



LIFEgroup Study Guide

September 11 - November 13

LIFEgroup Study Guide

This study guide follows along with LBF Church's current Sunday message series and is intended to be a supplement in your daily passionate pursuit of Jesus.

• *Watch last Sunday's message video:*
www.lbf.church/messages

Is your group stumped? Did you come to a question that you feel needs clarification? Our church isn't too big. Contact Pastor Dan with your questions.

• *Contact Pastor Dan:*
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Justice and Mercy

God's Priorities

How would you summarize what God desires from us in how we conduct our lives? Micah 6:8 gives a pretty succinct answer to this question. The prophet says, He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humble with your God.

How does God want his people to conduct their lives? With justice, mercy, and humility before God. This appears to be more central than ritual worship (Micah 6:6-7, Amos 5:21-24), and a bigger priority than obedience in the details of life (Matthew 23:23-24). God prizes justice, mercy and humility. Looking at how we live these qualities out is a better view of our relationship with God than if we looked at our voting record or our political party affiliation.

The final phrase in Micah 6:8—to walk humbly before your God—speaks directly to how we relate to God. The two earlier phrases—to act justly and love mercy—speak to how we relate to other people. As Micah summarizes what God wants us to do in relationship to others, he highlights justice and mercy.

Debate about Justice

Justice is a buzzword in our culture today. While no one would proclaim themselves to be anti-justice, we as a culture are not agreed on what justice is and what is desirable in the area of justice. Much of the debate surrounds the term “social justice.” If you ask fifteen people what “social justice” means, you are likely to get fifteen different definitions. The term, on its own, is certainly not a bad term but the term has not brought clarity in what we all should be aiming at.

One side will speak of justice in terms of equality of opportunity, while another side will speak of justice in terms of equality of outcome. One side will focus on group justice, while another will focus on individual justice. One side will see great value in trying to rectify past injustices, while another side will focus on moving forward in the present. We all say that we want justice, but we are not united on what a truly just society would look like.

Justice and Mercy

But God not only values justice; he also values mercy. Sometimes these two values can seem like they are in conflict with one another. Justice has to do with giving people what they deserve, whether reward or punishment. Mercy, however, has to do with sparing people from what they deserve. In other words, justice is earned while mercy is received freely.

While justice and mercy might seem to be in tension, in this series we will see that in the Bible we can easily lose track of where one begins and the other ends. We are not called to choose between justice and mercy, but rather to live out justice and mercy as we walk humbly before God.

This Series

In this series, which is 10 lessons long, the subjects of justice and mercy will be highlighted from a biblical perspective. You may notice from the lesson titles that the emphasis seems to be more on justice than on mercy. That is a fair conclusion. In each passage about justice, though, we will see how mercy flows right alongside justice. The two priorities go together.

In the first three lessons of this series we will explore the importance of justice and its definition. After that we will spend two lessons looking at how Jesus is connected to justice. Then four lessons will focus on specific ways that justice and mercy are lived out toward different groups of people. Finally, the series will end with a lesson about how justice and mercy relate directly to the church's mission of putting the gospel of Jesus on display.

So, prepare to engage with Scripture and with your fellow believers. Bring your convictions and beliefs, but also open yourself up to looking at things from a different perspective. And perhaps most of all, accept the invitation to abandon cheap religious ways of evaluating your relationship with God, and pursue living a life of justice and mercy. After all, that is what God says is at the center of what he wants from his people.



JUSTICE & MERCY



And Justice and Mercy for All

Lesson 1 • September 11 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Justice and mercy are at the center of God's calling for his people.

Getting Started

1. What would you say if someone asked you, "What does God require of me?"

2. If you had to choose only one, do you think our world right now is more in need of justice or mercy? Explain your answer.

Digging In

Read Micah 6:6-8.

6 With what shall I come before the Lord
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Look at the opening question in verse 6. What is the core concern at the heart of the question?

5. In verses 6-7, Micah gives three options for what a person might bring when he comes before the LORD. What do you notice about the options he gives in these verses?

6. In verse 8, Micah addresses both justice and mercy. How would you define each of these ideas?

7. Micah also mentions humility toward God. How does walking humbly with God impact how we relate to other people?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Justice and mercy can sometimes seem like conflicting ideas. How do you see justice and mercy working together in a complementary way?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. How did Jesus' sacrificial death address both justice and mercy? (For help, look up Romans 3:21-26 and 2 Corinthians 5:21.)

Taking It To Heart

10. What are the spheres in which you can practice justice and mercy toward people?

11. What specific action do you sense that the Holy Spirit is leading you to take in response to this passage?



JUSTICE & MERCY



What Is Justice?

Lesson 2 • September 18 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Justice is about giving each person what is owed to them.

Getting Started

1. What do you see as the top three threats to justice being done in our society?

2. How does favoritism relate to the challenge of doing justice?

Digging In

Read Exodus 23:1-9.

1 “Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness.

2 “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, 3 and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit.

4 “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. 5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it.

6 “Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. 7 Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.

8 “Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent.

9 “Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Write down all the different examples in these verses of ways that a person can pervert justice.

5. Look at verses 2-3 and then verses 6-8. What two dangers are shown about how a person can respond to the poor in justice-related matters?

6. Focus on verses 4-5. Do you see this section as addressing more of a justice issue or more of a mercy issue? Explain your answer.

7. Verse 9 relates the command against oppression to Israel's former status as an oppressed people. What lesson do you see for all of us in that line of thinking?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. As flawed and fallen human beings we are not capable of establishing perfect justice. How do you think this should impact our attitude and approach to justice-related issues?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. Read Romans 3:22-24. How does this passage address how God deals with favoritism when it comes to salvation?

Taking It To Heart

10. In terms of favoritism, do you think you are more in danger of automatically siding with the "poor" (perceived victim) or with the "rich" (person with established status)? How do you think you can address this tendency in yourself?

11. Is there anyone in your life that you sense the Holy Spirit is leading you to apologize to or to rectify a situation in which you treated them unjustly? If so, what is your next step of action?



JUSTICE & MERCY



Justice as Worship

Lesson 3 • September 25 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Our rituals of worship are pointless unless we are living out justice to others.

Getting Started

1. Share an example of a way that Christians can ignore something of greater importance because we are focused on something of lesser importance.

2. When Christians gather to worship God, what do you think makes the worship pleasing to him or not pleasing to him?

Digging In

Read Amos 5:21-24.

21 “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me.

22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and

grain offerings,

I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,

I will have no regard for them.

23 Away with the noise of your songs!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.

24 But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. In verses 21-23, what three Israelite religious practices does God bring up, and how does he feel about them?

5. The activities in verses 21-23 were commanded by God, so the problem was not that they were bad activities. In light of verse 24, then, why was God not interested in the religious activities of the Israelites?

6. Look at Jesus' words to the Jewish religious leaders in Matthew 23:23-24. How do you see Jesus' words connecting to Amos' words here?

7. What idea is brought to your mind by the illustration in verse 24 of a river or a never-failing stream?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. We will never—this side of Christ's return—live out justice and righteousness perfectly. Does this mean that our worship is never enjoyable to God?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. This passage makes clear that excessive religious rituals are not a path to make us acceptable before God. We need a Savior (Galatians 3:13). What are some paths that people take today to try to make themselves acceptable to God?

Taking It To Heart

10. What threats do you see in your own life that could keep your religious activities from having any real significance before God?

11. What threats do you see in the life of your church that could keep your religious activities from having any real significance before God?



JUSTICE & MERCY



Jesus and Justice, Part 1

Lesson 4 • October 2 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Justice and mercy were central to Jesus' mission and message.

Getting Started

1. How would you summarize the mission that Jesus had when he came into this world?

2. How does the gospel of Jesus relate to living out justice and mercy in the world?

Digging In

Read Luke 4:14-21.

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been

brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

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,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Looking at verses 14-15, what was the reputation of Jesus as this story begins?

5. Jesus quotes a portion of Isaiah 61 in verses 18-19 to summarize his mission. In one sentence, what does Jesus say here that he came to do?

6. What statement in verses 18-19 most stands out to you, and why?

7. In what way did Jesus, in his life, “fulfill” (verse 21) the passage that he quoted?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Compare what Jesus says about his mission in this passage with what he says about his mission in Luke 19:10. How do you see these two statements working together?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. How does the good news of Jesus give not only hope for heaven, but also hope for our lives in the present?

Taking It To Heart

10. If the gospel of Jesus is meant to bring help to the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed, how does this impact how you think about your mission as a believer in Jesus?

11. Think of the vulnerable groups of people Jesus names in verses 18-19. Which group (or groups) do you find yourself identifying with when you think about your own story?



JUSTICE & MERCY



Jesus and Justice, Part 2

Lesson 5 • October 9 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Justice and mercy were central to Jesus' mission and message.

Getting Started

1. In what ways do you long to see justice established in the world?

2. How does your relationship with Jesus give you hope when you feel discouraged about the lack of justice in the world?

Digging In

Read Isaiah 42:1-4.

1 "Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.

2 He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.

3 A bruised reed he will not break,

and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

4 he will not falter or be discouraged

till he establishes justice on earth.

In his teaching the islands will put their hope."

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. This passage is quoted and applied to Jesus in Matthew 12:18-21. How do you see Jesus fulfilling this prophecy?

5. Three times this prophecy mentions the servant (Jesus) bringing forth justice. In what way do you think Jesus has brought (or will bring) justice?

6. In the midst of the talk of justice, mercy is highlighted in the first two statements in verse 3. How do you think we should understand the images of the “bruised reed” and “smoldering wick”?

7. This prophecy ends with hope. How does the message of Jesus bring hope to people who are marginalized?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. If Jesus came to bring justice to the nations, why do we still have so much injustice in the world?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. How do fulfilled prophecies—like Isaiah 42:1-4—impact your confidence in God’s promises through Jesus?

Taking It To Heart

10. Jesus is gentle with people who are fragile and vulnerable (verse 3). With what people in your life do you sense that God is calling you to imitate Jesus in this gentleness and mercy?

11. Name one way that you can demonstrate the good news of Jesus through helping to establish greater justice.



JUSTICE & MERCY



Justice and the Vulnerable

Lesson 6 • October 16 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Those with power have a special calling to give justice to the vulnerable.

Getting Started

1. Name some types of people who have a hard time getting access to justice and mercy in our world today.

2. In what ways do you feel personally responsible when you see human beings suffering injustice?

Digging In

Read Proverbs 31:8-9.

8 Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.

9 Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Proverbs 31:1 shows that the context of this passage is instructions given to a king. How does this context impact how you view the instructions in verses 8 and 9?

5. Who are some people who “cannot speak up for themselves”?

6. Why would the poor and needy need their rights to be defended?

7. What would put someone in a position to “speak up” for vulnerable people?

11. How is the Holy Spirit leading you to become more involved in speaking up for vulnerable people who are in need of justice and mercy?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. Do you think this passage (and other Bible passages) advocate for special treatment of the poor? If so, how does this connect to justice and fair treatment?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. Read Romans 5:6-8. How did Jesus take up the cause of vulnerable people?

Taking It To Heart

10. In what ways are you in a unique position to speak up for people who are vulnerable?



JUSTICE & MERCY



Justice and the Stranger

Lesson 7 • October 23 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

God calls his people to care for foreigners who are vulnerable to injustice.

Getting Started

1. What do you think should be core to any Christian's position on the subject of immigration?

2. What are some ways that people can be vulnerable to injustice because of being foreigners or immigrants?

Digging In

Read Deuteronomy 24:14-22.

14 Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns.

15 Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it.

Otherwise they may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

16 Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.

17 Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.

18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

19 When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. **20** When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time.

Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. **21** When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. **22** Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. According to verses 14-15, what is God's attitude toward those who take advantage of the needy?

5. How do you see verse 16 relating to the rest of this passage?

6. According to verse 18, why does God command the Israelites to care for foreigners?

7. Do you see the instructions in verses 19-22 as a representation of justice or mercy? Explain your answer.

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. How do you think passages like this one impact how we as Christians should approach immigration (both legal and illegal)? Do you think there is room for Christians to disagree on how to approach this subject?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. Read Ephesians 2:1-7, which describes how Jesus saved us from a desperate situation (which was our own fault). How does this reality impact how you view others who are in desperate situations?

Taking It To Heart

10. What are some specific ways that you can participate in caring for the "foreigner" who is among us?

11. How does this passage impact the attitude that you want to have toward those who fit into the biblical category of "foreigner" or "stranger"?



JUSTICE & MERCY



Justice and the Poor

Lesson 8 • October 30 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Caring for the poor flows out of a concern not only for mercy, but also for justice.

Getting Started

1. What are your biggest obstacles (both internal and external) to giving more generously to the poor?

2. When you are considering giving money to a person or an organization, what criteria do you use to make your decision of whether or not to give?

Digging In

Read 2 Corinthians 8:8-15.

8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. **9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

10 And here is my judgment about what is best for

you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. **11** Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. **12** For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. **13** Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. **14** At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, **15** as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. How do verses 8-9 set the context for the call to generosity that Paul is about to make in this passage?

5. What do you observe about the attitude Paul is trying to cultivate in the Corinthians in verses 10-12?

6. Paul says twice in verses 13-15 that his goal is equality. How does he envision this equality being achieved?

7. How do you think Paul's talk of equality relates to seeing giving to the poor as a justice issue?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. If justice involves richer people being obligated to give to poorer people, does this mean that poorer people can make demands of richer people? Explain your answer.

Connecting To The Gospel

9. Focus on verse 9 of the passage. How does the gospel of Jesus relate to giving to—and caring for—the poor?

Taking It To Heart

10. How would it change your actions if you viewed your money and possessions as resources given to you by God in order to help others?

11. What do you see as the next practical step that God is calling you to when it comes to being generous toward the poor?



JUSTICE & MERCY



Justice and the Family of God

Lesson 9 • November 6 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The call for believers in Jesus to love one another flows not only from mercy, but also from justice.

Getting Started

1. How, ideally, do you think a church is meant to function when there are disagreements between members over social and political issues?
2. What are the different dangers of a church (1) never taking a stand on political and social issues and (2) taking definitive stands on social and political issues that are not clear in Scripture?

Digging In

Read Romans 13:8-10.

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. **9** The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You

shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” **10** Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.
4. What significance do you draw from the fact that Paul calls loving one another a debt?

5. In the context of this passage, Paul is specifically calling Christians to love one another. Why is Christian love so central?

6. How can loving your neighbor sum up all the commands of God?

7. Twice Paul says that love fulfills the law. What do you think is important for us to know about love if we are going to focus so much attention on it?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. How can we know the difference between when love will lead us to overlook a difference of opinion versus when love will lead us to voice a rebuke or a strong conviction?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. Read 1 John 4:7-12. How does God's great love for you impact your ability to love other people?

Taking It To Heart

10. Think of other Christians with whom you differ over political and social issues. How does the debt to love one another lead you in your attitude and actions toward them?

11. In what ways do you feel God calling you to repent of creating unnecessary divisions with other Christians because of disagreements over "disputable matters" (Romans 14:1)?



JUSTICE & MERCY



Justice and the Mission of God

Lesson 10 • November 13 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

When believers in Jesus live out justice and mercy, they put the gospel of Jesus on display.

Getting Started

1. If we are saved by God's grace and not our good works, what role does practicing justice and mercy have in the Christian life?

2. When you think of your non-Christian friends and acquaintances, what do you think it would take for them to be convinced to take the claims of Christ seriously?

Digging In

Read 1 Peter 2:9-12.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. **10** Once you were

not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. **12** Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Verse 9 begins with four phrases about the identity of Christians. What most stands out to you about these four phrases?

5. Why is it significant that Christians are meant to see themselves as “foreigners and exiles”?

6. How would you summarize the difference between the command given in verse 11 and the command given in verse 12?

7. What kinds of “good deeds” do you think will lead people to glorify God?

Wrestling With Big Ideas

8. How can you tell the difference between (a) putting the gospel of Jesus on display through good works and (b) catering to the culture in order to gain the approval of people?

Connecting To The Gospel

9. In verse 9 Peter says that believers are meant to “declare the praises” of the God who saved us. What, specifically, about the gospel message makes you excited to declare God’s praises to others?

Taking It To Heart

10. What are some specific ways that you have seen people change their attitude toward Christians because of seeing Christians live out justice and mercy?

11. What is one tangible way of living out justice and mercy that you believe God is calling you to put into practice?