

Read Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37 What do you observe in the new Christian community (the Church) as they begin to live together?

How does your church community reflect some of the features of community life depicted here in the early church?

Integrating faith and mission

Read James 2:14-18, 1 Cor 13:1-3, 1 John 3:16-18, 2 Cor 9:6-15 and make some notes about how Christians should view acts of mercy/justice.

Should we leave governing and policy to those in government and politicians and only concentrate on evangelism and good works? What's your view? How do you back it up with the teaching of the Bible?

Read Psalm 82 What are these "gods" that earn God's judgement? What is your reaction to the picture portrayed in v5? What is the suggestion?

For further consideration ...

Given the scope of social injustice and poverty on a world scale, let alone what we see in Australia – how does the imbalance between rich and poor, move you? How does this make us feel? How can we respond?

Final Prayer

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God the Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort our hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word" – 1 Thes 2:16-17



Practical Christian Spirituality

#5- Working for Social Justice

Intro

In thinking about Christian spirituality and social justice, we are immediately confronted by many traditional pictures of spirituality such as incense, candles monks and Gregorian chants and liturgies. As a result, we limit ourselves and God's potential to work in and through us by the Holy Spirit, and thus make everyday activity, given and offered to God for Christ's glory as spiritual devotion and discipline.

When we come to tonight's theme in our series on practical spiritual disciplines - that of Social Justice - we are confronted by the harsh physical reality of social injustice that we regularly see in our news broadcasts and print media. So often there is this glaring need in society seems disconnected and unrelated to "spirituality". After all, the images we see are extremely practical and physical in nature, while spirituality seems so ethereal.

However, when we recognise that biblical spirituality is "practical", we come up with three aspects to Spiritual Disciplines that are highlighted in the Spiritual Discipline Diagnostic Guide you've received as a handout during this sermon series – that of an **inward focus**, **outward focus** and corporate **focus** to the listed spiritual disciplines.

A brief survey of this guide presents three disciplines ready made for this broad theme of Social Justice – Giving/Stewardship, Service, and Simplicity.

Giving/Stewardship

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 10:35) Stewardship is about more than money. Stewardship involves managing wisely all of the assets that God has entrusted us with. How are we going to use our time, talents, and money to bring the greatest glory to God? Giving a tenth of the first-fruits of the produce of the farm or business (tithing) was the requirement of the Old Testament law to teach and order the society with the recognition that God gives all that we have. Those of us in the post-New Testament church can see the full extent of God's abundant grace. Our appreciation of such wonderful grace will drive us to give far beyond the requirements of the law and to begin with the understanding that all we have is to be brought under God's Lordship and to be used for His glory. Learning to redistribute our wealth in a small group can be a good first step. See also...Acts 4:32-34, 1 Cor. 9:17, Matt. 25:14-30, Matt. 25:31-46, 2 Cor. 8 & 9, Gal. 6:9-10

Service

"God made man simple; man's complex problems are of his own devising" (Ecc 7:29, JB). We live in a busy, gadget-centered, consumer cult world. The fact that you are reading this page means that you probably have access to technology such as computers. In such a high-tech world, the idea of simplicity can be extremely foreign. God calls us to allow Him to supply all of our needs, and all the rest will take care of itself (Matt 6:25-34). He calls us to lead peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness (1 Tim 2:2), that He might be glorified. Reassessing what can be shared with other Christians rather than personally owned by you is a good start. Learning to share generously with more needy people is another step towards this goal. Reducing and balancing one's diary commitments and redirecting our work to that which glorifies God and builds community is another step. A change of location can also be of assistance by retreating to a place removed from the competing interests of our normal world for a brief time of reflection and reassignment of our priorities and commitments for the sake of God's Kingdom and Glory. See also... Phil. 4:11,12, Heb. 13:5,6, Deut. 8:6-20, Matt. 6:28-34, James 4:13-15

Simplicity

"...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matt 20:26). *"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."* (John 13:15) Jesus made it clear that we need to learn a new order and it is not in our nature to submit to another and lose control of our lives. Placing oneself under the authority of another is good practice for serving Jesus and learning that we don't have to get our own way. Getting our own way is the cause of so much division, we need much development and grace in this area. Serving in a team within the church is a good start to learning this new way of life which Jesus said every follower must undertake See also...

Luke 9:23-26, 1 Peter 4:10, Matt. 20:26-28, 1 Cor. 12

Questions for Individuals or groups

As the list in the spiritual diagnostic is not exhaustive, what might be added as a spiritual discipline relating to social justice?

Read Deuteronomy 15:1-11. What do you discern here about the people of God and God's expectation on social behaviour and interaction?

List the "negative" and "positive" attitudes the Israelites are told to adopt

How do you explain the different thoughts and ideas expressed in vs 4, 7, 11?

It is often said the poor will always be amongst us – how is this addressed?