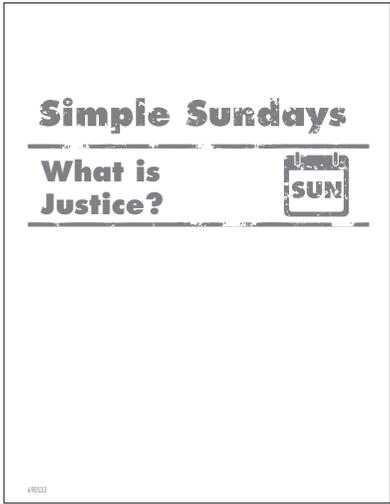


Simple Sundays

**What is
Justice?**





What is Justice?

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Main Idea

"What does God require of me?" This is one of the most important questions we can raise as part of our faith journey. God requires us to be loving companions of others and to reflect God's goodness in all we do and say. When we approach one another with love, kindness, and justice, we honor God.

You Will Need

Bibles

Faith Statement

Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves. . . . Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

Background

Young or old, we are all influenced by our surrounding culture. It is easier to go along with the definitions of our peer group than to forge definitions that seem counter to our culture. Micah warns the people of Israel that they have fallen into the trap of attempting to determine their relationship with God by using definitions from the surrounding culture (Micah 6:6-7). The people think that they can earn their way back into God's good graces.

God's requirements for being in relationship with God are very different from what the surrounding culture upholds. God requires nothing less than for the people to humbly walk with God in the ways of justice and kindness (v. 8). This verse captures the very essence of God's call to us. When we sufficiently unpack what it means to "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God," we discover a justice intertwined with compassion and a call to live a life where God remains the center of all we do.

Youth have a keen sense of how difficult it can be to live out these words. They look around and see adult Christians who are hypocritical in their actions. When given the task to discuss the challenge of living out their faith, youth can readily give examples of times when they have observed peers or adults verbally claim beliefs and values that they hesitate to put into action.

Almost any daily newspaper or newsmagazine will highlight these same inconsistencies. As you prepare for this session, consider interjecting current events into your discussion times. Church leaders, both past and present, have been sensitive to how difficult it is to retain our focus on God in all we say and do. The Westminster Confession of Faith (6.109) affirms that "God alone is Lord of the conscience" and

reiterates that to believe in this statement frees us from the constraints of the doctrines and commandments of humanity that are contrary to God's Word. This liberation releases us to fully serve God all the days of our lives.

Our church leaders also recognize that in our humanness we will fail in our attempts to fully serve God with all of our heart, mind, and soul. However, this does not mean that we are lost or alienated from God because of our failures. Our Brief Statement of Faith begins with the affirmation that "in life and in death we belong to God" (line 1) confirming that even when we fall subject to the demands and enticements of our world (lines 33-39), God will embrace us with mercy and love us still (lines 40-51). God loved us so much that God gave us the gift of the Spirit to empower us as we strive to obediently serve Christ in all we do, reflecting God's compassionate justice to the world (lines 65-76). God's love is the root of our own humility as we walk with God. We can only serve God and "do justice and love kindness" with the help of God's Spirit.

You and Your Youth

Youth are aware when adults do not practice what they preach. Micah's challenge is a difficult one for us to aspire to, no matter our age or experience. In preparation for this session, consider ways that you can role model how the journey in faith is a lifelong journey that constantly challenges us to "walk humbly with God."

Pray for members of the group by name, that they would grasp the gracious message that God loves us and gives us the Holy Spirit to assist us in our efforts to make the world a better place.



Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

A Class Action Suit

Arrange the space like a courtroom if possible. Have learners volunteer for the various roles—judge, two attorneys. The leader should assume the role of the “defendant.”

Announce that this is a “class action lawsuit.” Give the “charges” (below) to the prosecuting attorney to read. Make the charges humorous, similar to the following:

(The leader’s name) is hereby named as a defendant in a class action lawsuit. He/she is charged with willful and negligent failure to prepare for one or more youth sessions after the defendant was seen sleeping in front of the television set last Saturday evening with a bag of popcorn and a can of soda. The next day, the members of the youth group allegedly were left bored, dazed, and mystified as a result of this total lack of preparation.

If you want to play this scene out for fun, you could have the judge ask you, “How do you plead?” You could give evidence of your preparation, and so on.

Opening Prayer
 We love you, O God, but sometimes we find it difficult and threatening to treat others with the same kind of gracious love that you have given us. Strengthen our faith and trust in you so that all of our words and deeds reflect your kindness and justice. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.



Study the Bible

Bibles

Introduce Micah 6:1–8 using information from the Background.

Read Micah 6:1–2.

- What tone of voice do you suppose Micah used to deliver this message from God to the people?
- How would you feel if your pastor convincingly preached a sermon telling you that God was taking your church to court?
- Why does God tell Israel to plead its case to the mountains?

Read Micah 6:3–5. Discuss the ways that God has been faithful to the relationship with Israel. Discuss other examples of God’s faithfulness as found in the Old Testament.

- How is God’s faithfulness defined in the New Testament?
- How do we understand God’s faithfulness today?

Read Micah 6:6–7.

- What actions do the Israelites believe will heal their relationship with God?
- Why does God accuse them of trying to buy their way back into God’s favor?
- Relate Israel’s strategy with God to your relationships with others. How do you offer a favor or some material gift as compensation for making a mistake in the relationship?
- How do some people today try to make similar bargains with God?

Read Micah 6:8. Micah warns Israel that the only appropriate offering the people can give God is to participate in a total refocusing of their lives. It is not enough for them to simply call themselves “the people of God”; they must also act like God’s people.

- What types of justice and kindness does God expect from the people?
- Is there a difference between promoting justice and doing justice?
- Think of a time when you offered an act of kindness without expecting anything in return. How is this different from acts of kindness where you are promised—or where you hope for—something in return?
- What does God expect from us today?

On Trial

Bibles

Create a mock trial between God and the people of Israel. Ask volunteers to play out the different roles—God (Prosecution and Defense), the people of Israel, and the jury. Take time to prepare for your roles. For example, the prosecutor might want to compile a list of all of Israel’s wrongdoings. Set a time limit for the “prosecution” and the “defense” to each make their presentations.

At the conclusion of the mock trial, talk about how you felt playing each role.

- What was it like to play your character's part?
- What was your character feeling?
- What part of the trial process was easiest for you to relate to?
- Did the process remind you of any of your relationships with people?

God also sits as Judge in the trial illustration that Micah devises.

- What kind of judge is God? Does God cut off God's relationship with Israel?
- What type of sentence does God impose on Israel? What does God want Israel to do?

In spite of Israel's sin, God continues to be faithful to the people and acts to renew the relationship.



Express

These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant to your own life.

Youth Issue

Your youth group is planning a service project at a homeless shelter. Your best friend, Ginny, refuses to participate. She tells you, "It gives me the creeps to go to a shelter." She likes being part of other youth group service projects, but she refuses to have anything to do with the shelter.

Discuss:

- How might you respond to Ginny's objections?
- In what way do you share her reluctance to participate in projects of this nature?
- How could her—or your—involvement in this service project be considered a step of faith?
- What do you think God requires in this situation?

Action Steps

Read the following definition of *humble* aloud:

The opposite of conceited; deflects attention away from oneself.

In light of this definition, discuss what it might mean to walk humbly with God. Think of examples from your own life when you served God humbly. Now, think of a time when your actions as God's servant were

egotistical. What do each of these experiences teach you about your faith? Discuss some ways in which you can walk humbly with God in the next few days. Plan to practice at least one of these next week and then report back to your group the next time you meet.

Spiritual Practice

Bibles

God calls us to live a life where our journey with God remains the center of all we do. Keeping God in the center sometimes requires that we muster up the courage to make peace with people that have hurt us. We will find this courage only through prayer and through the Spirit.

Take some time now to develop an inner sense of God's presence with you. You might need to begin this time by slowing your breathing and utilizing various relaxation techniques. Some people find that dimming the lights helps calm their restlessness. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind a person or situation where forgiveness is required. Some of the following questions may help guide your prayer:

- Are you holding a grudge or nursing a past hurt?
- Have you written someone off because he or she has disappointed you one time too many?
- Do you find yourself seeking some sort of revenge?
- Have you made someone into a scapegoat?
- Are you angry with someone whose opinion clashes with your own?

Close the time of prayer by reading 1 Corinthians 13.



Exit

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, you call us to walk in such a way that justice and kindness resound in each step we take. Yet, too often we falter, and our steps merely mimic the sounds of the dominant culture, the latest fad, or the empty messages of our music. Guide us by your Spirit, O God, so that we might learn what it means to walk humbly, yet boldly, with you. Give us a new song that reflects your justice and kindness and forgiveness to the world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.