40 DAYS
OF FAITH
AND HOPE
IN ACTION

A Devotional Journey into God’s Heart for Justice and Compassion
“THE LORD LOVES RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE; THE EARTH IS FULL OF HIS UNFAILING LOVE.”

PSALM 33:5
God only speaks truth. He says what he means and he means what he says. He also has an unfathomably enormous heart of compassion, especially for his precious creation that is hurting—men and women, boys and girls who are suffering from injustice. Our Father’s heart emanates with the purest form of justice and compassion.

God’s Word abounds with descriptions of what he defines compassion and justice to be. He lays out his perfect plan to eradicate injustice. He narrates stories of how to selflessly give compassion to another. And his design for justice and compassion just so happens to involve you and me.

“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another’” (Zechariah 7:9)

“But,” you say, “there’s too much pain, too much injustice. Where do I begin?” Be devastated with God about the atrocities that sin inflicts on our world each day. But be hopeful that our Saviour is not standing idly by as people suffer from poverty, exploitation, hunger, abuse, and fear. “I know that the LORD secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy” (Psalm 140:12).

Friends, we need to look to God’s Word. This devotional journey will help guide you into God’s heart for justice and compassion. Our thoughts must be enraptured with the theology behind justice and compassion. Our attitudes must be captivated with our Father’s colossal and intimate love for his creation, so that justice and compassion become our natural response. Justice and compassion are not just words; they require action—relentless, joyful, rewarding, holy action.

Allow your heart to break a little, and then be renewed. Let the next 40 days revolutionize your thoughts, attitudes, and actions toward justice and compassion.

David Hearn
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I have watched you, Lord, through the lens of my own desperation. Bills coming due, income uncertain. I have watched you meet my needs, then go beyond the need to pleasures. Then go beyond the pleasures to blessings, then beyond the blessings to extravagance. It overwhelmed me.

What I didn’t realize was that, in the extravagance, I shifted my sights to the blessings rather than to their Source. I began to look to see what else you would do instead of keeping my eyes on you. You somehow became secondary to what I was receiving.

The subtlety of blessing is that it is good; it is meant to be enjoyed. It isn’t meant to replace the pleasure of intimacy with God. Rather, it is designed to enhance it. So the question comes down to: When abundance becomes the norm, how can I keep my soul needy rather than distracted?

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!” — ISAIAH 55:1

Don’t become so enamoured with the blessing that you pursue it rather than the Source. His invitation, though whispered, still penetrates to the place where I can hear him. “Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good ... Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you ...” (v2–3).

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: ISAIAH 55:1–3

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Can you remind yourself of times when God has gone beyond meeting your needs and your pleasures to overwhelming you with blessings and extravagance?
2. How will you pursue the Source of blessing today rather than the blessing itself?

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Faithful love and truth have met; righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth springs up from the ground; righteousness gazes down from heaven. Yes, the Lord gives what is good, and our land yields its produce. Righteousness walks before God, making a road for his steps.
— PSALM 85:10–13 (COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE)

Before Genesis 3, creation was as it was meant to be. After sin entered the scene, creation became distorted. Where there was once shalom, there is now disunity and brokenness. Where human intimacy with each other and the Father once created a picture of compassion, love, and togetherness, there is now the marginalizing of people and injustice. Things are out of sorts.

Spending time in a church, you quickly notice the word “righteousness” popping up with regularity. Throughout Scripture the word is commonplace. God is righteous. Unfortunately, the word “righteousness” is often understood as a state of being. This isn’t entirely wrong, but it’s certainly incomplete.

When the Scriptures speak of God’s righteousness, it’s more like an invasion of his goodness, or an active righting of wrongs. It is justice in the face of injustice. It is shalom in the face of disunity. This is essential to understanding our being transformed into righteous people through the Spirit’s work in us. As we become righteous as God is righteous, we are drawn into his movement of righting wrong, of removing the distorted view of creation.

Psalm 85 poetically puts this movement of God into perspective. As Christians who are being shaped into the image of the Son, we walk as righteous people, playing our part in seeing that justice and peace walk together hand-in-hand in God’s creation restoration project. We’re not just being made right, we’re doing right.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: PSALM 85:10

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. Can you think of examples in the Bible where God invaded with his goodness, when he actively righted wrongs? Can you think of examples of his righteousness in action today?
2. Is righteousness encouraged and promoted in your church? If so, what is your church’s definition of righteousness? How does this line up with God’s definition?

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Am I Really All That Different Than Cain?

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down, and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” — LUKE 22:39–42

Many of us look at the story of Cain in Genesis 4 with a sense of self-justification. We are unlike Cain, we think; after all, we have not killed our brother. Yet many of us behave very much like Cain. In response to God’s question about Abel’s whereabouts, Cain made two denials. First, he denied that he knew what had happened to Abel. That, of course, was clearly a lie. The second denial is probably more common to our experience than we would care to admit. Rhetorically, Cain asks, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Here, Cain denied to God that his brother’s whereabouts (and, moreover, his brother’s welfare) was his concern. While very, very few of us have committed murder, all of us have denied that the welfare of others is our responsibility. Too often, in an attempt to justify our own inaction, we have asked, in one way or another, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Sociologists have noted that this lack of responsibility for the welfare of others grows exponentially when the number of potential helpers to a particular need also grows. They call this phenomenon “the bystander effect.” Human nature, it seems, is always ready to assume that someone else will take care of those in need—I do not need to bother, I do not need to act. Surely someone else will. Surely someone else is better equipped.

The welfare of our brothers is always our business. The responsibility can never rightly be pushed away; rightly, it must be taken up.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: LUKE 22:39–42

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Can you ask yourself the hard question: Am I really all that different than Cain?
2. How often have you turned away from an injustice thinking that either it was none of your business or surely someone else would intervene?

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When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. — MARK 6:34

My son attended a skateboarding camp this summer. After his first day, I asked him how things went. His voice got tender as he told me about a campmate. I guess the other little fellow struggled. I asked him how he responded. “I smiled at him,” he said, and then added, “he’s going to need some special care.”

It was a lovely moment. He wouldn’t have said it this way, but his notice of the boy and compassion toward him was evidence of the kingdom breaking in.

Mark 6 tells two stories of two kings—how they shepherd, and who gets invited to their table.

In the first story, we meet King Herod. His table is filled with cronyism and back-slapping. His “shepherding” is marked by adultery and murder.

In the second story, we meet King Jesus. At his “table” is an enormous crowd who Jesus laments are like “sheep without a shepherd.”

Herod had just been exposed as a petulant fraud, having beheaded their beloved John the Baptist. And amidst their sorrow, Mark tells us that Jesus sees the shepherdless crowd and has compassion on them.

Isn’t that wonderful? This is what Jesus’ shepherding looks like: seeing and having compassion. Perhaps this shouldn’t surprise us; when it comes to these qualities, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. Once when Jesus was describing his Father, he told a parable of a rich man’s foolish son, and concluded by detailing their reunion. It’s maybe the clearest depiction of God he ever gives: “But while he was a still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him...” (Luke 15:20).

To see and to have compassion. May these be the marks which define us as we reflect the heart of the Father and the true King.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: MARK 6
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do you see the needs that are present in the world around you? Ask that King Jesus will grant you an increasing ability to see. As you see the world, is the King’s compassion being reflected in you? Ask that the King will grant to you his compassion.

2. For those of us with children: Jesus “learned” compassion from his Father. Are our children learning the same from us? What can we do to help them “see” the world, and have compassion for it?

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TO SEE AND TO HAVE COMPASSION. MAY THESE BE THE MARKS WHICH DEFINE US AS WE REFLECT THE HEART OF THE FATHER AND THE TRUE KING.
Job was a man who was “blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). When life’s tragedies began to hit him from all sides, his friends suggested to him that God was punishing him for his sin.

In Job 31, we see Job’s defence to these accusations and get a glimpse into the key character traits of a God-honouring life. There are the obvious ones like putting God first in worship, sexual purity, integrity, and honesty. But with Job’s response we are also challenged with the practical, tangible actions that must be evident in a believer’s life. For example:

- Using our money and possessions as a way to bless others
- Treating people with dignity and integrity
- Living generously towards the needy
- Offering hospitality
- Caring for God’s creation
- Responding to the needs of the fatherless and widow
- Administering justice

There is so much in this chapter that inspires us to put God and others before our own natural desires and wants. It is obvious from Job’s tone that at the core of his resolve to live uprightly is a deep reverence for God. May this encourage our own determination to live in a God-honouring way no matter what life throws at us.

**SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: JOB 31**

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Read Job 31 and ask the Spirit of God to highlight a specific area where you need to be more intentional in your actions.

2. Ask yourself: Do my acts of charity and my commitment to right actions stem from a deep reverence for God or from a selfish desire for blessing or recognition?

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Jesus understood the unique pain of incarcerated men and women when he said, “I was in prison and you didn’t visit me” (Matthew 25:43).

Life is difficult in prison. Contrary to popular opinion, it’s not a grand hotel filled with a huge spectrum of benefits. Rather, it’s a collection of broken people filled with a vast array of personal issues. Prisoners face a lot of external pressures every day as they live in an atmosphere of violence, negativity, and boredom. It’s not uncommon to be intimidated or assaulted frequently in a prison. But the internal pressures are worse. Many inmates live with high levels of fear, self-loathing, and hopelessness.

Christ loves the prisoner. He is a “friend of sinners” (Matthew 11:19). He says to those who are incarcerated: You matter to me. Your life counts. You were created for a purpose. I love you, and you’re incredibly valuable to me. I can forgive you and heal the big hurts inside of you.

It’s not unusual to see inmates reach out to God within a few days of their arrest and incarceration. Usually they realize they have lost control of their lives and are willing to turn to God. Is it possible that God is asking you to make a difference in the life of an inmate? In a world where people are beat up and put down, God can give you the power to make a difference.

There are a number of ways you can help. Letters and visits are meaningful to inmates. Maybe you and your church can provide Bibles and study materials. Do something special for the inmate’s family. Don’t expect any reward or thanks, other than these words of Jesus: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these... you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: MATTHEW 25:33–43

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. Would you consider contacting a local prison ministry to see how you can care for incarcerated men and women? Who could you ask to join you? What gifts could you use to bless those who are in prison?
2. What are some of the barriers that would keep you from serving an inmate or their family? What Scripture could counteract some of these barriers?

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This verse in Proverbs is originally in the context of being spoken to a king, reminding him not to rule for the elite, but to have his eyes on those who really need him, those who cannot speak for themselves.

Many leaders are swayed by the influence and needs of the elite or their equals, when in reality they don’t need anyone to speak on their behalf. It is those without access to boardrooms, the halls of power, financial backing, or advocacy who need someone to defend them.

Whether a king or commoner of today, these words speak equally to each of us, no matter what position of power we find ourselves in. Each of us in our everyday lives is exposed to poor and needy people. It may be the widowed, the orphaned, the oppressed, the enslaved, the addicted, or the lonely.

It can be overwhelming to see the vast needs around us, and discouraging to feel we can’t make a dent in it. But what we can do is start by picking one issue or one person or one location, and invest ourselves in meeting those specific needs. You will be amazed at how God blesses our work of blessing others and multiplies our efforts.

We defend the defenceless not because it’s easy, fun, or popular. Instead, we do it because we have been brought from darkness into light by the lavish grace of God the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ.

**SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: PROVERBS 31: 8–9**

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Who are the needy around you? Take the time to look at the people you pass on the street, in your office, in your family, and in your realm of influence. Ask God to open your eyes to the needs around you.

2. To what extent are you willing to use your strengths and position to support “the poor and needy” around you? We are not talking about merely lip service, but the expenditure of effort on their behalf, for the cause of justice within a certain realm. Are you willing to put in the effort?

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For those who have a desire to know God more, this one verse holds huge significance. This concept of worship through compassion is still fairly new in our current evangelical and missions climate. In an effort to move away from liberation theology and the social gospel, and to focus less on the immediate and temporal, the evangelical movement swung the pendulum to the opposite extreme.

Our evangelistic zeal has relegated compassion and social conscience to an optional afterthought of outreach and mission. A theology and practice of evangelism without compassion and social justice ignores a valid function of ministry, and even more so, it diminishes an essential component of healthy personal and corporate spirituality.

Without for a moment disparaging the value of proclaiming God’s Good News in the person of Jesus and his work on the cross, the idea that social justice or practical provision for the poor is an optional side activity for those who are “called” to that type of thing has us squarely caught in social sin.

The words of the ancient prophets to the nation of Israel are just as pertinent to the body of Christ world today. By not actively and purposefully providing for the world’s poor out of our extreme abundance, we have, according to Jeremiah, also forgotten what it truly means to know God.

For those who are hungry for spiritual life, for those who are desperate for the life of God to fill our Church again, we must take bold leadership, moving the Church into the world and eradicating extreme poverty—all in the name of Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: JEREMIAH 22:16

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. Why is knowing God so closely tied to giving justice and helping the poor and needy?
2. How will you seek to truly know God this very week?

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A Definition that Transcends Culture

“At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. — MALACHI 3:5 (NLT)

Justice... what is justice?

There are 203 sovereign states and approximately 6,909 distinct language/culture groups on our planet. If you were to ask two people from two different countries, you would discover that there are differing and even conflicting answers and practices to this question.

With so many conflicting ideas, how do we know what is definitively just and definitively unjust? One culture might choose to pay an employee more simply because he is of the same ethnic group. Another culture might find this unjust. Can we impose our value system on another culture?

To do business or missions globally, we are often encouraged to appreciate and embrace the practices, values, and worldview of other cultures. The world is truly becoming a “Global Village.” Internet, technology, access to affordable travel, and businesses that function in multiple countries have caused us to adapt to a “Global Culture.”

Culture is the behaviours, beliefs, and characteristics of a particular social, ethnic, or age group. Worldview is a collection of beliefs about life and the universe. Values are principles, standards, or qualities considered worthwhile or desirable.

God shows us in his Word the way to define what is just and what is unjust. This definition of justice transcends language and culture.

“But he’s already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It’s quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don’t take yourself too seriously—take God seriously” (Micah 6:8, The Message).

This doesn’t mean we have to do everything in the same way. But it does mean that we have to choose to apply to the culture we were born into the meaning of justice that
God has revealed to us through his Word. When asked, "What is justice?" we can look to God’s Word for the answer.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: MALACHI 3:5

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. What comes to mind when you think of the word “justice”? Ask several others what it means to them. How are your answers similar and different?
2. Can you recall Scripture verses other than Malachi 3:5 in which God defines what is just and what is unjust?

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DO WHAT IS FAIR AND JUST TO YOUR NEIGHBOUR, BE COMPASSIONATE AND LOYAL IN YOUR LOVE, AND DON’T TAKE YOURSELF TOO SERIOUSLY—TAKE GOD SERIOUSLY.
Needing the Poor More Than the Poor Need Us

“Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors! Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.” — ISAIAH 58:9B–11 (NLT)

It is interesting to see how childhood Bible stories influence one’s perspective on life. The story of the Good Samaritan, for example, shaped my attitude toward the needy. The story of Jesus’ instructions to a rich young man—sell all you have, give to the poor, and come follow me—influenced my opinion about wealth and stewardship.

Ironically, after thirty years of studying the Bible and teaching, I realized that both those stories begin with an identical question asked by two different men. But the answers Jesus gave were remarkably different. Why? It was not Christ’s intent to establish a theological treatise on wealth, sacrifice, service, or holiness. Jesus’ answer simply moved past the symptomatic question to a root issue that rested in the heart of each of these men.

The question asked was, “What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus refocused it, exposing the limited extent of their love for God and for others.

God longs for us to serve because it is in that position of humility that he transforms us. Anytime we invest in someone other than ourselves, we take a submissive posture. From this place of submission, God begins our metamorphosis into his image. In this context, we begin to realize how much we are in need of relationship with others. Those in need provide the perfect opportunity for us to serve. When we serve, we release the attitudes of entitlement, the demands for our rights, and the temptation to allow pleasure to dominate responsibility.

In that respect, we may need the poor more than the poor need us. People do not want us to fix their problems for them. They desire to be empowered to meet their own needs. They want to be valued and have their God-given dignity restored.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: ISAIAH 58:9B–11

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. Think of someone you know who is in need. What would it look like for them to be valued and have their God-given dignity restored?
2. How is your love for God and for others currently limited?

Dave Collins was raised in Vietnam, the son of missionaries. Based on lessons learned as a pastor, missionary, educator, international development worker, and senior executive, he founded Paradigm Ministries in 2007. Discover more at www.paradigmministries.ca.
Community Before Activism

Real wisdom, God’s wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honour. — JAMES 3:17–18 (THE MESSAGE)

The path to bringing justice into our broken world does not start with activism—getting involved, educating and inspiring, giving money. It starts with people in relationship with one another. It starts with community.

And communities that are healthy are gatherings of individuals who are willing to “do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honour.”

Jean Vanier—a philosopher, peacemaker, and theologian—asks fundamental questions about “being human,” like: What does it mean to be fully human? What does it mean to serve others well? How can unity be fostered among diverse people?

He suggests that, “A community should not be primarily a grouping of shock-troops, commandos or heroes, but a gathering of people who want to be a sign that it is possible for men to live together, love each other, celebrate, and work for a better world and a fellowship of peace.”

Thus, today my fight for justice starts not with activism, but with my willingness to make peace and keep peace with those closest to me. Only then will my advocacy have credibility, because it is rooted in the very “healthy, robust community” that my advocacy is meant to achieve for others.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: JAMES 3:17–18

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. What do you believe is the essence of community? What elements should be present in a “healthy, robust community”?
2. What does it mean for our advocacy to have credibility?

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Loving and Honouring the Elderly

Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.
— 1 TIMOTHY 5:3–4

These verses give instruction to the Church to honour widows by ensuring their needs are cared for. Although it is not always the case in our current context, widows—particularly elderly ones—often have great need economically, physically, and socially. This was validated recently as the local community food bank director in my southern Ontario affluent town informed our church that the highest numbers of clientele are widowed seniors who live on a fixed income. It made me wonder in how many other communities this is a reality and what are our church families doing about it.

This passage urges church communities to intentionally monitor the needs of widows in their midst and respond accordingly. At the same time, there is a separate challenge for Christian families to care for their widows (and yes, let’s include widowers) so the full responsibility doesn’t rest on the larger church family (see 1 Timothy 5:8,16).

How do we apply this on a personal level in our day? Too often in our culture we hear stories of neglected seniors with adult children who do not have time to care for them, let alone visit them. We also live in a society that is mobile, where families live miles, even continents apart. So what do we do with a passage like this as we see that intentionally caring for our parents is a crucial expression of our faith that pleases God?

The principle is to ensure that our own aging parents are loved and cared for with honour and dignity. As church families, we must ensure that seniors’ needs in our community are being met, not just physically, but socially and relationally as well.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: 1 TIMOTHY 5:3–4

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. Are you aware of a senior who may not have family close by whom you could visit and encourage with practical blessings?
2. Do you have aging parents who need your support and love?

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Jesus Moved Into the Neighbourhood

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it. — JOHN 1:3–5

Jesus is “the true light that gives light to everyone …” (John 1:9).

“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:3–5).

Jesus, the Word, “became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Jesus made his dwelling among us. He dwelt with us; he lived among us, not as a distant one, but as one who built relationships and did life with the people he loved. Every person is a person whom Jesus loves.

The Message version of the Bible says, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish” (John 1:14).

As people who have been sent to testify about Jesus, let’s “dwell” with people. Jesus was not—and is not—distant from us. We aren’t faceless, nameless people to Jesus. As we extend Jesus’ love in tangible ways, let’s “move into the neighbourhood” and do life with people.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: JOHN 1:1–18

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. What does “dwelling” look like in your context? What could it look like?
2. What does John 1:1–18 say about justice and compassion? What does it mean for the church and for followers of Christ today? How can I apply this today?

Denise works in the Communications department of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada.
On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty. — 1 CORINTHIANS 12:22–23

I have a weak arm from overusing it at a young age. Over the years, I needed treatment for my arm more than any other part of my body. Yet my arm remains a very indispensable and important part of my body. Understanding my body helps me to appreciate Paul’s use of the body as a metaphor that everyone in the church, regardless of specific giftedness or weakness, is indispensable to the whole.

When we have people with disabilities in our church, it is undeniable that we may need to provide special accommodations. But instead of seeing this as a burden, Paul encourages us to approach people affected by disabilities with special modesty, recognizing that they also have gifts to offer to the body.

For individuals with significant disabilities, it is not always easy to see how they can be contributing members of the body. John Knight gives us a good example on his blog. John’s son, Paul, has significant developmental disabilities. He is also completely blind. At an adult age, Paul functions as an 18-month-old child. He is known to sing praises to God at the oddest of moments such as in the grocery store or at a restaurant. His singing has captured the attention of people as they recognized that he was praising God. In his own unique way, Paul was witnessing for Christ!

Behind this story is the beauty of a loving and accepting church that has been supporting John’s family. Growing up in this environment, Paul learned the praise songs, but more importantly, he cultivated the desire to praise God.

May the Lord help us to see all people, regardless of their abilities, as blessings to the body of Christ, all for his glory!

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:22–26
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think it means to “treat with special honour” those among us who have special needs? What is the difference between this and treating them with pity?

2. When someone in your church who has special needs says or does something you are uncomfortable with, how have you reacted? How could you respond next time, in light of 1 Corinthians 12:22–23?

Cynthia Tam is Associate Pastor at Midtown Alliance Church in Toronto, ON. She has a strong desire to serve people with disabilities in the community. Cynthia has founded three support ministries for families with children who have special needs in different churches. She is also co-founder and president of Village Eulogia (www.villageeulogia.com), a Christian charity and community for families with children who have special needs.

MAY THE LORD HELP US TO SEE ALL PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF THEIR ABILITIES, AS BLESSINGS TO THE BODY OF CHRIST, ALL FOR HIS GLORY!

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What Are We To Do?

“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. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on the earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.” — ISAIAH 42:1–4

The suffering servant... Jesus... us. What are we to do? What is our vocation?

In the first verse of the first of four servant poems, we are told that the servant’s vocation is to “bring forth justice.” This is a formidable task in our broken and corrupt world. But like everything else, unless we know we are loved—“my chosen one in whom I delight”—and empowered—“I will put my Spirit on him”—our work for justice will become another ego-driven quest for meaning and personal validation.

We are to be like Jesus, who worked for justice out of his surrender to his Father and his love and respect for his fellow human beings. He had nothing to prove, but gave himself freely, knowing his own life was caught up in the lives of those around him. As he sought to raise people up from sickness, oppression, rejection, and death, he was doing it out of the love and power which would ultimately result in his resurrection from the dead.

So we are loved and chosen to bring forth justice. What does that mean? “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.” Biblical justice is neither a standard of perfection nor an arbitrary code of conduct. It is being careful with the vulnerable. It is gently nurturing the almost-extinguished life of the broken and nearly dead.

Our experience of being loved and chosen should lead us to loving those who we may not feel like loving. That is what we are to do.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: ISAIAH 42:1–4

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Who are the unnoticed and vulnerable in your community? What can you do to move them from the periphery of your attention to the centre?
2. How would you see relationship with the poor and vulnerable around you if you honestly believed that you need them more than they need you?

Don Cowie is a pastor in Downtown Vancouver. He has served there for over 20 years, and for the last six years has been leading a church plant called Mosaic @ the space, which meets in a warehouse just outside the Downtown Eastside. They are a community of broken and vulnerable people seeking to love and serve each other. Visit www.themosaic.org.
On Their Turf

“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” — MATTHEW 5:46–48

Loving people who have neat and tidy lives is easy. However, if we are going to live out justice and compassion, this means loving those who aren’t like us, and who don’t have orderly lives. Matthew 5:46-48 challenges us to love those who may never pay us back.

Loving people who are difficult to love requires a source outside of ourselves. Our human love has clear limitations. We may be able to pull off loving the unlovable for a while, but that well dries up pretty quickly. First Corinthians 13:4-7 speaks of a love that, lived out daily, comes from the heart of God.

What does this look like? Going to places where we are not comfortable: back alleys, housing projects, places where people are lonely and are calling out for help.

Do we meet them on our turf or theirs? Do we call them to come to us or do as Christ said by going to them? Indeed, our churches have wonderful programs in them; maybe some would come, but many won’t.

Marshall was a man who spent his time in a back alley, alone. He felt unworthy to come out onto main streets. He was a struggling alcoholic, yet he had a heart that revered God. One day, Marshall went into the church on the corner in his neighbourhood. He announced that tomorrow was his birthday, a day to make a new beginning with God. Marshall died two days later, trusting God.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: MATTHEW 5:46–48

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Who is one person in your life, or whom you’ve encountered briefly, who doesn’t have a neat and tidy life? What is one way you can demonstrate selfless love to this person, recognizing that you will not be repaid by them, perhaps not even thanked?

2. What is the source of your love? Why do you serve at church? Why do you volunteer? Why do you do kind things for people?

Donna Dyck is the author of Confessions of a Not-So-Average Girl and Not Beyond Our Reach. Her deepest desire is to see shattered lives restored through the power of Jesus Christ. Donna and her husband, Bill, have been serving as lead pastoral couple in Toronto Alliance Church for 15 years. Their ministry is focused on restoring broken lives among the poor, newcomers to Canada, at-risk children and youth, and those struggling with addictions.
Luke 10:1-12 gives a beautiful picture of how we are to extend the ministry of Christ. Here, Jesus gives clear instructions that it must go much deeper than just proclamation:

1. **“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’” Offer shalom!** The word peace actually means “shalom,” which is found 486 times in Scripture. Shalom refers not just to an absence of violence but rather a holistic wellbeing with security and equity in all areas of life. We extend that kind of ministry to people as we enter their lives and communities, proclaiming the message of a God who wants people to experience that kind of wholeness in all areas of their lives.

2. **“Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you.” Build relationships!** Eating together in that culture meant intimate fellowship. We must connect relationally with people who don’t know Jesus.

3. **“Heal the sick who are there.” Work to restore the physical effects of a broken world!** Christ has given authority to his Church to heal the sick and to cast out demons. Our world is full of the effects of sin that impact people physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. We must increase our faith to believe that God still longs to demonstrate his power and victory by doing the miraculous.

4. **“Tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’” The signs of the kingdom will always reverse the effects of a fallen world!** As we enter people’s lives, sharing the message of shalom and demonstrating kingdom values, we will see a broken and sinful world restored, renewed, and transformed.

It is God’s desire that people experience shalom—the world as he intended it. That is the message that we must proclaim and demonstrate!
SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: LUKE 10:1–12

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. Who am I intentionally building relationships with in my community, on their turf?
2. Do I have faith that Jesus will physically and spiritually heal in dramatic ways as he did in the Gospel accounts? Do I have enough faith to ask him and expect him to do this in my community?

Joanne Beach serves the C&MA in Canada as the Director of Alliance Justice and Compassion.

Note: A great resource that explores the Church as a builder of shalom community is Robert C. Linthicum’s book, Building a People of Power: Equipping Churches to Transform Their Communities.

WE MUST CONNECT RELATIONALLY WITH PEOPLE WHO DON’T KNOW JESUS.
The Extravagant Samaritan

“But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him.” —LUKE 10:33-34

When I think of the parable of the Good Samaritan, the first word that comes to mind is “extravagance.” The Good Samaritan gave extravagantly—much more than just giving the man some loose change; loose change was not his need at that moment. He desperately needed community, somebody to treat him justly, as a person created and loved by God.

And then there’s the priest and the Levite. Like them, we are busy with our religious lives, determined to reach our established goals, worried about the bottom line. We can become easily upset if we are inconvenienced, be it a traffic jam or a drunken man asking us for loose change.

One charity had a rather touching commercial on TV recently. After displaying the plight of various groups, they pleaded with the viewer to “Join in the struggle for justice” just by sending in a donation. It seems to me that the priest and the Levite would have been quite self-righteous about sending in their donations.

I see this as a pretty serious problem within the Church. We can ease our conscience by giving a donation, but then we walk right past the homeless woman on the street without even a thought of concern or compassion. We justify ourselves by our so-called “sacrificial donation.” Having done that, we are then free (or so we think) to do whatever we want in terms of self-centred pursuits. But pity the poor guy who might interrupt us in that pursuit. The Good Samaritan gave extravagantly. How do you give?

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: LUKE 10:25–37

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. How can we “join in the struggle for justice”? How can we do so without feeling self-righteous?
2. If you were to become a neighbour “to the one who had fallen into the hands robbers” (v36) what would that look like? What are some first steps you could take as a family or as a church?

Doug Wiebe is Pastor to the Parish for Exchange Community Church in Winnipeg, MB. Growing up as a farm kid in Saskatchewan, Doug ventured out to minister in Honolulu and Hong Kong and also served 12 years as Eastern Canadian District Superintendent before returning to the prairies. Visit www.exchangechurch.ca.
It was a long, hot night. There were no curtains to stop the Haitian sun from waking me too early. I was uncomfortable as the electricity was only sporadically available throughout the day and night. Without power, I had no air conditioning and even a cool shower was unsatisfying, as the water would barely dribble from the showerhead. I was tired, grimy, miserable, and irritably wishing my time in Haiti was done.

Later that morning my daughter picked me up to visit someone she knew who was in the hospital. She explained that when you are admitted into the hospital in Haiti, you are responsible for your own bedding, food, water, and medication.

After visiting with her friend, we stopped by the maternity wing where a dozen or more ladies awaited the arrival of their babies and several others cuddled their newborns.

We soon realized these women were thirsty and had no one to bring them any water. We quickly went out and purchased water packets, then returned with water for every lady in that wing. Their eyes and smiles communicated their appreciation, even though we had no common language.

Suddenly my discomfort while being in Haiti made sense. I always thought the poor needed my wealth. But in that moment I realized that I needed the poor to serve my Saviour.

Our gift of cold water not only blessed the recipients, it also enlarged my heart. In the process, Jesus received a cup of refreshment, too. I remembered Jesus’ words from the cross: “I thirst” (John 19:28). When we give a cup of water to those in need we satiate the very thirst of Christ.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: MATTHEW 25:31–40

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. Why isn’t generosity with our wealth enough?
2. What motivates you more: seeing people in need who are thirsting, or picturing Jesus thirsting?

Eldon Boldt is Lead Pastor at Circle Drive Alliance Church in Saskatoon, SK. Eldon has been a pastor in Saskatoon for more than 30 years.
And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?” — JONAH 4:10–11 (ESV)

Jonah and the whale: A story of God chasing down a disobedient prophet and using a massive man-eating-but-not-chewing-or-digesting fish.

The moral of the story: When God says, “Go this way,” don’t go “that way.” Or is it?

I suggest that the story of Jonah is much more complex than a lesson in obedience. It reveals to us the heart of man and the heart of God. Specifically, it reveals that we, like Jonah, want to protect ourselves against discomfort and risk, even if it means ignoring what God has clearly told us to do. It also reveals that our God is generous and wants all nations to know his love and receive his grace, that he cares about the plight of those who are living under the oppression of ignorance and sin—and how that ignorance and sin is not only affecting their souls but also their cattle.

Their cattle?

We think the most important animal in the story is the great fish. But the last line of the book says otherwise: “And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?” What’s with the cattle?

It seems that God wanted Jonah to bring a message of repentance and forgiveness and hope so that the great city of Nineveh (cattle = Nineveh’s gross domestic product) could be restored.

When God calls us to bring the Good News of Christ’s love and grace to all nations, he has in mind a grand vision. Yes, to save their souls, but also to save their cattle, their economy. The renewal that the Gospel brings to a city and a country is spiritual, social, and material. Because the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.
SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: JONAH 4:10–11

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. How has the Gospel of Jesus Christ affected all aspects of my own life (spiritual, social, material)?
2. What can I do to seek a more holistic renewal in the lives of those who need to know the message of the Gospel?

Vijay Krishnan is Lead Pastor of Upper Room Community Church in Vaughan, ON (a church planted by Rexdale Alliance in 2005). Upper Room is committed to being used by God to authentically represent Jesus Christ by loving God and serving others in a city marked by continuous growth and affluence and religious and ethnic diversity. Visit www.upperroom.ca.

WHEN GOD CALLS US TO BRING THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST’S LOVE AND GRACE TO ALL NATIONS, HE HAS IN MIND A GRAND VISION.
Integrity Matters

I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do. — NEHEMIAH 7:2

We live in a world of brokenness and inconsistency. When pressure mounts, we need a sure and secure confidence in what God is doing. In Nehemiah 6, we are introduced to a man of integrity who rises above the blame game and takes positive steps to recovery. For example, in Nehemiah 6:8–9, he calmly denies the charges; in verses 10–12, he carefully resists the pressure so that by verses 15–19, he confidently completes the task.

If you were governor of Jerusalem looking for a man to take charge, what abilities would you look for? What qualities would stand out in your thinking, and where would you find such a person?

Nehemiah was very blessed to have a brother with the same deeply rooted convictions and principles as him. Hanani is described as a man of integrity who feared God (Nehemiah 7:2).

The word “integrity” in the Hebrew language means honesty and sincerity coupled with the idea of completeness. There are two aspects to this word integrity. One is “kalos,” meaning honour and honesty. The second colouring of integrity is “adolos,” which means pure or un tarnished.

Throughout the Scriptures we see the importance of this virtue, in how much God values it. David said, “I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity . . .” (1Chronicles 29:17). Job maintained his integrity, and further stated that his integrity was at stake (Job 6:29). Those seeking to find fault with Jesus said, “We know you are a man of integrity . . .” (Matthew 22:16).

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: NEHEMIAH 6–7

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. How does the Hebrew definition of “integrity” help formulate your idea of what it means to be a man or a woman of integrity?
2. How is integrity related to justice and compassion? Is it a necessary character trait to do justice and to show compassion?

Ernie Gray is National Chaplains Coordinator for the Association of Alliance Chaplains. Alliance Chaplains minister in communities that are often beyond the reach of the traditional church, such as in hospitals, prisons, and the Armed Forces. They represent Christ in the midst of everyday life and in extraordinary circumstances.
How To Do Our Good Works

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to live in peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. — COLOSSIANS 3:15–17

When we consider our purpose—to stand for justice and respond to the lost and needy with compassion—we must do all, both word and deed, in Jesus’ name. What does this mean?

It surely must mean that as we speak and as we act, we do so in conformance with his will.

The apostle Paul warned the people of Corinth of works that are useless for God’s kingdom—just wood, hay, and stubble, or works that are like a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

How do we serve our neighbourhood and community differently? How can whatever we do, whether in word or deed, be done in Jesus’ name? By having the mind of Christ. By discerning his plan, purpose, and perspective. By living at peace with one another, and letting God’s Word dwell in us richly.

Paul told the Ephesian church that, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). So surely we must inquire of him, asking, “What good works have you assigned to me?” while understanding that God’s plan for the world is to bring glory to himself.

All that we do must be done as we walk closely with our Saviour, listen to his voice, and love as he loves. Let us love humbly in his name, and always for his glory.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: COLOSSIANS 3:15–17

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What effect do our words and deeds have if not done in Jesus’ name and for God’s glory? Are they still worth doing, even when not for the right reasons?

2. Has God commissioned you to do some specific “good works”? Are you regularly asking him what he has for you to do?

Rev. Eunice Smith has served with the C&MA for more than sixty years in Ecuador. In June 2013, Eunice became the first woman ordained through The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada.
Human trafficking, with its most common endpoint of prostitution, is a $32 billion business around the world, according to the United Nations. This means it nets more than Nike, Starbucks, and Google combined. The average amount a trafficker or pimp makes by selling one girl in a year in Canada is half a million dollars. Unlike drugs, which the buyer uses once, a woman is sold again and again and again, which is why human trafficking is so lucrative.

Psalm 82:3–4 tells us to defend the weak and the fatherless and maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Prostituted women fall into those categories. Most come from dysfunctional homes, most are poor, and they are certainly oppressed. They are at risk of abuse and violence. Canadian women and girls in prostitution have a mortality rate that is 40 times higher than the national average.

God is expecting us to join him in his work of bringing justice to this group of children and women who are most often stigmatized and vulnerable to oppression in our country.

Part of bringing justice to bear on this issue is to look at the demand side of prostitution. As the gender that typically purchases sex, men need to be made aware of the realities that exploited women face and then do their part to change prevailing societal attitudes that say there should be a group of children and women available to be bought and sold at all times. Every woman and girl is worth this defence.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: PSALM 82:3–4

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. How much do you know about the realities of prostitution in your city?
2. Can you challenge yourself to become more aware of the issue over the next few weeks?
   Check out www.defenddignity.ca for resources. Prayerfully consider your next steps.

Glendyne Gerrard is Director of Defend Dignity, an abolition of prostitution initiative of the C&MA in Canada. Defend Dignity raises awareness through education about the issues of prostitution and acts as a catalyst for churches and individuals to become part of the solution to this human rights issue. Defend Dignity also advocates for law reform with our governments and networks with other organizations involved with victims of exploitation.
Welcoming the Foreigner

“The community is to have the same rules for you and for the foreigner residing among you; this is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You and the foreigner shall be the same before the Lord.” — NUMBERS 15:15

Immigration statistics will never motivate us to welcome the foreigner into Canada or into the family of Christ. Something more fundamental has to occur.

Most churches and individual Christians, I would hope, aspire to be welcoming to newcomers to Canada. However, moving from mere aspiration to tangible welcome first requires some honesty around our thinking. How we think impacts how we act (Romans 12:2).

We begin at the beginning. The creation story establishes that God created all humans “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27). He makes absolutely no distinctions of value among people when it comes to his love. He expects us to treat others similarly. Note that Israel, the exclusively set-apart people of God, was commanded not only to take in the foreigner but to treat them with respect and equality (Numbers 15:15; Deuteronomy 10:19).

Now think about who you see when meeting an immigrant. “In his own image” means you are to see them as created with the same value as you, and therefore equally deserving of respect, no matter if they have reconciled with God through Jesus Christ or not. This is because in Christ we do not evaluate others using the world’s standards such as ethnicity, religion, morality, or economic status (2 Corinthians 5:16). All are of inherent worth to him and therefore to us. When we view others as persons created in his image, we have common ground from which to start a relationship.

Here’s a simple initial step to move from right thinking to right action: Be a good neighbour. The basic act of neighbourliness empowered by the Gospel message will not only be a positive welcome into Canada, but an introduction to another “immigrant,” Jesus Christ.

We were all foreigners at one point. He welcomed us.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: GENESIS 1; NUMBERS 15:15; DEUTERONOMY 10:19

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. What does it mean to have inherent worth? In what ways are we made in his image?
2. Is your church welcoming to newcomers to Canada? Is your family? Are you?

Harv Matchullis is Facilitator of Encompass Partnerships in Calgary, AB. Encompass is a mission agency designed for partners who are focused on taking the Gospel to the ends of the city where it has not yet gone or gained full expression. Harv’s passion comes from a ministry career of starting new ventures in Canada and internationally. Frontiers still exist.
The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. — COLOSSIANS 1:15–20

Ultimately, this passage is about the supremacy—the authority and sovereignty—of Christ. He, as part of the triune God, is the creator and sustainer of all creation. That includes everything spiritual and physical, unseen and seen. All things were created through him and for him. All things find their end, their purpose, their goal in Jesus. Too often we separate life into sacred and secular compartments. We tend to see the spiritual things we do as being more important to Jesus. These verses remind us that as we respect and enjoy all that Christ has created, we honour and worship him. As we go about our day, working or playing—even doing our mundane chores—we are doing it for Christ.

We tend to mainly focus on the spiritual when we think of the reconciling work of Christ. These verses remind us that Christ is redeeming all things. His death and resurrection are about bringing peace and healing to all of creation (and Isaiah 65 gives us a glimpse as to what this will ultimately look like). We are called to be agents of reconciliation which involves seeking to reverse the effects of what sin has sought to destroy—spiritually, physically, and relationally.

This process of reconciliation is under way. It is not just some future moment in time when Christ returns. It is an ongoing process that we are called to participate in now, to live in the way that God intended for his creation. Yes, one day it will be fully realized. Yet in the meantime, it is up to us to make it tangible as we live as agents of reconciliation—offering a foretaste of what is to come.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: COLOSSIANS 1:15–20
REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. What are the signs of a broken, sinful world in your community? How can you and your church community be agents of reconciliation in order to bring healing and restoration to the situation?
2. When you consider that all things—spiritual and physical—were created through and for Christ and that through his work on the cross all things are being reconciled or made right, how should this influence our actions and attitudes toward both the spiritual and the physical parts of creation?

Joanne Beach serves the C&MA in Canada as the Director of Alliance Justice and Compassion.

WE ARE CALLED TO BE AGENTS OF RECONCILIATION WHICH INVOLVES SEEKING TO REVERSE THE EFFECTS OF WHAT SIN HAS SOUGHT TO DESTROY—SPIRITUALLY, PHYSICALLY, AND RELATIONALLY.
Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

— ROMANS 12:2 (THE MESSAGE)

Our culture has created a “must-have” generation. We are consumed with the middle-class dream of personal wellbeing and comfort. With the convenience of extended credit we can buy what we want today and, hopefully, pay for it later. Money and possessions define who we are. We have become inwardly focused.

But God wants us to focus on him. He wants us to show ruthless compassion which will bring out the best in us and change us to become more like him.

This summer at our kids’ soccer camp, we challenged our small group of children to think about kids in another country who did not have soccer balls or cleats or even T-shirts. We asked them to gather up some change and see if we, as a small group, could make a difference. I threw in a handful of spare change while several of the children showed great maturity by going home and taking out all of the money from their piggybanks to make a difference in a child’s life across the world.

I, who have so much, gave a handful of coins, while these children who have been saving their pennies and nickels and dimes for something special gave everything. Have I bought into today’s culture? Where is my heart? Where is my generosity and willingness to sacrifice?

We need to see the world through the eyes of our children. They were able to see beyond what they wanted in order to give freely and thus make a difference in the lives of children who they may never meet. It’s time for some ruthless compassion, adults.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: ROMANS 12 (THE MESSAGE)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. When have you seen your kids, or your friends’ kids, outdo you in joyful generosity? Was your response to encourage them—and be more generous yourself—or to damper their excitement?
2. Whom can you have a dialogue with about “ruthless compassion” this week?

Jan Gray is National Children’s Ministry Coordinator for the C&MA in Canada. Children’s Ministry is an important part of the C&MA mandate to create a chain of discipleship that reaches the youngest members of our Alliance churches.
But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

— LUKE 10:40–42

This passage of Scripture describes the conflict that many of us struggle with on a daily basis. As we listen to the news today, it’s easy to become overwhelmed with the needs of our world and communities. Where do we begin? Are we like Martha, running from one cause to another and not feeling particularly effective in any one, trying to do it in our own strength?

Martha’s behaviour shows how our pride can corrupt even our best intentions. Martha became so immersed in busyness that she took her eyes off of Jesus. Her misguided focus allowed resentment and a critical spirit to take over.

A few years ago I was involved in the founding of a compassion ministry—a residential home for pregnant and parenting teens in our town. We struggled for a number of years with funding issues and staff challenges. We prayed for God to intervene and provide what was needed to serve these young women. When we were forced to close, I felt angry. After much prayer, he gave me a peace about the situation, and I realized that while I was working hard trying to keep the home open, my focus had not always been fully on him and his plan.

Martha’s story is a reminder of what we are called to do. Yes, we need to be involved in ministries that show compassion to those around us, but we must never forget that we need to be more like Mary—to sit and learn at the feet of Jesus. When we spend time with him daily, worshipping and focusing on his Word, it will put things into perspective and enable us to serve others over ourselves.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: LUKE 10:38–42

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you been relying on your own strength and plan to show compassion to others?
2. Have you ever become resentful or critical of others who weren’t serving as much or as hard as you?

Janice Buck is National Coordinator of Alliance Parish Nurses. Parish nurses are Christ-centred registered nurses who work with the church to teach health education and offer health counselling, referrals, and advocacy.
I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. — PSALM 139:22–24

How can I ever forget my first face-to-face conversation with a jailed sex offender who had so terribly hurt innocent children? How can I forget the Easter Sunday when I spoke with a young man serving a life sentence for murder, who had just viciously attacked another inmate I had become quite attached to during his regular visits to our chapel services? As a new chaplain in a maximum security prison, I remember being overwhelmed with anger, to say nothing of disgust, despair, and even hatred that, at the time, I was sure was quite holy.

Psalm 139:19–22 describes quite explicitly what David was suddenly so concerned about in his own life: he loved to hate the wicked. Maybe God was not so pleased with the way David judged and condemned. Maybe the searching Spirit was whispering to him, “For God so loves the world.”

The old David unfortunately would have been able to fit quite well into today’s evangelical Christian population, which often feels more compelled to judge than to love, connect, and bring hope. The new David was able to love the world’s worst and, through that love, give them hope of restoration. Today, the new David would make a great prison or community chaplain. In fact, I am sure he would simply make a great follower of Jesus.

There were many more conversations that followed my first conversations with these two men. The Holy Spirit used them to change me into a far better disciple of Jesus, and into a better chaplain. While these men had committed horrific acts, my connecting with them soon made it clear to me just how much they also thirsted for healing, salvation, and restoration. And I finally understood just how much God thirsted to meet and restore them.

Scripture to Reflect On: Psalm 139:19–24

Reflection Questions
1. Does the seriousness of an offense keep you from seeing the hurt, brokenness, and deep needs of an offender? How do you feel about following closely Someone who was judged, condemned, and crucified with real offenders to whom he reached out and offered hope?
2. If you are a disciple of Jesus, do you represent a God of love and restoration as much toward a “really big sinner” as you do toward an “average sinner”? And where do you place yourself on your sinner scale?

Jean Martin is Professor and Director at l’Institut Biblique VIE (Life Bible Institute). IBVIE, in Quebec, prepares lay and licensed workers for ministry in French. Visit www.ibvie.org.
A Widow’s Mite

Jesus looked up and saw some rich people tossing their gifts into the offering box. He also saw a poor widow putting in two pennies. And he said, “I tell you that this poor woman has put in more than all the others. Everyone else gave what they didn’t need. But she is very poor and gave everything she had.” — LUKE 21:4 (CEV)

A woman sent the following note, along with a donation, to The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada not long ago:

“I am just sending a note saying I’m able to send $30.00 a month. I’m a senior and have only my pension, and I feel God wants me to continue to send to you…”

As I read her shaky, thoughtful handwriting, I could not help but think of how Jesus took notice of the widow who gave her two small coins (Luke 21:1–4). Her act of worship was extravagant! She humbly and intentionally gave all she had—compared to the gifts of larger amounts just “tossed” into the offering box by those who still had plenty to spare.

Both of these women inspire me to reflect on my giving practices. Do I give sacrificially? Or do I give after all my needs and wants have been satisfied? What is my motive for giving? Am I willing to give in such a way that means I live with less?

The other thought that strikes me is that Jesus notices our gifts! This leads me to ask myself, “What Jesus would say about my giving patterns? Would he be pleased?” For that is what really matters!

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: LUKE 21:1–4

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. What does Luke 21:1–4 say about justice and compassion?
2. What does it mean for the church and for followers of Christ today? How can I apply this in my own life this very day?

Joanne Beach serves the C&MA in Canada as the Director of Alliance Justice and Compassion.
A New Name

The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?” “But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” The Lord answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.” — JUDGES 6:14-15

He’s almost laughable really, and yet how does the angel of the Lord greet him? “Mighty warrior” (Judges 6:12). Then Gideon receives his mission in language we may find very familiar: “Go … Am I not sending you? … I will be with you” (vv14,16). And this coward of a man who has excuses and doubts also has the Spirit of the Lord come upon him (v34). In God’s power and by the work of the Lord’s hand, Gideon ends up leading a very small army to victory over Israel’s very mighty and oppressive enemies, the Midianites.

Is the angel of the Lord simply flattering Gideon by naming him a “mighty warrior”? No. He is giving Gideon a new name, calling out in him an identity that is not rooted in his natural strengths (or weaknesses) but in the work of the Holy Spirit in and through Gideon.

This story echoes into the life of the early church when Jesus gave fishermen and tax collectors new identities and the Great Commission, filled them with the promised Holy Spirit at Pentecost—and thousands were saved. Throughout church history and still today, Jesus speaks new names—and Spirit-empowered followers see great moves of God.

I don’t know about you, but sometimes when I think about issues of justice and compassion, I get … well, overwhelmed. Going down the street and bringing the Light into the mess of a neighbour’s life is a stretch some days, let alone fighting against human trafficking or caring for refugees or whole nations impoverished with no hope of a government bailout.

Who am I? What can I do to make a difference? I’m just like Gideon—a coward—but with a new name.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: JUDGES 6:14-15
REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. What fears, doubts, or excuses do you carry around with you like Gideon? What are the areas in which you need to live in the reality of your new identity in Christ and trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to work through you?
2. Dream with me: What might God do with an individual (you!), a whole small group, a whole church, a whole denomination that is Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered, and mission-focused?

Jenica Van Essen is serving as a missionary apprentice in Halifax, NS along with her husband, Dan, and their two young sons, Elliot and Arie. Their vision is to see a movement of Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered, and mission-focused disciple-making disciples committed to kingdom purposes across Atlantic Canada and beyond.

THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY AND STILL TODAY, JESUS SPEAKS NEW NAMES—AND SPIRIT-EMPOWERED FOLLOWERS SEE GREAT MOVES OF GOD.
A walk though Edmonton’s river valley in the fall brings alive the beauty of God’s creation as the transition from summer to winter brings a beauty that is unmatched. Yet many of Edmonton’s homeless have come to call this river valley, “home.” They live within the bushes seeking shelter underneath the canopy of the trees. They live invisible to most of us here in the river valley, hoping that their shelters in the woods will go undiscovered so as not to be evicted from their homes.

Those who live on our streets will tell you they feel like they have become invisible to the rest of society. People go out of their way to avoid them. “Those people” are deemed “less desirable,” as if their worth and dignity are directly related to their mental health or dwelling place.

One of the hardest transitions for most of us to make is the movement from charity to solidarity. Charity allows us to stay in a vertical relationship with those on our streets. It keeps us standing above and reaching down to those in need, keeping a distance between us when what we really need is to be brought closer together. We need to bridge the gap between “us and them,” to recognize that for us to live fully we need each other.

In Genesis 1:26–27, we are told that God created all of humanity in his image. The implication of this truth should shatter the culture of “us and them” that we have established, while opening us to the gifts that others have to offer to us. When we decide not to see God’s image in those we deem less desirable, we choose not to see God’s image in ourselves.

**SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: GENESIS 1:26–27**

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Do you know where homeless people live in your city? Have you ever gone out of your way to avoid them or evaded their eyes as you walked by?

2. What is the difference between charity and solidarity? Can you identify which attitudes need to change for you to move closer toward solidarity?

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Kris Knutson is Executive Director of the Edmonton Do Likewise Society (EDLS) and The Neighbour Centre. In response to the increasing needs of homeless and marginalized people in south Edmonton, EDLS build relationships and nurtures hope, health, and personal transformation. Kris has served with The Mustard Seed and the Community Correctional Chaplaincy program, bringing with him his heart and passion to see individuals and communities transformed through God’s people. Visit www.dolikewisesociety.org.
The Ten Commandments: Shaping Community

"See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them…” — DEUTERONOMY 4:5

The Ten Commandments is one of the best known parts of the Bible. Even those who don’t read the Bible can list two or three of them. We may have a deep sense that these laws are given so that we will know how to live an upright life before God.

The Ten Commandments were not originally given as a way for individuals to live moral lives; they were given to shape a community. The Ten Commandments are a summation of the entire law that was given to Israel as a vision for what their communal life should be. While practicing these commands obviously has an individual dimension to it, ultimately they are a vision for communal life.

False testimony is banned because it will subvert justice; adultery is prohibited because it threatens a multitude of relationships within a community; murder is wrong because it strips another of their right to life. The idea behind these laws is the preservation and building of community.

In Deuteronomy 4:6, we read how the laws of Israel were designed to function in shaping the nation as a community that would be a witness to the world: “Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”

This is the impact of a community that lives out God’s intentions for his people. Their practices of righteousness and justice will demonstrate who he is to the world around them. The Church is called to be this community. As the Church practices God’s ideal as found throughout Scripture, we will inevitably be a people of true justice and a community that reflects God’s holy character to the world.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: EXODUS 20:1–17; DEUTERONOMY 4:5–7

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. What kind of impact do you think your church would have in the community if your church lived out the communal life as reflected in the Ten Commandments?
2. What does it mean to be a community of true justice?

Lee Beach is Assistant Professor of Christian Ministry and Director of Ministry Formation at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, ON. Lee has served in pastoral ministry with The Christian and Missionary Alliance for 22 years and is currently part of a new church plant with his wife, Joanne, in Ancaster, Ontario.
Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: “There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea are swept away.” — HOSEA 4:1–3

These are words from 3000 years ago describing the devastations of human sin and the condemnation from the Lord to his people. However, who back then would have thought that even birds in the sky and fish in the sea would be wiped out, all because of human rebellion?

Indeed, it is happening right in front of us as seen in news from around the world which seldom brightens our day. Some recent samples: terrorist attacks and chemical warfare; gun violence tragedies on campuses; millions being displaced because of armed conflicts; civil unrest in multiple nations; massive flash floods rampaging cities; wildfires destroying not only forests but entire towns; massive depletion of fish stock in all great oceans; and the list goes on.

The prophetic description follows a biblical pattern right from Genesis. God created all things and placed humans among his creation as his royal representatives (the image of God) and priests (as seen in the priestly duties of tending the garden).

However, once we rejected our created roles, not only were our relations with God severed, but we started fighting against our fellow human beings. And the rest of creation has been devastated ever since; as put in Romans 8:22, the whole creation is groaning.

Of course, our hope is in Christ, who will “reconcile all things unto himself” (Colossians 1:20). Do we play a part in that restoration and reconciliation too? Definitely! Paul puts it again in Romans 8:19: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.” Are you one of these sons of God?

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: HOSEA 4:1–3
REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. What do you see the world’s situation to be today? Do you see or hear what Hosea describes?
2. What does it mean to be God’s representatives and priests on earth? What are the implications for your daily living and working?

Samuel Chiu is Multicultural Programs Director of A Rocha Canada, an international Christian organization which, inspired by God’s love, engages in scientific research, environmental education, and community-based conservation projects. Samuel was formerly a pastor at Scarborough Chinese Alliance Church. He is passionate about Christians in Canada and around the world getting involved in care for God’s creation. Visit www.arocha.ca.

THE PROPHETIC DESCRIPTION FOLLOWS A BIBLICAL PATTERN RIGHT FROM GENESIS. GOD CREATED ALL THINGS AND PLACED HUMANS AMONG HIS CREATION AS HIS ROYAL REPRESENTATIVES AND PRIESTS.
Traditionally, apologetics has been concerned with developing rational arguments that offer convincing proof to the seeker or the skeptic that faith in Jesus is plausible. This kind of intellectual engagement plays a crucial role in the overall mission of the Church. However, well-articulated arguments are not the only way to convince someone that Jesus is true.

John the Baptist was a significant religious figure at the same time as Jesus. He had spent his life telling others that a prophet was going to come, one who would bring in the kingdom of God in new and dynamic ways. As we read in Luke 7:18-23, John thinks that this prophet could well be Jesus, so he sends two of his followers to enquire, to see if Jesus can convince them that he is the one.

When asked if he is the one who is coming to bring God’s kingdom, Jesus answers by healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, and preaching Good News to the poor. Based on these actions, Jesus invites John’s disciples to judge whether God’s kingdom is breaking in. Jesus doesn’t offer any intellectual rationale or a carefully crafted defence of his ministry. He just shows justice and compassion to those who are sick, poor, and marginalized. These are the proofs that he offers as confirmation of his credibility.

If the church is going to make Jesus credible in our world, we have to do what Jesus did: demonstrate the Good News by proclaiming and embodying it in works of justice and compassion for those around us who need healing, deliverance, and hope. These remain the most convincing “proofs” that Jesus’ kingdom is indeed at hand.

**SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: LUKE 7:18–23**

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What do you think are the most convincing proofs of God’s kingdom? What do you think your neighbour would think are the most convincing proofs?
2. How can the Good News be embodied in works of justice and compassion without becoming just a social gospel?

Lee Beach is assistant professor of Christian Ministry and director of Ministry Formation at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, ON. Lee has served in pastoral ministry with The Christian and Missionary Alliance for 22 years and is currently part of a new church plant with his wife, Joanne, in Ancaster, Ontario.
Will Your House Withstand A Storm?

“As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.” — LUKE 6:47–48

One of my earliest Sunday school memories is singing the song about the wise man who built his house upon the rock, and the foolish man who built his on the sand. We sang loudly and acted out the falling house with great enthusiasm.

I determined that I didn’t want my house to fall, so I was going to listen to Jesus’ words and do what he said.

I was recently challenged when I read that story from the end of Luke 6 in the context of the whole chapter. What are these words that I need to put into practice?

First off, in the middle of the chapter Jesus gives a warning that makes me squirm: “But woe to you who are rich [Is that me, with a roof over my head, a closet full of clothes and a vehicle in the driveway?], for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now [Gulp! I have a fridge full of food and need accountability so I don’t eat too much], for you will go hungry” (Luke 6:24–25).

Feeling decidedly uncomfortable, I read on: “Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back” (v30). “But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back” (v35). Then Jesus introduces the story of the two builders with a question: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (v46). If I am not being generous with what he has given me, I dare not call him “Lord,” and my house will not withstand the storm.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: LUKE 6

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. After reading Luke 6, are there changes you need to make in order to be like the wise builder?
2. Why is generosity so closely related to calling Jesus “Lord”?

Lisa Rohrick is a C&MA International Worker. She works with the Fulani people doing community development and church planting in Niger, one of the world’s poorest countries.
In Genesis 16, Sarai, afraid that God will not give her a child, pleads with Abram for a surrogate to give her a child. She chooses Hagar, her Egyptian servant, to bear a child for her. When Hagar conceives, Sarai perceives her as a threat so she mistreats her.

Hagar runs away and finds herself alone in the desert. She is sitting near a spring when the angel of the Lord appears to her and gives her a promise. Hagar returns to Sarai and Abram’s first son, Ishmael, is born.

This story shows how Hagar was “just a servant” (and, more likely, a slave). Sarai and Abram treat her as an object, using her for her fertile womb. It is only the angel of the Lord who calls her by name: “Hagar.” Not only does Hagar experience God’s care, but she is the first recorded person to be visited by the angel of the Lord.

In turn, Hagar gives God the name, “El Roi,” meaning “the God who sees me.” This foreign female slave is the first person in the Bible to name God. He heard Hagar’s misery and he saw her. He knew her by name and he cared about her.

God is with those who are casualties of others’ mistreatment and misuse—the outcast and the marginalized. He hears and sees their misery. Jesus describes God as the Shepherd who leaves his 99 sheep to find the lost one.

Hagar’s story demonstrates the power of being heard and being seen. Her experience is a sign of God’s love and care for those who are marginalized, who are experiencing persecution and powerlessness. God sees our misery, hears our cries, and is willing to make himself visible to us.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: GENESIS 16

REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. Whom do you identify with more in this story, Sarai or Hagar? If you identify with Hagar, how might God want to care for you? If you identify with Sarai, what are some ways you can join in God’s work in caring for the “Hagars” of this world?
2. Do you believe that God sees you? If so, what are the implications for how you see others?

Mardi Dolfo-Smith is Discipleship Pastor at North Shore Alliance Church in North Vancouver, BC. Mardi has been a pastor in the C&MA for 12 years.
When Six Weeks Became Three Months

Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.” — DEUTERONOMY 15:11 (NRSV)

Early on as a pastor, our church agreed to host a group of young children and their mothers who came to Canada from Asia, suffering from a serious medical condition. These children required specialized life-saving surgery. They were billeted with two host families along with a translator for six weeks. The purpose of the ministry was for our church to express neighbourly generosity and Christ-like compassion.

Due to multiple unforeseen medical delays, six weeks became three months. In addition, our host families experienced various cultural and language challenges which compounded the needs both families faced. In spite of these challenges, each host family, along with our church community, continued to display an unwavering commitment to active service in full view of our new neighbours—imparting the groundwork for God’s Spirit to work through their daily actions.

Throughout the three months, each mother experienced first-hand how our host families put their faith into action. As a result, curiosity about Jesus emerged. Throughout this ministry, I witnessed our local church responding from a tangible expression of biblical hospitality and generosity modeled before these women.

In hindsight, it would have been easy to decline the invitation to be a neighbour to these distant families in urgent need of medical care. It would have been convenient for our church to keep our hands clenched—to bypass this opportunity altogether—because of its layered complexities.

The message of Deuteronomy 15:11 is a reminder that the needs of our world cannot be avoided. Their daily existence involves a commitment and a response from God’s people to act—to keep our hands open—even amid the unforeseen challenges.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: DEUTERONOMY 15:11 (NRSV)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to “open your hand” to those neighbours around you who are in need? What do their needs look like? Can you identify them?
2. Consider an area of generosity where your hands may be closed to the needs around you. Identify the reasons for this. Pay attention to the feelings that arise. If needed, take time to prayerfully acknowledge what it will take for your hands to begin to open up.

Rev. Wes Roberts serves as Chaplain at the Veterans Centre, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto, ON.
If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. — 1 CORINTHIANS 13:3

I love being a part of what God is doing through Alliance churches in Canada. Gathering stories of Justice and Compassion excites my spirit. I am encouraged by the many opportunities available to put faith and hope into action—plus, Jesus himself tells us that he will be there to receive it (Matthew 25:35–36).

A few years ago, I was passionately advocating for the marginalized, and I invited others to join me in demonstrating God’s love by serving the disadvantaged. My advocacy message and service centred on being motivated by compassion, yet I soon learned that compassion was not enough.

Sadly, after our first group volunteering experience at a soup kitchen, I became disheartened and confused by patrons who complained about the food that we had prepared. Even worse, I was dumbfounded by the indignation of volunteers who were expecting gratitude from these lost souls.

I began to wonder whether Christ was really among us that day.

Unfortunately, when we only know in part the extent of God’s love, our good works will be ineffectual and meaningless. God helped transform my motivation for serving the disadvantaged. As I reflected on 1 Corinthians 13, I began to see that without a motivation of love, nothing is gained for Christ.

My prayer is to always ask the Counsellor for guidance to understand what justice and compassion looks like when it is motivated by unconditional love. Holy Spirit, help me to understand the fullness of God’s love. I pray that you will bring to mind my own brokenness as I commit to move out of my comfort zone and love those whom I perceive as undeserving or unlovable.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: 1 CORINTHIANS 13; MATTHEW 5:43–48
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about faith and hope in action? Is there a difference between being motivated by compassion and being motivated by perfect love?

2. Have you ever volunteered and felt completely unappreciated or concerned that your efforts were not accomplishing anything for Christ? Reflect on 1 Corinthians 13 and then read Matthew 5:43–48.

Serena Richardson works at the National Ministry Centre as the Alliance Justice and Compassion Administrator. She is also an undergrad student at Emmanuel Bible College, working toward her Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE) in Christian Education and Intercultural Studies.

MY PRAYER IS TO ALWAYS ASK THE COUNSELLOR FOR GUIDANCE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT JUSTICE AND COMPASSION LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT IS MOTIVATED BY UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.
Stories make meaning, and if there is one thing we are starving for, it’s meaning. In direct tension with meaning making are the anonymous, machine-like systems we navigate through every day. It can feel meaningless, or even anti-meaning.

If you follow Jesus, you have one foot in God’s world of meaning, centred on your identity as a child of God—a world you’ve been called to help co-create. This is a world of identity and vocation deeply rooted in shalom—all things being as they were intended to be. You also have one foot in the present age that says you are what you produce or what you consume.

You have one foot in both worlds because you’ve been called to co-create God’s world of meaning right smack in the middle of the present world of anti-meaning. So there is tension. In John’s Revelation of Jesus it’s called thelipsis, which means pressure, as in crushing pressure.

If you follow Jesus you are supposed to feel the tension. To navigate this tension you don’t need answers, you need good questions. You need to ask those questions of and share those questions with others around you who are living in the same tension.

You need to tear down for each other, reveal the story of the machine. You need you to build up for each other, explore the story of identity centered in imago dei, explore the story of meaning-making centred around hesed, misphat, tsedek, which can be translated as love, justice, and righteousness.

If you follow Jesus you are called to imagine and then make manifest an alternative, upside-down world right in your neighbourhood. You are called to join God in co-creating it, and then ask your neighbours to join you. You are your neighbourhood’s conduit to the infinite possibility of an identity and vocation, rooted in the lived experience of all God’s children making meaning in the world. Shalom.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: GENESIS 1:27

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. — GENESIS 1:26–27
REFLECTION QUESTIONS
1. Can you identify the tension in your life—the machine-like systems, the meaninglessness, the anti-meaning?
2. What would it look like if your neighbours on your street had their identity and vocation deeply rooted in shalom? What good questions could you share with them to initiate a dialogue?

Steve Frost is a writer and artist. He is embedded in Mosaic, a community of compassion and grace in Vancouver, BC. Steve teaches at Pacific Life Bible College in Surrey, BC.

YOU ARE CALLED TO JOIN GOD IN CO-CREATING IT, AND THEN ASK YOUR NEIGHBOURS TO JOIN YOU.
Day 40!! What an amazing journey through various Scriptures that capture God’s heart for his creation! Jesus began the ministry of reconciliation that reverses the effects of sin, and he calls his followers to extend this ministry.

Often we have thought of his command to “go” as a call to missions—to stop being here and to go to another place to make disciples. While that is part of the message, the meaning of “go” in the original language can be interpreted as “while you are going.” So, as you are going about your life—going to work, going to school, living in your community—you are to be extending the ministry of Jesus. This has implications for all followers of Jesus.

As we live out our faith, we implement the priorities that Jesus taught, and we teach others to do the same. To carry out this commission faithfully, we must demonstrate and declare a Gospel that has implications in all areas of our lives.

If we put into practice all that Jesus taught, we will begin to experience communities of SHALOM—holistic wellbeing with security and equity in all areas of life: economic, political, social, and spiritual. This is God’s intention for the world; he longs for all people and all nations to experience healing and wholeness in relationship with him, with others, and with all of creation. As we enter people’s lives, sharing the message of Christ and demonstrating kingdom values, we will see a broken, sinful world restored, renewed, and transformed.

The most exciting part of this journey is that Jesus promises to be with us always. While he commissions us to carry on his work by his Spirit, he is present—sustaining us, strengthening us, empowering us, and guiding us.

**SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT ON: MATTHEW 28:16–20**

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**
1. What does Matthew 28:16-20 say about justice and compassion?
2. In what areas of life can I share the message of Christ “while I am going”?

Joanne Beach serves the C&MA in Canada as the Director of Alliance Justice and Compassion.
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