



# CULTURE OF JUSTICE

**REALIZING GOD'S JUSTICE IN ALL ITS FULLNESS**

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**All people are image-bearers of God and were created to flourish, but in a culture rife with injustices, God's will for his children is not being realized in its fullness.**

This collection of devotionals identifies the unique role Christians play in combating dehumanization and racial injustice in our society and will inspire you to actively join God in His redemptive work in our world.

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Take time to reflect on each devotional's questions which are intended to help you begin to process your thoughts, to bring them into your discipleship journey so that they can be expressed in the person you are and the way that you live.

# Jesus' Ministry

## READING

### **Luke 4:18**

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.

### **Isaiah 42:1**

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him.

## STUDY

In Jesus' speech at the synagogue announcing his ministry, he proclaimed that he came to set free the oppressed and bring justice to the nations. The spirit of the Lord anointed him for this distinct purpose. Mandated by God, his every action was rooted in procuring freedom and justice for the destitute, exploited, and persecuted. He instructed his disciples to go and do likewise.

Thousands of years later, the call to follow Jesus' example has not changed. To be a disciple of Christ is to work to combat poverty and injustice in all its forms.

As we look at the roots of injustice across the world, a common thread emerges – dehumanization. Dehumanization is a sin that strips away the intrinsic value that we are all born with and deprives a person or group of their right to flourish.

Currently, we're seeing evidence of this in the racial injustice that has long afflicted and continues to affect people of color in all parts of the world.

But it was never meant to be this way.

So, how did we get here?

# Jesus' Ministry

## REFLECTION

How do you feel when you hear stories of racial injustice?

When did you first learn about racial inequality?

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# Cain & Abel

## READING

### Genesis 4:1

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." 2 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.

3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

6 The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

## STUDY

A clear biblical instance of one human dehumanizing another occurred when Cain murdered his brother, Abel.

They had just brought their offerings to the Lord, Cain laying down fruit from his farm, Abel laying down the firstborn sheep from his flock. An act of worship to their creator and sustainer. The Lord looked favorably on Abel's sacrifice but not on Cain's.

At seeing Cain's disgruntlement, God tried to calm the toil in his heart, "Why are you angry? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

The words were not received. Full of jealousy, Cain responded with violent anger, taking his brother's life. He then pretended that he'd committed no wrong.



# Cain & Abel

The Lord cried out: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

The account of Cain and Abel is a lesson in jealousy and bitterness, but it also teaches us the effects of dehumanization.

How could the older brother – after spending time worshiping and seeking the Lord's favor – become so estranged from his younger sibling that he would slay his own flesh and blood? What beliefs, deceptions, and actions led Cain so astray?

At some point in the story, Cain decided in his heart that his brother's life was not worthy of protection, of honor. His own arrogance and contempt deceived him into a dark depiction of his brother:

Abel, the younger, was not as good as Cain. Abel was less experienced, less knowledgeable, *less than*. He did not deserve prestige.

The Lord knew the thoughts in Cain's mind. He knew the evil that the older brother was capable of. He knew what could happen if those things were left unchecked. *Sin is crouching at the door...you must rule over it.*

Cain's defiance of God's warning led to his own demise.

That seed of hatred planted in Cain's heart still grows today – when those meant to protect lives take them. When you think about a police officer kneeling on the neck of a black man until he suffocates, do you hear God's sorrow? *The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.*

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## REFLECTION

Does racial injustice feel far removed from your own life or deeply connected with it?

When being completely honest with yourself, how much have you disengaged with this issue because it hasn't directly impacted you?

Have you ever looked down on someone else who was different from yourself?

# Refuting Injustice

## READING

### **Ephesians 6:12**

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

### **Galatians 3:28**

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

## STUDY

Scripture tells us that our struggle is against the power of darkness and evil. Now more than ever, we're realizing that the powers and principalities that perpetuate injustice have wrought havoc in our nation both historically and today. Accounts of global racial injustice have continued to fill our news feeds, contributing to a growing sense that we can't let this moment pass without seizing the opportunity for change.

Some of us might face the temptation to distance ourselves from discussions about racism, asserting our innocence and perhaps also referencing relationships that we have with those of different races as proof of this.

et racism is about so much more than interpersonal relationships.

Race is a social construct. It is a means of categorizing people based predominantly on perceived common physical and behavioral traits. Race is something that society ascribes to people and has been used to reduce and dehumanize certain groups. Practices like colonialism and slavery are examples of this. While race has been used to dehumanize some, it has also been used to justify power over and brutal treatment of others. Colonizers held the notion that their "whiteness" gave them superiority over other groups of people.

# Refuting Injustice

Around the world, these deceptions – and the corrupt power they uphold – have been reinforced over centuries, infiltrating cultural perceptions, education systems, churches, and public policy. The result of all this is persistent and structural inequality between people of different races.

Scripture refutes the construct of racial inequality: you are all one in Christ Jesus. But acknowledging the problem is not enough, we have been called to do something about it. We must act to refute this injustice.

We yearn to see Jesus, through the faithful witness of His beloved Church, change us, our communities, and our society. We hold onto hope and declare a future that when Jesus reigns, in his Kingdom racial injustice of every kind will be no more.

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## REFLECTION

What societal concepts about race can you identify where you live?

In what ways have you seen the sin of racial injustice passed down from previous generations to your generation?





# Equality & Justice

## READING

### **Luke 19:45-46**

45 And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, 46 saying to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."

### **Genesis 1:26**

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

### **Luke 19:1-10**

He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

## STUDY

When people within our societies are discriminated against, the image of God in them is defiled.

Just as Jesus lamented when the house of God was defiled – overturning the tables of the

moneylenders in the temple and berating them for turning it into a den of robbers – people must be able to respond with lament when the image of God that they bear is defiled.

# Equality & Justice

As the unhealed wounds of historic and systematic injustice are surfacing, it is tempting to want to move to reconciliation or unity as quickly as possible. But without unearthing and challenging systemic racism, the drive for reconciliation will only lead to a shallow substitute which serves to perpetuate injustice.

In Luke's gospel, a spotlight is placed on Jesus' compassion for the marginalized and oppressed through the redemptive story of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was despised by Jewish society because of his affiliation with Rome, the oppressive regime of the time. As a tax collector, he was complicit in and benefitted from systemic injustice. Oftentimes, the tax collectors exploited their place of power and authority by overcharging citizens. What stands out in this story is Zacchaeus' response after encountering Jesus: Feeling convicted of his sin, he vowed not only to repay his debt but to give half of his possessions to the poor and to pay back fourfold those he had wronged.

After encountering Jesus, Zacchaeus recognized his wrongdoing, which led to repentance that resulted in radical action. It stirred an outpouring of generosity that led him to go above and beyond in his response to the injustice in which he had not only been complicit but had overtly participated in. This is the kingdom of God: the reconciliation of equality and justice.

It is impossible to know and follow Jesus and not be moved with the same compassion for the marginalized and oppressed.

Genuine reconciliation requires that we recognize and name injustice, address pain, and allow space for lament, radical repentance and re-envisioning. We cannot rush through these stages: we need to be willing to sit in this uncomfortable place of listening and recognizing, creating a space from which change can emerge.

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## REFLECTION

Was Jesus justified in overturning the tables in the temple?

What was it that enabled Zacchaeus to recognize the sin and injustice in his own life?

What stage do you feel you're in right now, lament, repentance, or revisioning?

# Freedom to Flourish

## READING

### **Luke 20:45-47**

45 And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, 46 “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, 47 who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

### **Luke 11:43**

Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

### **Colossians 1:19-20**

19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

## STUDY

Throughout the gospels, Jesus critiques the behavior of various power-holding groups in society. We see this when he rebukes the teachers of the law on account of their treatment of the marginalized, and again with the Pharisees and for their love of power. Jesus also admonishes these groups for their hypocrisy, as we read in Matthew 23:29-32:

*29 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. 30 And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ 31 So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!”*

# Freedom to Flourish

Jesus' words were spoken in a specific context and addressed to a specific group of people, nevertheless, they can still speak into our situation today. Jesus reminds us that communal sin is a reality, and we are entangled in the sin of our societies. His words also speak of our generational interconnectedness – our past matters and is part of our identity. Finally, Jesus' words highlight the need for greater awareness of the ways in which we continue in the sin of previous generations.

In the Old Testament, prophets were sent by God to groups of people to rebuke them for the sin in their societies and to call them to repentance. Similarly, in the passage above, Jesus rebukes the teachers of the law and the Pharisees for their communal sin. He highlights their hypocrisy and alludes to the fact that they will eventually kill him, as their ancestors had killed the prophets that came before him.

Like Cain who defied God's warning, the religious leaders ignored Jesus' rebuke and responded in pride and hatred...an act that led to Jesus' undeserved death.

*The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.*

God longs for freedom and justice for the oppressed, it's why He sent Jesus. The hope of the cross is that all would be reconciled to God and that all would flourish.

We long to see God's people everywhere, as expressions of individual and corporate worship, be bold, loving, and faithful as they speak the truth about racial injustice. We do this as an act of reverence and love for Jesus, in whom we place our hope for the redemption of sin, freedom for captives, and the restoration of all creation.

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## REFLECTION

Turning to our situation today and the racial inequality in our societies, what might Jesus and the prophets say to us?

How should we choose to respond?

# Conclusion

We hope that by reading this resource you were able to encounter the Holy Spirit and felt inspired to combat dehumanization and racial injustice in our society and actively join God in His redemptive work in our world.

We invite you to continue this journey of serving the vulnerable with compassion, pursuing justice and peace, and caring for God's creation. Visit [www.tearfundusa.org](http://www.tearfundusa.org).

## ABOUT OUR WORK

For over 50 years, we've been following Jesus where the need is greatest, to bring an end to extreme poverty.

With an unwavering commitment to strengthen the local church, we work in close partnership with church leaders and Christian organizations in more than 50 countries, restoring dignity and hope in the world's poorest communities.

Don't let poverty and injustice have the last word.

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## THIS IS HOW YOU CAN JOIN US



### ADVOCATE

We are mobilizing people to contact Congress to take action on poverty.



### PRAY

We believe prayer is key to overcoming injustice. When addressing problems this large and complex we need God's power and leading to overcome the challenges our world faces.



### GIVE

Support our work and bring hope to those who need it most.