

Whose life is it anyway?

Injustice, stewardship and the kingdom of God

Introduction to the series

In a world wounded by poverty and injustice, Christians long to bring hope. To do this we must first understand that injustice occurs whenever humans put themselves in the place of God and rebel against his Lordship.

This series of three sessions for personal Bible study and discussion in home groups looks at the role human beings have been given to 'rule' the earth (Genesis 1:26, 28). It explores how, whenever humans domineer over creation and claim authority for themselves, people are oppressed and the rest of creation is damaged. When our rebellion against God is expressed at a national level, we see the kind of injustice that regularly confronts us on the news – war, terror, famine, trade injustice and environmental degradation. To stand against injustice, we must reject the world's way, choosing to live the life God has for us, not the life we want to live. We must take hold of his calling to care for the resources he has given us (Gen 2:15) and honour him above ourselves. Responding to injustice begins in the throne room of our hearts.

Part 1: Injustice and Dominion

AIMS of this session:

- To think about our response to injustice
- To understand God's purpose for us as 'servant rulers of the earth'
- To reflect on how injustice comes about when we live for ourselves, not for God

Time: 1 hour 20 minutes

You will need: Two large pieces of paper; pens; Bibles

1. WELCOME

Aim: to warm up the group and introduce the topic of injustice

Time: 10 minutes

'Grumpy old men/women'

In the style of the TV show where famous 'older' men or women complain about the things that irritate them, give two or three people the opportunity to complain about something trivial (and non-offensive!) for one minute each. (If people are in need of ideas, suggestions could include: modern art, the weather, British sporting abilities, public transport, automated telephone answering systems or political correctness).

Once two or three people have had a turn, move the discussion on to more serious things such as issues of injustice – what really makes you angry 'in your gut?' Write these things down on a big piece of paper in the centre of the group.

End by explaining that the idea of this session is not to make everyone cross, but to think about what causes injustice in our world and how God wants us to respond.

2. WORSHIP

Aim: to help people reflect on the sovereignty of God, particularly over situations of injustice, and to desire his Lordship in their lives.

Time: 10 minutes

Read Psalm 33 aloud around the group, with each person saying a verse or two at a time.

Spend some time thanking God that he is sovereign over all things, that he loves justice and righteousness and helps those who trust in him. Lead into the next section by praying that God would help you to honour him above all things in your life.

3. WORD

Aim: to understand our role as servant rulers of God's earth, and what happens when humans take control

3a: The rich fool

Time: 15 minutes

Read Luke 12:13-21 (the parable of the rich fool). Then discuss the following questions as a group:

- 1. What prompts Jesus to tell the story? What attitudes is he challenging? (vv 13 – 15)**
- 2. In what ways do you think the man misunderstands the purpose of his life?**
- 3. In what ways does he misunderstand God?**

The man sees his life as ‘consisting in the abundance of his possessions’ (v 15), and serves himself only. He doesn’t see his land or his good crop as being given to him by God, or trust that God will provide for him. He doesn’t think about how he could honour God with what he has been given.

4. *What could he have done?*

3b: Stewardship v ownership

Time: 15 minutes

In Genesis 1:28 God gives human beings their role on the earth: *God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

Although we are called to rule over it, the earth is not ours, it is God’s. According to Psalm 24:1 *‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it’*

This makes us stewards over the earth, not owners of it. According to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary, a steward is a ‘person entrusted with management of another’s property’.

Brainstorm on a piece of paper the differences between stewardship and ownership. It may help to think about a real situation where you are stewards of something that doesn’t belong to you, such as house sitting, and compare that to living in your own house. Other examples could be: driving your own or a company car, acting as a treasurer compared to looking after your own finances; child minding compared to how you treat your own children etc.

You could think about some or all of the following:

- who are you doing it for? who has ultimate authority?
- how do you behave differently as a steward and as an owner?
- how do your motivations differ?
- how are you likely to go wrong?

Look back at the piece of paper you wrote on earlier. In which situations do you see human beings acting as owners rather than stewards, placing themselves in the position of gods?

4. WITNESS

Aim: to give space for people to reflect on their own attitudes in this area and ask for God’s help to change

Time: 25 minutes

Questions for personal reflection or prayer in pairs

Read the following story, using it to spark a time of prayer and reflection.

A friend of mine was given a digital camera as a present. She already had a computer and felt very blessed to be in possession of such luxuries. As a Christian who worked with asylum seekers and was aware of the poverty in the city where she lived, perhaps she might have felt guilty about possessing these material things. Should she give them away to someone who needed them more?

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Her response is something I won't easily forget - it struck me as the essence of stewardship. She prayed that God would give her opportunities to use these gifts to bless others. Almost immediately, she received a request to photograph the artwork of a refugee who was putting on a display in a Christian art centre. It was a beautiful and simple way to bless someone else. When we receive what God has to give us with open hands, the temptation is to allow our hands to close around the gift. If we fight to keep them open, offering back to him what he has given us, he will use it for his glory.

Discuss and then pray about some or all of the following in groups. Alternatively, pray through these questions individually, as time allows and according to what people are comfortable with:

- what resources has God given you to steward? (this could include money, property, time, children, spouse/family, skills and talents, qualifications, material possessions, responsibilities at work, garden, farm, congregation (if a pastor), community (if a local leader) .
- when have you acted as a steward over those things, and when like a master?
- are there things you believe are yours by right?
- do you view God as a God of scarcity or abundance?
- when have you had to trust God's provision?
- are there regular areas where you find it hard to trust God's abundance? (eg always hunting for the best deal regardless of the implications on others, finding giving difficult, not spending time with people, reluctance to share etc)

And finally:

Read Luke 12:22-34 and summarise the session, particularly emphasising that in our role as stewards of the earth we are to:

- seek first the kingdom, the reign of God (which includes both how we live our lives, and the structure of society)
- trust in the abundance of God to provide for us as we do this.