

# Community and Justice: A Theology of Community Ministry

DAVID BOAN, PHD  
DIRECTOR, HUMANITARIAN ADVOCACY  
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

This presentation is intended to be delivered in a 90' presentation plus time for discussion. It presents a foundation for service to those displaced by natural or man-made disasters. This foundation is in three parts:

1. The scriptural command to give (tithe), and do so generously;
2. The Christian ethic to care for those most in need, including widows, children, the hungry, etc.
3. The command to seek justice. This last one is built on the observation that disasters fall most heavily on the vulnerable, and in general the vulnerable are made vulnerable by injustice.

# Overview

---

In this presentation we will present and discuss the foundation for care for the forcibly displaced

This foundation has three parts:

1. Scriptural command to give (tithe) generously
2. The Christian ethic of caring for the most vulnerable among us
3. The command to seek justice as part of seeking righteousness

# Great Commandment

---

Jesus replied: “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. ' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

See dikaiosune

The great commandment is the exercise of righteousness or virtue, also translated as seeking justice.

in a broad sense: state of him who is as he ought to be, righteousness, the condition acceptable to God

the doctrine concerning the way in which man may attain a state approved of God

integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking feeling, and acting

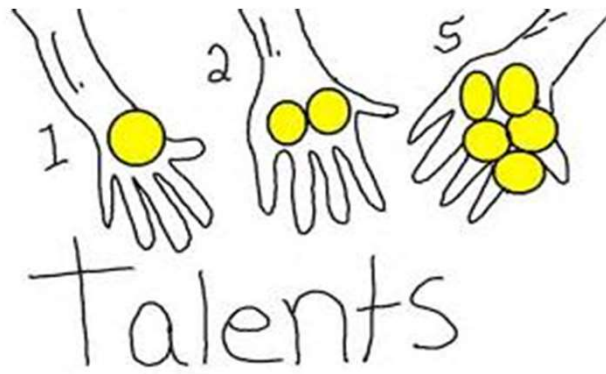
in a narrower sense, justice or the virtue which gives each his due

Reference:

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/dikaosune.html>

The Bible calls upon us to use our time, talents, and treasure to help the vulnerable and to serve God (Acts 10:4; Matthew 25:14-30)

---



# Tithe

---

At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year and shall deposit it in your town. The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do (Deut. 14:28-29).

# Generosity

---

Proverbs 11:24 "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want."

2 Corinthians 9:6-8. Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

I John 3:17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

Hebrews 13:16 And don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.

## Genesis 41:1-40 Joseph and Preparedness

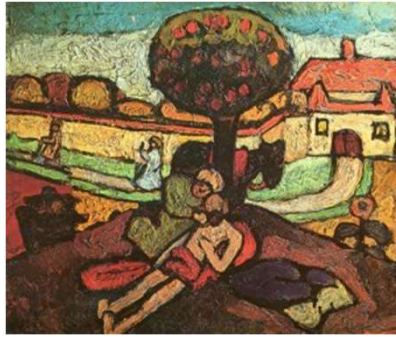
---



The story of Joseph shows us the anticipatory response. Joseph saw a vision of the future in the Pharaoh's dreams and guided a response to that future event. Thus he did not wait till events forced a response. This links to disaster preparedness and also to understanding the full continuum of the experience of the displaced. Displaced people are far more likely to be displaced again in the future and to suffer repeated losses.

## Luke 10:25-37 Good Samaritan

---



The parable of the good Samaritan speaks to how far we should go in caring for others. The Samaritan also anticipated the traveler's needs and provided for them.



## Nehemiah 1:1 – 7:3

### Recovery from Despair

---



Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem, and in the process also addressed the despair the people felt at the destruction of Jerusalem. He restored hope. This broadens the idea of loss and the range of responses that are part of caring for people who have suffered a loss.

## Seven Christian Responsibilities

---

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*; naked, and you *clothed Me*; I was sick, and you *visited Me*; I was in prison, and you *came to Me* (Matt. 25:35,36).

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to *visit orphans and widows* in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27)

Disasters reveal vulnerabilities and injustices in the community, because ...A disaster requires three things for harm to occur:

---

1. an event (flood)
2. Exposure (people near event)
3. Vulnerability (live in small hut near water)

*Harm requires all three*

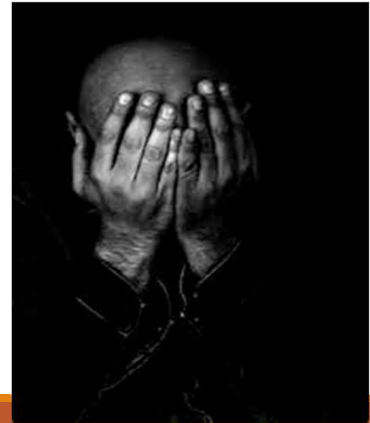


Disasters, especially natural disasters, are seen as falling equally on people when in fact they do not. Here we introduce the idea of a disaster as an indicator of vulnerability and injustice.

The vulnerable suffer disproportionately from all types of disasters.

---

Harm is increasing not just because of events, but because vulnerability is also increasing.



In fact vulnerability is increasing in the world, even though relief and development agencies have worked for decades to reduce vulnerability. This sets up a discussion of current events and social forces that keep people vulnerable.

# Disasters Reveal Injustice in the Community

---

People are made vulnerable by injustice

They then suffer the majority of harm from a disaster

Disaster harm will not be eliminated without addressing the underlying issues of injustice

“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)



Here we introduce the concept of justice and link it to what God expects of us. He not only expects us to tithe but to also seek justice. The key concept here is that tithe makes resources available to the suffering, and seeking justice addresses the underlying cause of the need. We are commanded to do both.

## Do Not Neglect those in Need

---

Yahweh, the God of Ancient Israel, gave specific instructions so that those with no inheritance or portion in the distribution of land and resources would not be neglected. “You shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town, for he has no portion or inheritance among you” (Deut 14:27).

## Our Responsibility to the Vulnerable

---

He who oppresses the poor insults his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him (Prov. 14:31).

The poor are generally defenseless and helpless. If you take advantage of them in this weak condition, you reproach God their Creator. He will avenge all such offences ([Deut 10:17-18](#); [Ps 68:5](#)).

You reproach God by abusing His creation of the poor and His providence in leaving them poor ([I Sam 2:7](#)).

God made both the rich and poor, and no matter how rich you might be, you are no better than the poor ([Pr 17:5](#); [22:2,16,22-23](#)).

Having connected disaster, vulnerability and injustice, we now introduce scripture that speaks to this link.



## Justice

---

Understanding justice is important to understanding the proper role of the church in the community and in disasters.

The church has a unique and important role to play in demonstrating the Kingdom by advancing justice

Biblical sense of justice means “to make right”

To fulfill this role the church must have clear foundation in theology of justice

Here we may, depending on the audience, specifically address the perception that justice is about punishment. In contrast we introduce the idea that justice means making things right, and that comes in many forms.

# Our Foundation in Justice

---

Since God is the God of Justice

- Psalm 99:4 The strength of the King loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

The church is to live out God's plan for creation, which includes demonstrating God's justice

All of creation bears God's Image (men and women, the world around us)

Bible strongly condemns our failure to act

- 1 John 4:20; Matthew 15:7-9; Romans 2:3; James 2:14-26

## Justice is in Many Forms

---

Social – the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities. Implies community responsibility along with rights.

Procedural – Fair process in administering justice and settling disputes

Distributive – Just allocation of goods; Reduction in inequality

Retributive – Punishment should be proportionate to the crime

Restorative – Repair harm caused by others.

Contributive – Responsibility to contribute to benefit of society

A common element of “ought”, as in we ought to ...

Depending on time, the speaker may present examples of each type and ask participants to do the same.

# People Have an Inherent Sense of Justice

---

Starting as children, we have a sense of justice, expect the world to be just.  
Reflects God's Image

What does "you got what was coming to you" mean? Or "you reap what you sow"?

We feel conflict when we see injustice. The conflict is resolved in three ways

1. Come to the aid of the one suffering injustice, restore justice. Requires action.
2. Say the victim is to blame and deserved what happened (thus no injustice). Avoid action, maintain our own comfort.
3. Ignore the injustice

Blaming and avoiding seeking justice impairs compassion

This is the social science of justice. I suggest that being made in God's image, which is the image of the God of justice, means we too have an inherent sense of justice and a drive to make things right. Our fallen nature means this drive can be corrupted, as shown in two of the three forms of expression.

# Blaming the Victim

---

Blaming the victim is common, and keeps us from showing compassion and seeking justice

- The child deserved abuse for misbehaving
- The women deserved assault for being seductive or taking risks
- The poor deserve their condition for being lazy
- Men are excused for their behavior because women are to blame for theirs, thus there is no injustice

You counter blaming the victim by ...

- Recognize patterns of blame, such as typically blaming women for men's behavior
- Seek out the victims view, build a relationship, create a safe place for victim to speak out

This is the most common corruption of justice. Can be applied to gender violence, punishment of gay people, financial corruption and more. Take some time to explore this with the participants. This is generally seen as the largest impediment to getting people to provide aid.

## Therapeutic vs Corrosive Communities

---

When people come together in crisis, trust is built

- The community becomes stronger and more able to respond to the next crisis

When people fail to respond to those in need, or when corruption is seen as the source of the crisis, trust is damaged

- The community becomes weaker, more likely to descend into further conflict, less able to manage the next crisis, less resilient

Responding to injustice is the church showing that God is a God of justice

Failing to seek justice has many consequences. One of the major consequences is the development of mistrust. Mistrust undermines cooperation and damages community resilience.

Discuss perception of why care arrived when needed, or did not.  
Ask for examples locally.

Perception comes from conversation. Church must be proactive to change the conversation.

Change the conversation from the pulpit. Sermons are one way that what people see and think is shaped.

## Failing to seek justice damages you and damages the community

---

- People who act unjustly, or see injustice and do nothing, suffer
- A community where there is injustice suffers. People do not trust, less likely to come to others aid
- A church that harbors injustice is acting against it's own image of the Kingdom

More on consequences of injustice

# Promoting Justice Builds Resilience in the Community

---

Resilience is the ability to withstand and recover from a crisis

Justice builds trust, trust builds resilience

In a trusting community,

- people more likely to work together, help one another
- People who are vulnerable are recognized and their needs are acted upon
- Resources are used fairly to help people recover



# The Church Can Promote Resilience

---

Promoting a constructive faith

Serving as a community of hope and support

Equipping people for service

Building trust in the community

Standing for justice

Knowing who is vulnerable and acting to protect them

## How Does the Church Become a Community of Justice?

---

Leaders must teach a proper theology of justice

Preaching must be followed by dissemination

- Teach in Sunday School, small groups, bible study

Dissemination followed by Engagement

- Put into action in personal life, break down “compartments”
- Align with other areas of life, create consistency
- Faith and justice become central theme in one’s life

This is the transition to application. Church has many roles, one is to create trust by seeking justice, which in turn leads to a stronger, healthier community.

## But The Church Can Also Damage Resilience

---

Teaching hate and division

Teaching God of judgment rather than God of love and compassion

Promoting separation

Denying the importance of justice

Focusing on own needs and failing to see or show concern for the needs of others

## Put This into Action

---

Start teaching justice

Use stories and examples to help people recognize injustice

Confront blaming, avoiding the victim

Start in your own church, then expand to community

Many NGO programs are based on creating a just society, consider participating, also create your own.

# Discussion

---

How will you teach your church to be a church of justice?

How are justice and evangelism connected?

What challenges will you have when you introduce your church to justice?