engage issues of oppression, they often find that the faith they bring is not rugged enough to survive the desperation they encounter.
- The work of justice is some of the most fertile ground for discipleship
- The call to the work of justice is not God sending his church out to a place where God cannot be found but into the place where he is already at work
- The call to fight against injustice is therefore the call to intimacy with God and to deep discipleship
- Our willingness to examine our forms of worship is well intentioned and often good but it can produce a tendency to exclude the clear commands of our Father (Is 1:11-17)
- The work of justice is as much about discipleship as it is about mission
- Violent injustice is an environment far more complex and chaotic than most churches are accustomed to – it will require the best of our hearts, souls, and minds – to sustain the work requires all the common spiritual disciplines
- The 2 reasons that leaders, churches and individuals either lose heart or fail to find meaningful engagement: lack of courage, lack of humility

Part 1 – Justice, Discipleship and the Failure Point of Faith

Chapter 1 – the Failure Point

- When strength training – bringing your muscles to the point of failure is what causes the muscles to grow
- Repeated failures of faith increase faith
- An unwillingness to fail can be a significant barrier to learning

Chapter 2 – the nature of faith

- Faith=belief + trust
- Belief can be reduced to doctrine and creed. Trust is much harder to teach and much harder to learn
- In the developed world, our day-to-day existence doesn't require much trust of us
- Testing -> endurance -> maturity -> ministry (re: Acts 1-8; James 1:2; 2:14-26)
- Re: Psa 50 – the formula for a right relationship with God: Get into trouble, call out to God, God rescues, God is glorified
- Looking for trouble is about making the concrete decision to emerge from our isolation so that we can experience the world as it really is
- Trust requires acting on our belief
- Trouble – the place where we have become so identified with the suffering of our neighbors that we are suffering alongside them – a place of desperation where we cannot help but fall at God's feet and beg for his intervention – where we are acutely aware that we ourselves need rescue and the only one who can save us is God.

chapter 3 – finding trouble in the Andes

- Being in Peru, hearing and witnessing firsthand about the work of “Paz y Esperanza,” was overwhelming but compelling
- Hebrew 13:3 “Remember those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them ...”
- If you have the faith of a mustard seed/This is what the Lord says / you would say to the mountain / move, move ... that mountain would move, move, move

chapter 4 – recovering from failure

- Spiritual disciplines have the most effect when practiced in the context of a meaningful and challenging mission
- At the point of failure
 - God has not changed simply because our experience of the world has changed
 - It is important that our faith be tested
- Never work out alone
- The miracle of rest
- A healthy diet
- “along the way” disciplines
 - Examen (Ignacio Loyola) – consolation/desolation/what was God doing

chapter 5 – the secret of joy

- Tzedakah – righteousness and justice
- Finding joy in God by engaging in the suffering of those around you (Is 58:6-9)
- Offer food to the hungry then your light will rise ... repairer of the breach ... honor the sabbath by not going your own way, serving your own interest ... then I will feed you (Isa 58:9-14)

chapter 6 – from mailbox to missional risk

- What should the church offer young people who are ready to risk everything?
- The absence of risk in the church is one significant reason we lose so many of our youth.
- Brainstorm:
 - list all the passions residing in people in a group,
 - brainstorm a list of networks to which the people in the groups were connected,
 - list the assets the groups possessed

- give an hour to brainstorm potential “missional risk” projects and present them to the group

Part 2 – the justice journey

chapter 7 – finding better fuel

- the work of justice is something for which most churches are unprepared
- before meaningful and lasting engagement can happen, there are significant deficits in education, vision, and exposure that must be corrected. Before the church can engage transformationally in the work of justice, it must itself be transformed.
- There is a process by which the church can actually build biblical justice into its ministry DNA
- Responding to violent oppression will lead into direct and often shocking confrontation with real evil and complex need.
- Producing the healthy fruit of justice ministry will require you to prepare the soil, to plant good seed, to water and tend it carefully, and then with watchful patience, to wait for the crop to mature.
- *Dive* – a program designed to support your congregation as you discover how God has called you into the work of justice (www.ijm.org) – encounter, explore, engage
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chapter 8 – encounter: meeting the God of Justice in and Unjust world

- The pastors who come for training in Peru have much less resources than many back in the US, but they are ready to put what they do have to practical use.
- The centrifugal force of the scriptures is an outward force to join his mission, but our natural response is to resist rather than resign and we exert energy to climb closer to the center of the “merry-go-round” then as we approach the center we finally sit alone at the center with no compulsion to move outward.
- Dangers of wealth
 - It does not satisfy
 - We can serve money instead of serving God
 - Wealth acquired unjustly is a danger
 - Allure of wealth can cause us to justify bad behavior
 - Lure of wealth can hinder us from following Jesus
 - True religion has nothing to do with the pursuit of wealth
- Once a culture has the structures in place to isolate itself from the pain and suffering of the world around it, it usually turns inward
- Our environment influences how clearly we see the scriptures – if our environment is limited then our understanding of scripture will be limited then we may not see compelling reasons to embrace the needs of the world around us.
- Preaching on justice should be as common as preaching on evangelism, worship and tithing
 - God is deeply and passionately concerned for victims of violent oppression in our world (Ps 35:10; Jer 22:16)
 - God hates this injustice and wants it to stop (Psa 10:17-18; Isa 61:8)
 - God’s plan for ending injustice in the world is the church (Matt 5:14; 16:18; Luk 4:18-19)
 - It is actually possible for the church to engage injustice with efficacy. It’s doable because God is with us and wants to work wondrously through us (Eph 2:10; Phil 4:13)

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- Injustice is what happens when someone uses their power to take from someone else the good things God intended them to have: their life, their liberty, their dignity, or the fruit of their love or their labor
- Dangers to avoid
 - Don't overdramatize the issue
 - Don't exaggerate statistics or stories
 - Give very clear next steps
 - Provide lots and lots of hope
- Equip individuals and small groups for an encounter with the God of justice
 - Books
 - Small group studies
- Educate and involve youth and children
 - Provide steady stream of good educational and experiential tools
- Deepen the encounter: form a justice learning community
- Continue learning – put someone in charge of directing and tracking the research of the group
- Offer continuing justice education and discipleship opportunities to the broader church
- Pray

chapter 9 – explore: discovering the intersection of talent, need, and call

- Exit the encounter phase with a bias toward action. If you don't the risks are
 - What was learned will remain an abstraction
 - If the church fails to engage in the exploration of our community and world, we may find that we lack the gifts we need
 - If you fail to explore carefully the issues in your surrounding community and in your networks, you doubtless lack authenticity among the community
 - If we fail to undertake the process of exploration, we may miss God's call to engage specifically in an issue of injustice
- Avoid too much momentum
 - Take time for careful exploration and research in your community
 - Take time to build appropriate alliances
 - Honor those who are already at work
 - Don't duplicate efforts of others
 - Fully understand issues to design an appropriate response
- The main indicator that you are ready to enter the Explore phase is a sense of biblical conviction about the work of justice
- What will you do when: you wake up and no longer feel outrage? Encounter your first obstacle? Encounter relational conflicts
- The lasting motivation, the necessary energy must come from your Maker, who calls you to give up your life for a worthy cause.
- A successful Explore phase is about finding real neighbors to love.
- The goal is to mobilize the church
- As you move into the explore phase, the individual pathways for each church become more diverse and unique, but there are general guidelines
 - Church leadership and the Justice Learning Community should carefully consider the people who have surfaced during the Encounter phase
 - Gather the leaders who have surfaced and commission them to lead the Explore phase and form a Justice Task Force

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- (charged with the work of exploring your church, your community and your global opportunities – they must be passionate and mature)
 - Those who lead the encounter phase may not be the right leaders for the explore phase
 - Keep wider church updated on the work of the task force
- Explore phase – tasks are research and discernment. Align people and abilities to the opportunities. Look for overlap: unique talent, clearly defined need, call from God
- Spiritual preparation: pray for four things that don't come naturally: humility, wisdom, love, hope
- Three values:
 - Christian: we seek to serve, to be humble and grateful, to submit to the Father, depend on the Holy Spirit
 - Professional: we engender, earn and keep trust; are disciplined, value knowledge and expertise, keep commitments, evaluate by outcomes
 - Bridge-building: seek common ground and build relationships and partnerships
- Questions for task force:
 - Is your church a safe place for victims of injustice already in your midst
 - What are the latent skills in your congregation
 - Is your church giving financially to the cause of justice
 - Is your church passionate about a particular part of the world
 - Is your church preaching about biblical justice
- Explore the community
 - What are the basic statistics that tell the story of injustice in your community
 - What are the likely place of violent abuse in your community
 - Talk to the police and social workers in your community – what issues of injustice are they confronting
 - Educate your congregation about the extent of these issues
 - Don't forget the importance of hope
- Explore global opportunities
 - Explore global frontline ministries

chapter 10 – engage: moving from fear to faith

- There is no way to engage in the work of biblical justice without experiencing and confronting fear
- Talk about any fears that you are aware of
- Common practices:
 - Praying for the work of justice
 - Make justice a budget item
 - Taking personal responsibility
 - Become a justice advocate in your community

chapter 11 – real churches with real problems

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The final world

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