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Session created by Cathy James, Rick James & Steffie Kemp for Home Groups.
View the session and the rest of the series here.

home groups

Session 1 - Introduction

Prepare: print and cut out the character cards, ensuring you have one per person (more than one person can have the same card). Also, print three copies of the drama. Both can be found at the bottom of this page.

Overview of sessions

7 sessions to explore the biblical basis of effective development. God calls us to ‘do justly’ (Micah 6:8) and to love him with our ‘mind’ as well as our heart (Mark 12:28–30). This means thinking carefully about where and how we give our money, our time and our other resources to ensure that we are helping people effectively. If we give thoughtlessly, evidence shows that we can actually do harm where we think we are doing good.

- This session is an introduction and overview of justice in the Bible.
- Sessions 2-6 are each based on one principle for effective development. They include a Bible study, a true story, an activity to do together and ideas for how we can respond (‘acts of love’).
- Session 7 concludes the study and offers tips for choosing effective development organisations to support and how best to engage with them.

Why should we care about those in poverty?

Brainstorm in groups of 2-3 people any key Bible passages that show the importance that God ascribes to helping those experiencing poverty and injustice, ensuring that they include some from each of the following sections:

- Old Testament laws
- Old Testament prophets
- Jesus' words and example
- The New Testament church

Feedback a few examples for each to the whole group.

317 verses specifically talk about 'poor', 'poorest' or 'justice', showing God's heart for those who are vulnerable and the mandate he gives us.

Further reflection: Isn't effective development contrary to Jesus' heart for helping 'the one', like in the parable of the lost sheep?

Jesus did not just help individuals – his mission on earth was to restore all things and open the way for everyone to return to relationship with God. If we believe all people are created in God's image, we should want to help as many as possible. Even when working with individuals, Jesus often worked in particular ways that we'll explore in these studies.

Shouldn't we just pray and do what we hear?

Prayer is vital. But the Bible recognises that it is sometimes difficult to hear God and that our own biases/ desire may get in the way: 'Test everything, and hold fast to what is good' (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

So yes, we should always listen to God, and yes, he may call us to do things with our money that seem odd by human standards. But understanding effective development shows us how to follow a biblical model of justice. It gives us something against which to test words that we hear.

To find out more:

https://justloveuk.com/wp-content/themes/just-love/resources/Theology%20and%20Social%20Justice.pdf

Activity: Take a Step

What is justice?

1. Give everyone a character card (if there are fewer than five of you, ensure you have a diverse selection of characters among you). Ask everyone to think about the situation of that character and imagine what life is like for them. They need not worry if they unsure about all the facts – they should just respond as best they can.
2. Participants line up, side by side (as level as possible). Ask them to listen carefully to each statement and step forward each time the character they are playing would answer 'yes'. If the statement does not apply to them, they should stay still. (Some may not move at all).

3. Read out the following statements, giving everyone time to think about how it applies to their character and whether to take a step forward or to remain still.

- You can read
- You control the money you earn
- You have running water
- You can vote
- You have a brick house
- You are attending/ can send your children to primary school
- You are attending/ have finished university
- You have a bank account
- You can access health care when you are sick
- You have friends with whom you regularly spend time
- There are people you can go to for help if you are abused
- You have a regular income/ source of money
- People respect your opinion
- You have travelled over 10 miles from where you were born
- You can have 3 meals a day every day of the year
- If you are robbed, the police will help you/ if you are falsely accused

4. Ask the people at the back, at the front and in the middle to share how it felt.

Questions to discuss:

- What did you observe?
- What were the factors that made people get left behind?
- What do you think would help people in all these different circumstances to take action to reduce these injustices?

Summarise: justice is about access to opportunities and choices like we have, so we can all become the people God created us to be and fulfil our calling and responsibilities.

Principles in Practice: Malawi

Case study: Chiku is a little girl of 5 who lives in Southern Malawi with her brother Mphatso who is 2. Their father died of HIV/AIDS when Mphatso was just born. At first their mother could feed them and their elderly grandmother from what she grew in the fields, but soon she became sick too. Chiku had to look after her mother until she died. Then, with no one to look after them and no way to feed themselves, both children soon became malnourished.

The case studies from Malawi in these Bible studies come from Eagles Relief and Development Programme (www.eaglesmalawi.org). With over 17 years' experience on the cutting edge of community development, their approaches show what happens when we put these principles into practice. Eagles is highly trusted by their funders including Tearfund, Oxfam and Christian Aid, and called to speak on these topics at international events.

In light of what justice really means, what needs to happen to help these children?

After asking everyone for their ideas, share with them what actually happened:

- Eagles had already trained the local church to work with their community to prioritise issues, identify the resources that they have and come up with solutions
- The community had heard about a childcare centre set up by a neighbouring village and visited it to learn and then set up their own: it looks after children during the day to free parents to work in the fields and ensures the children get one nutritious meal a day.
- They persuaded the government to come and train the voluntary teachers in their village. Everyone looks after the teachers' fields, so they also have enough to eat.
- The community lobbied local government for seed. They then planted crops. Everyone continues to give towards the children's daily meal.
- The church visited Chiku's grandmother to counsel her. They invited her to join a village savings and loans groups so that she could start her own small business.
- Until she is earning enough, the church pays basic costs for Chiku to go to school.
- Many, many children are in a similar situation to Chiku – far too many for an outsider to help one by one. This approach enabled the community to care for all its vulnerable children now and for the future too.

Discuss: what principle did Eagles use when deciding how to help Chiku and Mphatso?

Biblical principles for effective development:

- **Holistic:** addressing physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs
- **Long-term change:** breaking dependency and addressing root causes
- **Locally owned and led:** everyone using what they have in their skills and resources
- **Everyone playing their part:** partnering with others, including government
- **Learning what works:** reflecting on experience and looking at the evidence

Act of love

Pick the verse that struck you the most from brainstorming about justice in the Bible. Take a moment to pray individually over that verse and ask God to bring one action to mind you could take this week in response. Make a commitment to do that action by sharing it with at least one other person. Then pray for each other.

Preparation for next week: ask for 3 volunteers to perform a short drama next session and give

each a copy.

Gods-Heart-for-Justice-session-1aDownload
Gods-Heart-for-Justice-session-1bDownload

Cathy James

Cathy James is a social development consultant and practitioner with over twenty-five years' experience in international development. She combines a strong academic background with twelve years living and working in Africa and Latin America. Her extensive consultancy work provides support for UK and international organisations and their southern partners across the world. It includes working with faith groups and organisations, helping them work in effective, empowering ways that bring about long-term and holistic change. She brings expertise in church and community processes, participatory development, theory of change, monitoring and evaluation and assessing. She has also co-founded two Malawian NGOs and two UK supporting charities.

More by Cathy James

Rick James

Dr Rick James is an organisational change specialist in international development. He has spent 30 years working in Africa, Latin America and Europe, consulting for more than 100 aid agencies and churches. His focus is on leadership development, strategy and culture change. As well as consulting, coaching and training, Rick is a Senior Teaching Fellow at CASS Business School, London University, as Course Director for the Masters in NGO Management pathway. Rick has published extensively including books on: 'Consulting for Change', 'Creating Space for Grace'; 'Inspiring Change'; and 'Capacity building for NGOs: Making it work'.

More by Rick James

Steffie Kemp

Steffie Kemp has lived in Malawi for twelve years and currently works for Eagles Relief and Development Programme (www.eaglesmalawi.org) in church and community mobilisation as the Advocacy and Learning Coordinator. Eagles mobilises and empowers local churches and communities to work together, take responsibility for their own development and achieve holistic change. Her focus is on the role of faith and mindset change in community-owned development and the connection to long-term change. Her consultancy work includes UNICEF, Mothers' Union, Comic Relief and the Joint Learning Initiative (JLI). She is pursuing an MSc in Human Rights Law from Oxford University.

More by Steffie Kemp

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