

**What To Do With This Book! A Discussion Guide for
Timothy Keller's *Generous Justice***

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Murals of Modesto CA are used to illustrate this volume. Details about the growing number of community murals may be found at healthier Community arts Project;

The few arch murals are from the former downtown Modesto post office (now a law office). The murals were painted as part of the New Deal to depict commerce in the central valley. The full story can be found at

<http://www.healthiercommunityartsinitiative.com/murals.html>

This is a discussion guide designed to move you to uncomfortable action. The ideas expressed in *Generous Justice* make people uncomfortable in large part because they are true. The truth does that; when Harry Truman was given the moniker *Give em hell Harry* he responded by saying "I never gave em hell, I just told em the truth and it made them feel like hell". The frustration of reading a book that challenges comfortable paradigms will pass with time and sufficient distraction. That is unless the Holy Spirit is prompting the frustration that is intended to change you and move you to become an agent of change for others.



My friend Jim was a catalyst for this frustration when he introduced me to the book in 2010. While I was still reading it for the first time, I was accosted in the church parking lot by a man I admire for his maturity, scholarship, and commitment. He tread heavily toward me shaking the book and asked, "Have you read this book?" I told him I was about halfway through it. He said, "I don't know what to do with this book" as he pivoted and stomped away. Wow, I thought, if *he's* that frustrated, this is going to take some work. It was then that I was taken with the idea that the only way I could get this frustration to move beyond theory to real and lasting change was through discussion and accountability with others.

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Since that time, I've been discussing and applying the life-changing justice that is explained by Timothy Keller in *Generous Justice*. These discussions started as one on one and later developed into the groups that have been the model for this guide. This current revision is the product of improvement fueled by discussion with my community group co-leader Robert Cole, and the patient people we serve.

Keller's work can be summarized as a treatise on God's invitation for believers to respond to His grace by rescuing and restoring the disadvantaged among us. The pastor builds a scriptural case that the fruit of following Christ will be borne in our care for the orphan, the widow, the immigrant, and the poor. He admonishes us to accept God's perspective rather than mine. I think you should get what you deserve, and I should get mercy. God thinks you should get what you deserve when he sees you through the grace made possible by Christ's sacrifice. He invites us to see others as deserving that same grace.

Don't worry that I've gone gospeless social gospel, or forsaken personal salvation & responsibility, for Pastor Keller and I most certainly have not. He reiterates the gospel many times in this book, however, had I read this book alone there would be room to wonder if salvation was chief among the manifold needs of the disadvantaged. This may have more to do with the reader than the writer. I would prefer to treat this book as a sequel to Keller's *Prodigal God*, which is an eloquent explanation of the gospel.

Religion operates on the principle of "I obey-therefore I am accepted by God." The basic operating principle of the gospel is "I am accepted by God through the work of Jesus Christ—therefore I obey". As we have seen, believing the gospel is how a person first makes a connection with God. It gives us a new relationship with God and a new identity. We must not think, however, that once believing it, the Christian is finished with the gospel message. A fundamental insight of Martin Luther's was that "religion" is the default mode of the heart.... So Luther says that even after you are converted by the gospel your heart will go back to operating on other principles unless you deliberately, repeatedly set it to gospel-mode. *Prodigal God* pp. 114-115

As you study and respond to the truth of the gospel and how God would have us act upon His grace, I encourage you to read *Prodigal God*. Two particularly influential sermons on this topic may be found at redeemer.com; they are *The Gospel and Your Self*, and *Have I not Loved This Great City*. I have just found it difficult to return this truth to the lesser priority it has held in my life. My current quest is to learn how God would have this higher priority demonstrated in daily life.

So, the first purpose is to be changed personally by the truth of God's generous justice. The next is to put this new perspective into practical use among people in need. Ultimately it may lead to joining a community of believers to prevent or alleviate some suffering at a systemic level. This is about freeing poor orphans, widows, & refugees with the grace that leads them out of deprivation, and into the blessing of eternal life with Christ. But for the grace of Jesus, we are all fatherless bankrupt wanderers.



Redeemer Modesto: Why This Book, and Why Now?

Why *this* book?

Generous Justice is a biblically based and provocative book authored by a man that we respect. This book is an exploration of how an understanding of God's grace toward us will influence us to generous service to others. We talk a lot about *living as loved*, and we believe that serving our neighbors is a natural outgrowth being unconditionally loved. Redeemer's elders have been seeking a greater understanding of God's love for Modesto and how He would lead us to serve by equipping our neighbors spiritually and physically. We trust that study of the bible and open discussion of the topics raised in this book will help us find direction. We are intentionally working to build and maintain the gospel-centered culture of Redeemer. By praying, studying, and discussing these matters together we invite you to influence this culture. The elder board will bear responsibility for the strategic plans, budgets, and their results, and we want you to be a part of the formative discussions.

Why now?

At this writing Redeemer Modesto meets downtown, and Redeemer's leaders have expressed both a desire and a commitment to serve Modesto downtown. This hub of the city is the center of government, business, the arts, and media. Being at the hub we also have a front row seat to see most of the challenges that the people of Modesto face. Over the last few years, Redeemer has partnered with local non-profits to meet needs and build friendships that we pray lead to discipleship. We call this ministry *The Local*, and it has been our strategy to team up with like-minded professional groups that can support through giving of time and money. This has been a good effort, and we are exploring how God would have us go further to serve the city we love.

Practical factors are affecting our city in general and some will impact our downtown neighbors in particular. Among the factors that impact our community at this time are:

- Threats like gang activity, drug and human trafficking.
- The physical changes to the downtown area will have an impact if and when the federal courthouse is constructed.
- There is an unprecedented openness on the part of the county officials to seek assistance from the faith community to address local needs.

The building where Redeemer currently meets is leased, and the lease will expire or be renewed in 2021. The leadership of Redeemer has been praying and discussing the matter for more than two years. While we are committed to being downtown, we may not stay in this location beyond the current lease. Our discussion of how we plan to serve the community will influence the use and design of the building where we meet long term. So, whether it is in a new location or a result of remodeling in the current location these discussions will influence where we meet and what type of building will be required.

So, our mission to build purposeful relationships that will serve the spiritual and physical needs of our neighbors, the changes and challenges of the city, and the building where we meet, are all contributing to the importance and timeliness of this discussion.

A Word of Assurance

Questions of motives and methods are a natural part of this process. Part of the way Redeemer operates is that it is okay, more than that, it is encouraged that people ask questions. By doing so perspectives are broadened and decisions are informed. If you have questions please approach an elder, a staff member, or a community group leader and raise your question or concern. Here are a couple of questions that come up whenever social justice is discussed in the church:

Q. I am concerned that you have already decided how this is all going to go. Is this book study just a way of getting us all on board with your plan?

A. There has been a great deal of discussion and prayer about the direction, the vision to serve our city and our neighbors. We are inviting you to join us in seeking to know God's plan for our congregation in serving people and making disciples. Put another way, we know the *why* and we are seeking the *how*.

Q. If we become more involved in community service don't, we run the risk of watering down the gospel or compromising on social issues that contradict biblical standards?

A. Bluntly, yes, that is always a risk. However, we are called to be salt and light which involves the balance of being in the world, but not of the world. So, we will keep the spread of the gospel and making disciples as our highest priority. We will continue to be guided by our core beliefs (<http://redeemermodeledo.com/about/#beliefs>). In fact, one of the things we will gain through reading *Generous Justice* together is a pragmatic understanding of the way in which Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan successfully dealt with the same matters.

Q. Many churches that have delved into community reform have been distracted from their primary mission and ended up as foundations for social programs rather than churches. Are you as concerned about that as I am?

A. Definitely, and if you read pages 144-147 of *Generous Justice* you will see that Keller is also seeking balance. After discussing various ways for the church to be involved he says, "Churches that, against Kuyper's advice, try to take on all levels of doing justice often find that the work of community renewal and social justice overwhelms the work of preaching, teaching, and nurturing the congregation."

Whether you have a question or concern now or at any time during this study please feel free to bring it up in the group or to any of the leaders mentioned above.



What To Do With Your Group

How to use this guide to discuss and apply *Generous Justice*

Venue: 1 to 1^{1/2} hour discussions with a group that has read the material. This discussion may be preceded or followed by a prayer for group members concerns.

Strategy: There are 5 to 10 questions for each chapter. Understand that the group may or may not cover them all. They roughly follow this pattern:

1. Check the baseline state of the individuals in the group in reference to the topic at hand.
2. Discuss the logical building blocks of Keller's premise.
3. Read the scripture Keller cites in context and check the readers' response against Keller's inference from the text.
4. If the truth (or plausibility) of the conclusions hold then what may be done about it. In early chapters we will focus much more on "How will I be different in my perspective or behavior this week" than "What movement shall we join or launch that will alter society". But certainly, we will be thinking in those terms by the end of the book:)

Application: In each session, there is a suggested activity to *put feet* to the  concepts discussed. Upon returning to the group there is an opportunity to stand and deliver a report  about how the activity changed others or ourselves.

The suggested activities will develop from exploration to application. The seventh meeting is set aside as a time for the group to work together on a *justice project*. If the chosen project does not lend itself to the regular meeting time, then it is suggested that this time is used as social time to celebrate and discuss the completed project.

Coming prepared: The best case would be for everyone in the group to convene having read the assigned chapters, thought about the material, and discussed it with someone else before coming to the meeting. But, in the real world, we are always glad to have people join in community whether or not they have prepared. To facilitate everyone being equipped to participate each chapter will have a *catch-up* reading selection.

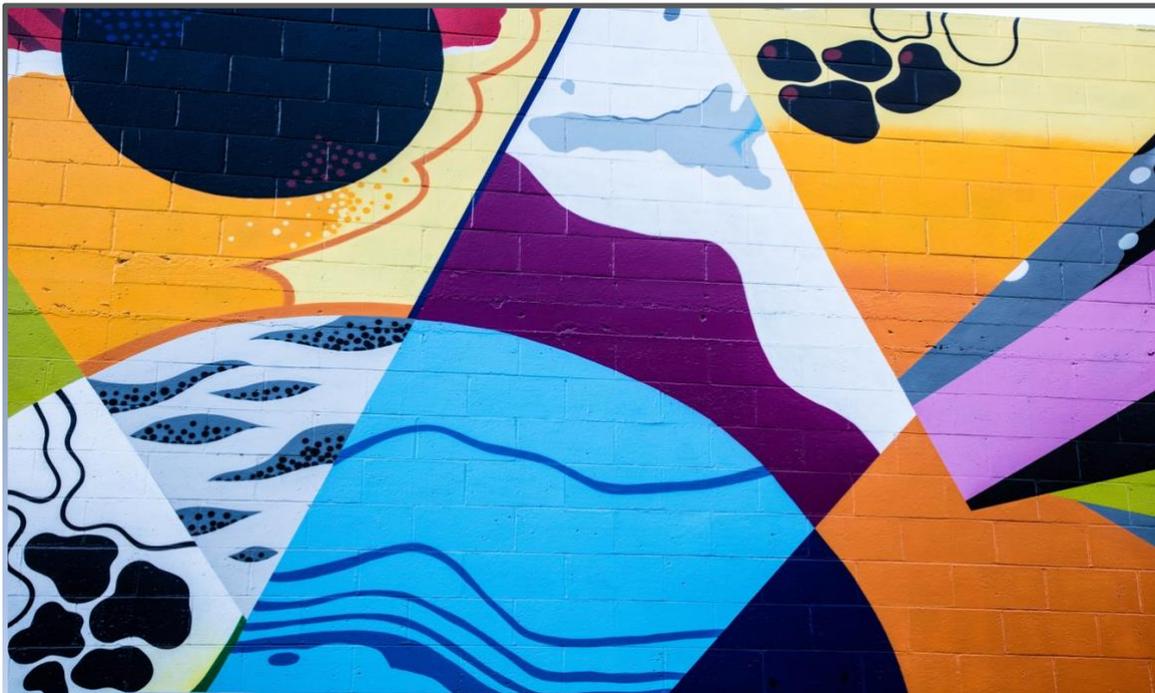
For those who do take the time to read the chapter, each section offers reflection questions to consider before reading the selected chapter.

Pace: A suggested schedule is included here to help groups that meet every week or every other week to stay on track. In this way, multiple groups studying the same material may finish together. The chapters are laid out in the book as if the group were meeting weekly and planned to finish in nine weeks.

Alternative schedule for those who do not meet weekly:

Meet every other week on this schedule and discuss the chapters on this pace, the author's introduction, Ch 1, 3, and 5 are used to guide individual or couple study. The schedule would span nine weeks and cover the material in the same span of time as the groups meeting every week.

Week 1	Discuss Introduction
Week 2 (no meeting)	Study Ch 1
Week 3	Discuss Ch1-2
Week 4 (no meeting)	Study Ch 3
Week 5	Discuss Ch 3 & 4
Week 6 (no meeting)	Study Ch 5&6
Week 7	Discuss Ch 5-7
Week 8	Study Ch 8
Week 9 Justice Project	Complete the project and/or celebrate.



Generous Justice

Introduction

Pre-Group Study on your own

1. Timothy Keller wrote this book for four groups of people, where have you encountered them?
 - a. Those concerned with social justice. Active volunteers who do not let social concerns affect their personal lives. (x)
 - b. Those who are suspicious of a social justice focus because it is perceived a distracting from the priority of personal salvation. (xi)
 - c. Those who believe the gospel must evolve to stay relevant. (xiii)
 - d. Those who believe religion, and particularly Christian religion, is the cause of society's ills. (xiv)
2. The author attributes his developing interest in justice to the work of the gospel in his life. How is the gospel changing you? (xv)
3. The four groups of target readers seem different, but Keller says that they are the same because they all fail to see that the biblical gospel of Jesus leads a person to do justice. How does God's grace motivate? (xiv)
4. In light of the gospel which statement is truer:
 - a. Jesus has saved me, therefore, I *must* love others OR
 - b. Jesus has saved me, therefore, I *can* love others.



Repeat this phrase and see if it fits your experience: *Grace frees me, a broken and selfish person, to recognize and respond to the needs of others.*

Generous Justice

Chapter 1 What *is* Doing Justice?

Reflection Question: How would it change my community if I saw it the way God sees it?

Catch-up Reading Selection: pp. 3-9

1. What comes to mind when you think of the word justice? (Fairness? Integrity? Payback?)
2. On page three Keller describes two Hebrew words for justice; *Mishpat* and *Chesedh*. How do these words differ from our everyday use of the concept?

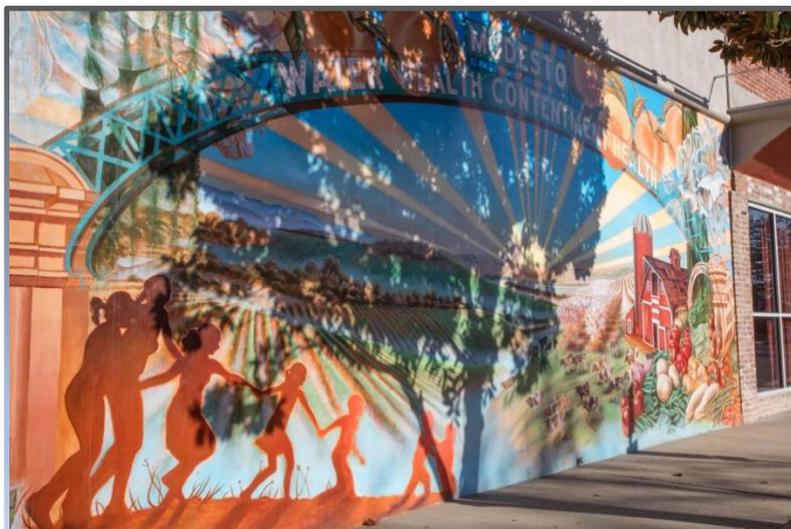
3. Review these verses: What is your gut reaction? What is God saying?

Zechariah 7:10-11

Psalm 146:7-9

Deuteronomy 10:17-18

4. Consider Micah 6:8; What would it look like to see a person do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God?



5. Keller closes the chapter with this statement:

It consists of a broad range of activities, from simple fair and honest dealings with people in daily life to regular, radically generous giving of your time and resources, to activities that seek to end particular forms of injustice, violence, and oppression.

When you consider what to do with this truth and how it will affect your life is your mind drawn to individual action, or perhaps to sweeping social change? What shall we do with this truth?



With whom share this challenging view of justice this week?

Generous Justice

Chapter 2: Justice and the Old Testament

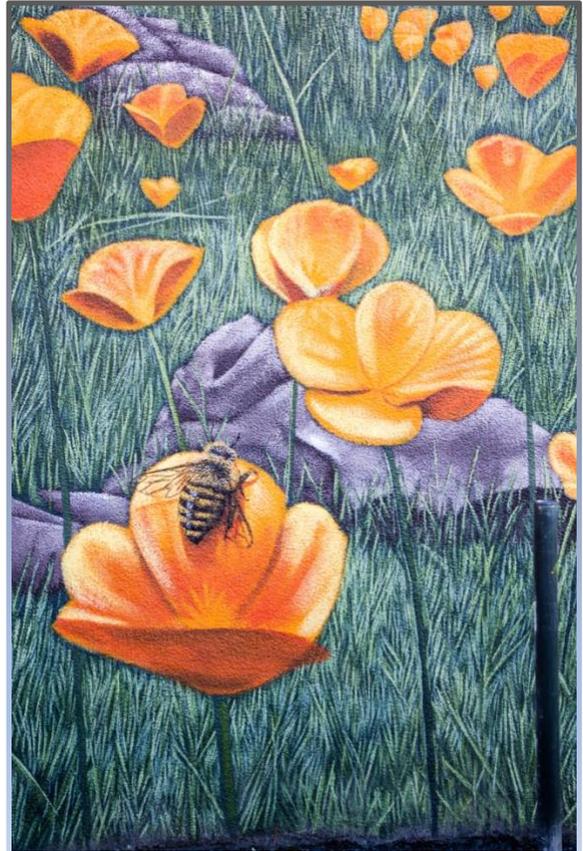
Reflection Question: How would God have us care for one another?

Catch-up Reading Selection: pp. 24-28 & 33-35



With whom did you share the concept of justice, and how did it go?

1. Do you agree with this statement? "It is the generosity of God, the freeness of his salvation, that lays the foundation for the society of justice for all". Does this fit your understanding of justice? (pp 40)
2. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. How do Old Testament rules and principles apply for Christians today? How do you know the difference between one that applies and one that does not apply?
3. What's a Theocracy? Should we aim to apply the same rules in a democratic republic? (pp 23)
4. Read Deuteronomy 15:1-8. What does this verse reveal about the character of God?
5. Deuteronomy talks about redistributing resources. How does this compare with political perspectives on immigration and the states responsibility to care for the disadvantaged? Remember, our goal is to understand and adopt God's view (pp 29).
6. Consider the laws regarding gleaning and gathering of manna. If Keller is accurate, how would these principles apply to your life and work? (pp 31)
7. Read the last paragraph on page 31 and discuss your reaction. Jesus took politics out of the equation in Matthew 22:21, how can we apply this directive in delivering justice?
8. What are the causes of poverty as Keller outlines them from scripture? (pp 38)



9. God is passionate about caring for disadvantaged people; what might be the signs that a person is disadvantaged? How might we respond?

10. God responds to the disadvantaged with grace. When have you been disadvantaged?



A community anthropology project. This week look at the places you go and the people you meet differently. Identify and report back with the needs that you observe. If you did not speak the language and were unfamiliar with the culture, then how would you interpret behavior (e.g. at a coffee shop, a sporting event, a school)



Generous Justice

Chapter 3: What Did Jesus Say About Justice?

Reflection Question: How would it feel if your only hope was in the help of a person you had wronged?

Catch-up Reading Selection: pp. 62-68



What needs did you see in the community this week? Did you see the community differently?

1. What was your reaction to the story about the needy mother who misused the church's gift to her family?
2. To recount Jesus view of Justice read the description Keller provides (2nd paragraph and following pp 44)
3. Isaiah sums up the view of the prophets in Is 1:17 and Is 58:6-7. How does Isaiah describe our responsibilities?
4. Is doing justice evidence of salvation? (pp 53)
5. Is Heaven a red state or a blue state? What is the “whole cloth” biblical view that Keller mentions? (pp 55)
6. Compare Acts 4:34-35 and Duet 15:4. What would it look like today if there were no poor among us?
7. Galatians 6:10 “Do good to all people, especially the family of faith”. Does this mean we should care for those in the church first?



God may be providing you to meet the need of someone he loves. Who do you think that person may be? Pray with about how you may approach and help this person this week.

Generous Justice

Chapter 4: Justice and Your Neighbor

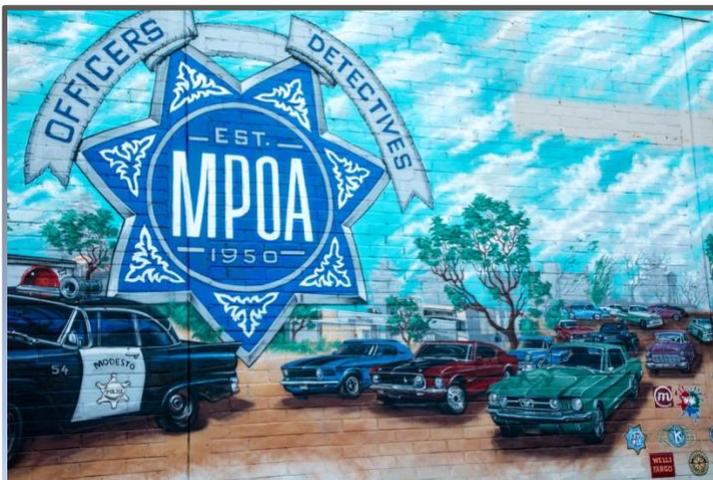
Reflection Question: Who is your neighbor?

Catch-up Reading Selection: pp. 79-82 & 101-104



To whom did he send you, and how did it go?

1. “What if your only hope was to get ministry from someone who not only did not owe you any help- but who actually owed you the opposite? What if your only hope was to get grace from someone who had every justification, based on your relationship, to trample you?” (pp76)
2. Read the story of the “good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-37) Why did the law expert question Jesus? If we did a modern remake of this story what groups of people would be cast in the major roles?
3. In the epilogue of the story about the irresponsible mother helped by Keller’s church; why does the church get so involved?
4. Who is your Samaritan? Is there a group of people with whom you find it very difficult to interact?
5. Jesus is the ultimate “good Samaritan”, having cared for you when you were broken and unclean. What do you remember about the relief that came when you were rescued?



What group that is organized to *do justice* intrigues you? Take time this week to interview a volunteer or staff member to learn more about their goals and methods.



Generous Justice

Chapter 5: Why Should We Do Justice?

Reflection Question: What if everyone you met today was an immortal made in the likeness of God?

Catch-up Reading Selection: pp. 82-85 & 92-96



How did the interview go? What did you learn?

1. James 2:15-17 “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead.
2. What are the various motivations people have to love, respect, and give practical help to the poor? (pp 79-92)
 - a. People are made in the image of God (pp 82)
 - b. Response to God’s ownership (pp 88)
 - c. A response to God’s grace (pp 92)

3. Why did God reject the yearly fast?

Isaiah 58:3-7 'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?' Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast? and a day acceptable to the Lord. Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

4. Who are the middle-class in spirit? (pp 102)
5. “Pushing the button”: Keller thinks we make the connection that awakens the believer’s heart for the poor when the need is connected to the grace we experience.



Ask someone from a different community what they believe the biggest needs that are expressed by members of that community.

Generous Justice

Chapter 6 How Should We Do Justice?

Reflection Question: Having been rescued by God, how will I be involved in His rescue of others?

Catch-up Reading Selection: pp. 112-116 & 135-143

1. Job 31:16-19 describes the way Job cared for the poor and marginalized. What would a life like this look like today? (pp 109)
2. What are the layers of help as described by Keller? (pp 112)
 - a. Relief
 - b. Development
 - c. Social reform



3. What is your reaction to John Perkins philosophy of relocation and redistribution? (pp 117)
4. In your community what would you identify as the financial, social, and spiritual capital? (pp 118)
5. Many of the characteristics that define us have also divided us. How have differences in race, nationality, and spiritual condition hindered the spread of justice and grace? (pp 124)

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6. How would you go about discerning the needs in your community? In your church's neighborhood? (pp 133)
7. Who is God giving you a heart for?
8. In preparation for the next discussion explore the following questions as they relate to the people God has put on your heart. IF you were to join with like-hearted people to address their needs how would you answer the following:
 - a. What do the people in the community say that they need?
 - b. What structure would need to be added to the group/church to address these needs?
 - c. How should we help?
 - d. Whom should we help and how?
 - e. Under what conditions should help proceed or end?
 - f. In what way do you help? (Relief, development, reform?)
 - g. From where will you help? (From without or within?)



What small short-term project could your group undertake so that you might experience doing justice together. You may choose to work with an established organization or to take on a small project that you may accomplish together.

Generous Justice

Chapter 7: Doing Justice in the Public Square

Reflection Question: How can I be *in* the world and not *of* the world?

Catch-up Reading Selection: pp. 153-158 & 162-164



This is the week for the group to plan and schedule the group justice project with the goal of completion before or during the meeting in week 9.

Take some time during this meeting to make a plan. There is a planning chart provided in the Week 9 section.

1. How do you feel about the idea of working on justice projects with people who do not share your faith? What could go wrong? What could be gained? (pp 148-149)
2. On page 149 the story is told of a board member *trumping* further discussion with the phrase “this is a justice issue”. Have you had a similar experience?
3. Why must we *smuggle moral value judgments* into our public discussions? (pp 156)
4. How would you describe a person who is marked by humble cooperation and respectful provocation? (pp 158 & 164)
5. We expect that those who do not share our beliefs will still want to work for many of the same goals. On Page 160 Keller explains this by citing two important biblical concepts. Please read the accompanying verses and describe:
 - a. General revelation (Romans 2:15)
 - b. Common grace (James 1:17)
6. It has been said that the gospel is an offense and we should not add the offense with our personalities. “Christians should not be strident and condemning in their language and attitude, but neither should they be silent about the biblical roots of their passion for justice” (pp 169). If you believe this to be true, then how will it change your discussions with those who believe differently?



For whom is God softening or even burdening your heart? What opportunities to serve have been provided? Pray with the group that God will give clarity about where and how He would have you serve.

Generous Justice

Chapter 8: Peace, Beauty, and Justice

Reflection Question: Will I be willing to *disadvantage* myself to serve others?

Catch-up Reading Selection: pp. 173-180



In what ways did God make clear whom he would have you serve?

1. Colossians 1:19-20 "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on the earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Jesus' sacrifice brought peace with God for believers and he is still actively bringing things to himself toward a new heaven and earth. What does this mean?
2. What has been your understanding of the word *Shalom*? How is this impacted by the definition on page 174? How is shalom lost, and how may it be restored?
3. How is doing justice related to fostering shalom? (pp 177)
4. Remember a time when you were overwhelmed with beauty. What words or feelings would you use to describe the experience?
5. How do you respond to Edward's quote on page 182? "...human beings will only be drawn out of themselves into unselfish acts of service to others when they see God as supremely beautiful".
6. Jesus loves the poor and sees them as individuals made in his image. Read Matthew 25:35-40. How shall we respond to the thirsty, the naked, and the captive?



Take time as you close this time to thank God for sending us, together or separately, to aid the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, and the poor. Pray also that he will empower us as evangelists for without the gospel we are all fatherless bankrupt wanderers.

Generous Justice Week 9: Justice Project

This week is set aside either to execute your plan for a Group Justice Project or to celebrate your completed project and your time learning together.

To assist in planning the project using the steps offered in suggested in Chapter 6, first discuss the ideas, and opportunities to address needs known to the group. Remember that this is a short-term volunteer effort; so scale the project accordingly.

- What do the people in the community say that they need?
- How should we help?
- Whom should we help and how?
- In what way do you help? (Relief, or as part of an organized development or reform effort)

In order to plan a successful project, you may use the chart below to plan who will contact non-profit or community leaders, who will bring any required materials or tools, and any other preparations needed. Be sure to get coaching from someone involved in work with the people you plan to serve. They will help you to engage with the people more effectively and they may improve your plan.



Group Justice Project

What To Do	Who will do it	By When	Expected Outcome

Our Justice Project will be _____

The date(s) will be _____

Our goal is to serve people with this project, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and to trust God with the results in those we serve and in ourselves.