

# Recognize Injustice

JOHN 7:53–8:11

## GOAL

Adults acknowledge their participation in acts of justice and injustice while widening their gaze to consider unjust systems and structures.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, [bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR](https://bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR), for conversation starter videos.

## PRAYER

Help me to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you, O God. Amen.

## THIS SESSION

“Recognize Injustice” examines justice from a biblical and practical standpoint to recognize unjust actions and systems. To see injustice is to witness discrimination and oppression, observe their impact, listen to the stories of those experiencing injustice, and wonder about what contributes to injustice in our lives. Our action entails suspending judgment and holding empathy for the other and ourselves. While understanding injustice can be an uncomfortable process, it is a necessary first step for identifying problems and sources where we can later advocate and contribute to justice.

## THE BIBLE STORY

When Jesus is confronted in John 7:53–8:11 to uphold the punishment of stoning a woman for an adulterous act, he challenges the community to recognize in their own lives when they have acted with poor judgment. Jesus changes the narrative of individual sin by recognizing greater systems of injustice present in society. Jesus acknowledges that each of those present has sinned. By not shaming or punishing the accusers, he invites them to not shame or punish in turn. He models a different way of confronting and correcting. The passage leaves space to consider what Jesus views as a more appropriate response to injustice.

Old Testament prophets worked diligently to call people to live according to God’s law and justice. Often, they used harsh words and laid out the community’s brokenness and sinfulness. Examples of this are found in Isaiah 1:21–23 and Micah 3:9–12. The prophets also gave directives for what God desired from the people. These can be read in Micah 6:8 and Isaiah 58:1–12. The prophets help us recognize God’s call to justice.

## SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Room in the Inn” (p. 7): If you do not have internet access during the session, access the bit.ly link ahead of time to print the 2017–2018 Annual Report for “Room in the Inn.”
- “The Learning Hub” (p. 7): If you do not have internet access during the session, access the bit.ly link ahead of time to print “The Learning Hub” webpage.

# GETTING STARTED

## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome participants and engage in gathering activities particular to your group (*introductions, offering, prayer concerns, and announcements*). Review the Unit Overview on page 4 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain that a more detailed discussion of the practice can be found in the foundational essay that begins on page 47 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Encourage participants to read the essay during the course of the next four sessions.

In this first session in the practice, it is assumed that many participants are just receiving their *Adult Reflection Guides*. This session's suggested activities in the *Adult Leader's Guide* correspond closely with *Adult Reflection Guide* activities, since participants may not have worked through these in advance.

### OPENING PRAYER

Refer participants to the Scripture printed on page 4 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain that the theme of this practice, *Do Justice*, comes from Micah 6:8:

[The Lord] has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice and to love kindness  
and to walk humbly with your God?

Invite participants into a time of prayer as you show the YouTube video “What Does the Lord Require of You (The Micah Song)—FirstPresMV Church Choir—June 2020” ([bit.ly/FMMicahSong](https://bit.ly/FMMicahSong), 1:42). This video and song will be used as an opening prayer for each session.

## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

### CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEO

Show the “*Do Justice Overview*” and the “*Recognize Injustice, Session 1*” videos from the Growing Faith YouTube channel ([bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR](https://bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR)). To introduce the session, lead a brief conversation about participants' thoughts and questions about the videos.

### DOING JUSTICE

Invite participants to discuss the question:

- ➔ What issues of justice are you currently engaged in, big and small?

Assure participants that doing justice is long-term work. Refer participants to the Unit Overview and the statements in bubbles on page 5 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the statements as reminders to not get overwhelmed in the work of doing justice. Discuss how each of the assurances supports justice work.

### SEEING INJUSTICE

Have participants read the James Baldwin quotation on page 7 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite people to talk about their impressions and reactions to Baldwin's words. Discuss how this quotation highlights different ways of recognizing injustice.

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- This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

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Refer to the questions on page 7. Recognizing injustice is not always simple, yet there are some lessons learned through time that can help us ask deeper questions about injustice. Discuss the questions:

- ➔ What do the people who suffer injustices say the problem is?
- ➔ Who is benefiting from the injustice?
- ➔ If the situation makes me uncomfortable, what is going on?
- ➔ How does the issue affect me? Do I benefit from it? How so?

## FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

### RECOGNIZING DEEPER INJUSTICE

Direct participants to “Jesus Recognizes Deeper Injustice” on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite volunteers for the parts of Narrator, Jesus, Scribes/Pharisees, and the Woman. Have them read aloud the Scripture passage. Pose these questions to review the incident:

- ➔ Why did the woman deserve punishment?
- ➔ Why did the accusers abandon the punishment they initially sought?
- ➔ How does this story reflect a system of justice? Of injustice?

Invite volunteers to take turns reading the paragraphs on page 10 that follow the Scripture. Discuss the reflection questions that follow.

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### THE PROPHETS

Refer participants to “The Prophets” on page 8 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the first paragraph. As participants read the passages from Isaiah and Micah, have them write in the margins the types of injustices and consequences that the prophets name. Gather the group and have participants talk about the injustices they identified. Encourage discussion with these questions:

- ➔ What was the purpose of the prophets writing these words to the people?
- ➔ How do messages like these affect people’s behavior?
- ➔ Imagine someone posting this on Facebook today. What effect might it have?

Read aloud the final sentences in this section. Why would the prophets deliver condemning messages if, in the end, God forgives the people for their injustices?

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### MISHPAT

Direct participants to the Unit Overview on page 4 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain that the biblical concept of *mishpat* is central to the practice of doing justice. Read aloud the final paragraph on the page in which *mishpat* is defined. Have the group work together to create a working definition of *mishpat*. Record their definition on newsprint and display it throughout all sessions of the practice.

# FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

## RESPONDING TO NEEDS

Direct participants to the opening paragraphs in “Finding the Practice Then and Now” on page 11 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Have them take turns reading these paragraphs aloud, sentence-by-sentence. Use these questions for discussion:

- ➔ As *mishpat*, God’s justice, is a central biblical theme, why have Christian communities continued to struggle with injustice throughout the Bible and across generations?
- ➔ How do you come to recognize injustices within your community? Whose voices do you listen to in discerning injustice?
- ➔ In what ways do you, or your faith community, respond to and work to address local injustices and needs?

Select from the options below for examples of ways other Christians have responded and worked to continually address injustice and need.

Choose one or both options.

### ROOM IN THE INN

Have participants read the paragraph describing Room in the Inn on page 11 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Have them use internet-connected devices to access the group’s 2017–2018 Annual Report ([bit.ly/FMRoomInn](https://bit.ly/FMRoomInn)).

Form three groups. Assign each group to read a different section of the Annual Report to look for ways the ministry perceives, understands, and addresses injustice in the Nashville, Tennessee, community. Gather the group to discuss what they discovered about the ministry and its connection to the community’s justice needs.

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Internet-connected devices

### THE LEARNING HUB

Have participants read the description and first bullet point in “Regular Gathering Across Differences” on page 12 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Offer, as one example, Beechmont Presbyterian Church, a multicultural congregation that brings together worship experiences with English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and Sudanese Christians. Church members recognized a community need when local schools began offering classes remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Have participants use internet-connected devices to read about the church’s ministry, the Learning Hub, which arose directly from community needs ([bit.ly/FMLearningHub](https://bit.ly/FMLearningHub)). Discuss the value of identifying community needs and developing programs to address them.

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Internet-connected devices

# PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

## WIDENING OUR GAZE

Direct participants to read the opening paragraph in “Practicing the Practice” on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite participants to name the serving and mission activities they or their faith community engage in. Record these on newsprint. Have them consider each item listed to identify the systems or structural realities that give rise to people’s needs for supportive services. Discuss ways that the group can make a difference

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Newsprint and marker

in broader systems to address injustices at their root. Consider ways that they might stop contributing to systems that perpetuate unjust structures and systems.

Select from the options named to practice widening your gaze to see and respond to structural realities that affect injustice.

Choose one or more options.

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Newsprint and marker

## WRITING A CONFESSION

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the paragraph in “Confess” on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Use the questions to discuss sins of commission and omission when it comes to participating in injustice. Record their confessions on newsprint. Use these to write a group prayer of confession to use in closing this session.

Remind participants that God welcomes our prayers and confessions. When we admit the ways we fall short of living into God’s justice, we can adjust our awareness and actions for God’s people.

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## KEEP LEARNING

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the paragraph in “Keep Learning” on page 14 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Look at each bulleted item and discuss resources in your community that can be used to continue learning about discrimination and other injustices that people face. Participants may record these local resources in their *Adult Reflection Guide* to follow up in their personal learning.

Work together to make a short-term plan to incorporate learning about a group you don’t know about. Invite each person to identify one way that they will learn more about a situation of injustice.

## REFLECTING TOGETHER

Engage the group in reflecting together about a single justice issue they are aware of. Discuss the information and questions in “Reflect” on page 15 in the *Adult Reflection Guide* to dig deeper into the needs and structures behind a local issue. Identify additional ways to address the issue. Notice how deeper knowledge affects plans and actions.

# FOLLOWING JESUS GLORY

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Invite volunteers to read aloud the paragraphs in “Following Jesus” on page 16 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

If you chose the “Writing a Confession” option (above), have the group pray in unison. Offer these words of assurance:

Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. Know that you are forgiven and be at peace.<sup>1</sup>

In closing, show the YouTube video “Common, John Legend—Glory” ([bit.ly/FMGlory](https://bit.ly/FMGlory), 3:08). Use this link for the lyrics: [bit.ly/FMGloryLyrics](https://bit.ly/FMGloryLyrics).

Pray together the prayer on page 16 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

1. *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), #4.