

SESSION 1

READY WHEN INJUSTICE PREVAILS

The Point

God wants us to defend those who can't defend themselves.

The Bible Meets Life

Justice is what most people look for in any society. Unfortunately, the reality of injustice is just as common. We all want justice when we've been wronged, but are we as ready to step up when it's someone else needing justice? We cannot ignore injustice because our apathy or inaction is simply another form of injustice. We can't right every wrong, but God calls us to be His champions for justice.

The Passage

Exodus 23:1-3,6-9

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Exodus 23:1-3,6-9

¹"You must not spread a false report. Do not join the wicked to be a malicious witness.

²"You must not follow a crowd in wrongdoing. Do not testify in a lawsuit and go along with a crowd to pervert justice.

³Do not show favoritism to a poor person in his lawsuit.

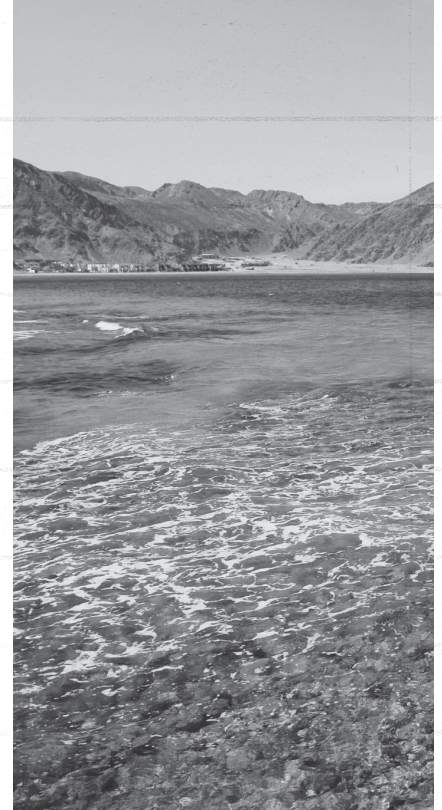
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⁶"You must not deny justice to a poor person among you in his lawsuit.

⁷Stay far away from a false accusation. Do not kill the innocent and the just, because I will not justify the guilty.

⁸You must not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and corrupts the words of the righteous.

⁹You must not oppress a foreign resident; you yourselves know how it feels to be a foreigner because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.



THE SETTING

After freeing the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery and delivering them safely across the Red Sea, God established a covenant with them to be His special possession (Ex. 19) and presented them with the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20). For the next several chapters, including these verses from Exodus 23, God continued to lay out His expectations and guidelines for His people.

ENGAGE

(15 MINUTES)



GET INTO THE STUDY

ENGAGE: Begin the session with one or more of the **Engage Options** on the next page. (This is optional. If you'd rather skip the **Engage Options**, just begin with the first discussion question.)

SAY: Justice is what most people look for in any society. Unfortunately, the reality of injustice is just as common. We all want justice when we've been wronged, but are we as ready to step up when it's someone else needing justice? God calls us to be His champions for justice.

DISCUSS: Direct students to discuss the question, "Have you ever spoken up when something happened you knew wasn't right?"

GUIDE: Call attention to **The Point**. Explain that this is the key idea to keep in mind throughout the session.

ITEM
8

Leader Pack: Use the *Ready* unit poster to promote the six-week series.

ITEM
9

Leader Pack: Use the *Defend* poster during the session. Ask your students what emotions they feel when they see the image.

THE POINT

God wants us to defend those who can't defend themselves.

READ: Read and summarize **The Bible Meets Life** for your group.

Every few years, a trial takes place that captures nationwide attention. The case may involve a celebrity or some sensational murder, and it seems to be the only thing the national media talks about. And when the jury finally reaches a verdict, we hear people react strongly when the decision is not guilty! "How could they let that person go free when all the evidence and testimony pointed to their guilt? They got away with murder!"

We've all had those moments when we marveled at a blatant lack of justice. But many examples of injustice go unnoticed: negligence, abuse, oppression, murder—the list goes on. Injustice often hits hardest against those who are unable to speak up for themselves. Who sees that justice is done for those without a voice? God is a God of justice, and He calls us to practice justice as well. In the Old Testament, we see clear-cut direction on how we should practice justice and speak up for others.

PRAY: Transition into the session by praying that the Holy Spirit would foster a passion in your students for people affected by injustice.

Engage Options

► Lead with Action

Place a stack of 10 shirts in front of 4-5 students. Announce that the first person to put on all of his/her shirts wins. Make this challenge easy for most of the students, making sure their stacks contains large t-shirts. The last stack should be more difficult to put on. For example, tape one shirt so the student has to untape it to put the shirt on, include an extremely small shirt, or pin one shirt to another. Place a regular-sized shirt on top so the student can't see that all the shirts are hindered. Make it unnoticeable at first that one stack is more difficult. Say, **"We often desire for life to be fair; however, life can be quite unfair. Are you ready and willing to stand up for the injustice in our community, country, and world?"**

OPTION: *Locate a person who is currently imprisoned for his or her faith. Ask your students to write letters, share on social media, or anything else to bring awareness to the injustice.*

► Lead with Atmosphere

Place pictures of what an unborn child looks like in the womb, from one to 40 weeks. Do some research. Next to each week, post facts about the progress of the child at that point based on your research. (For example, at 16 weeks of gestation, babies develop hearing.) Your goal is to humanize the baby as much as possible. Say, **"This baby is a human from the very beginning. But in our country, some say that this baby doesn't have any rights until he or she is born or has developed into a certain stage in the womb. This child cannot speak for itself, but we can defend this child and stand up against the injustice that others try to inflict upon him or her."**

OPTION: *Place images around the room of people who are imprisoned for their faith in foreign countries.*

► Lead with Media

Search the Internet for "Natalia's Story." Ask, **"Are you going to stand around ignoring the truth, or are you going to fight for God's beloved creation—people?"**

STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: God wants us to defend those who can't defend themselves.

¹ "You must not spread a false report. Do not join the wicked to be a malicious witness." ² "You must not follow a crowd in wrongdoing. Do not testify in a lawsuit and go along with a crowd to pervert justice." ³ "Do not show favoritism to a poor person in his lawsuit."

—EXODUS 23:1-3

EXODUS 23:1-3

SAY: Justice is an ideal in every society. And one way to carry out justice is to fight against deception. That's the focus of the commands recorded in Exodus 23:1-3.

GUIDE: Lead students to understand why we must defend the lives of innocent unborn children.

I can't read these verses without thinking about justice for the unborn children of our world. Why? Because one false report that has circulated for years is the claim that an unborn child is only "tissue" or a "product of conception." Abortion isn't an ethical or moral issue, the argument goes, because it doesn't involve "real" human beings.

Advancements in technology have shed light on this false report. Today we have access to 4-D ultrasounds, which is great because 85 percent of women who benefit from this technology decide to keep their babies—it's clear that what's inside the womb is a human life.

- ▶ The heart begins to beat between the 18th and 24th day after conception.
- ▶ Brain waves have been recorded as early as 45 days after conception.
- ▶ At eight weeks of pregnancy, the baby possesses the unique fingerprints he or she will have for life.
- ▶ At 11-12 weeks, a baby can suck its thumb.

SAY: Given these truths, why have so many embraced a "false report" about abortion? Because the lie protects them from unwanted consequences and responsibility. Injustice occurs when people are willing to seek their freedom at the expense of someone else's life. It's easy to go along with the culture on controversial issues. But God's command is clear: Don't follow a crowd in their wrongdoing (v. 2). Our call is equally clear: stand up for others who can't stand up for themselves.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the questions, "Why is it so easy to go along with what a crowd is doing, even when it's not what you would normally do?"

Commentary

EXODUS 23:1-3

These were exciting days in the history of Israel. God was fulfilling His promise to Abraham to make his descendants a great nation (Gen. 12:2). Centuries of enslavement in Egypt by cruel oppressors came to an end after Moses led the people victoriously toward the promised land. The newly liberated nation, however, needed laws and a system of justice to guide their relationships with God, one another, and foreigners. God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:1-17), then expanded these basic principles with specific commands. Our passage for this study focuses on implications of the Ninth Commandment, "Do not give false testimony against your neighbor" (v. 16).

The term *false report* refers to slanderous information about a person or persons, unjustly undermining their standing before the law or community. The warning was for the person who originated the lie and for all who might carry the false charges to others. The prohibition intends to prevent the false accusation and punishment of innocent persons.

Truth is the basis of a just and fair judicial proceeding. The attitudes people form about others can influence their perception of the truth. Exodus 23:1-2 specifically warns individuals not to join the wicked or go along with a crowd to pervert justice. Peer pressure and prejudice can intimidate a witness to give false information or fail to provide information that would vindicate someone falsely accused. God instructed the Israelites to reflect a basic attribute of His own nature: God is impartial and not a respecter of persons in judgment (Deut. 10:17).

The Old Testament required two or three witnesses to establish a matter (Deut. 19:15), but even that requirement would not prevent evil individuals from conspiring to lie against an innocent person.

A different temptation regarding false reports appears in Exodus 23:3. The motivation for corruption of justice in the previous verses was clearly malicious. Here, however, people are warned not to show favoritism to a poor person in legal matters. God warned His people not to show favoritism to someone just because they felt sorry for the person. God warned against a favorable prejudice that might lead to exonerating a guilty person. Impartiality requires telling the truth and should not be compromised by either malice or sympathy. Truth is truth and should not be corrupted to compensate someone for other disadvantages in life. Justice should be blind to the wealth or poverty of an individual. Other reasons for favorable prejudice include family loyalty, friendship, or support for a common cause. None of these can justify lies as a means of avoidance of punishment for the guilty.

TIP: Remind students that justice should never be based on emotion or feelings. Justice should always be rooted in Scripture.

STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: God wants us to defend those who can't defend themselves.

⁶ "You must not deny justice to a poor person among you in his lawsuit.
⁷ Stay far away from a false accusation. Do not kill the innocent and the just, because I will not justify the guilty.

—EXODUS 23:6-7

EXODUS 23:6-7

READ: Read aloud or call for a volunteer read the following:

Let me state the obvious: it is a great injustice—a sin—to kill anyone. People have tried to justify abortion or the taking of any life they deem non-viable or unproductive, but Scripture does not give us that option. Abortion is not just a topic for casual discussion, and many Bible study groups would rather talk about something else. But there are lives at stake. This is not simply a theological or theoretical issue. This issue impacts family members, neighbors, friends, classmates, and your church.

- ▶ **More than one out of every five pregnancies ends in abortion.**
- ▶ **Sixty-five percent of all women who have abortions identify themselves as Christians.**
- ▶ **Since Roe v. Wade in 1973, more than 56 million babies have been killed in the U.S. through abortion. (For some context, the total population of California is around 40 million.)**

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, **"What is the first thought that comes to your mind when you hear that 56 million babies have been aborted?"**

SAY: But many more lives are affected than just these innocent ones who are destroyed. Every abortion sets off a chain reaction of loss. The lives of the parents are affected. Untold numbers of people deal with the guilt of knowing they have had, participated in, or supported an abortion. All these repercussions are sobering. The gravity of the situation is magnified when we consider God's response: "I will not justify the guilty" (v. 7). Those who contribute to the death of an innocent person become guilty themselves because of their unjust actions. God takes sin and injustice seriously.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, **"How does this passage influence your response to issues such as abortion?"**

DO: Direct students to complete the **Action Point**, "For Every Action."

For Every Action

When you are wronged, what is your first response? Form a group with two or three other people and talk through your answers.

Commentary

EXODUS 23:6-7

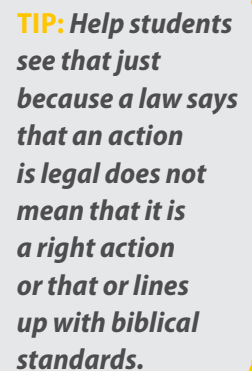
Verse 6 examines justice and the poor from a different perspective than verse 3, where the Israelites were forbidden to show them favorable prejudice. The more common instances of injustice regarding the poor would involve taking advantage of their weakness and inability to protect themselves from wealthier opponents in lawsuits.

A key term in verse 6 is *justice*. In a very general sense, justice could be defined as a decision rightly decided on the basis of law. However, the Bible is more specific in its definition of justice. According to Scripture, justice is rooted in the nature of God. Laws must conform to His revealed moral principles. Thus, modern Christians should be aware of the dangers presented by laws that do not conform to God's character. When the law of a nation and the law of God conflict, Christians must be able to discern how to put the kingdom of God first. As we see in the following verse, the sanctity of human life demonstrates a clear difference between man's law and God's law.

God warned the Israelites not to kill the innocent and the just. The Hebrew adjective translated "innocent" here refers to a person who is free from punishment or obligations due to criminal or negligent behavior. The term can be used of a person generally characterized as godly or righteous (Ps. 24:4). In our passage, the word refers to a person who has committed no crime and deserves no punishment. The adjective was used by the writer of 2 Kings to describe the victims of a particularly heinous form of idolatrous worship that included the sacrifice of children to pagan idols during the reign of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah (2 Kings 21:16). The killing of an innocent, unborn child can never be declared just according to God's laws.

Today, abortion is legal in certain cases according to human laws, but abortion is always immoral and illegal according to God's law. The Bible, not human legislation, determines the definition of justice. God warned of divine retribution for those who pervert justice and harm the innocent: "I will not justify the guilty (or wicked)." Just as surely as Manasseh's slaughter of innocents contributed to judgment for Judah (2 Kings 21:10-16), so God will punish any nation that fails to protect the innocent and just.

Today, we should support crisis pregnancy centers that provide truth and support for women and their unborn children. We should work to educate others and press for legislation protecting unborn children. We should seek to protect all human life from conception to natural death, in opposition to those who would unjustly take life they consider to be unwanted, too expensive, or embarrassing.



TIP: Help students see that just because a law says that an action is legal does not mean that it is a right action or that it lines up with biblical standards.

STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: God wants us to defend those who can't defend themselves.

⁸ You must not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and corrupts the words of the righteous. ⁹ You must not oppress a foreign resident; you yourselves know how it feels to be a foreigner because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.

—EXODUS 23:8-9

EXODUS 23:8-9

SAY: One group that is susceptible to oppression and unfair treatment in any culture is the outsider—someone who is “not like us.” God gave the Israelites a strong reason for treating foreigners with fairness. Up until very recently, they had been outsiders. They had been oppressed and unfairly treated in Egypt. God called them to remember their own experiences. Implicit in this command is the heart of the Golden Rule: treat others as you want to be treated.

SUMMARIZE: Lead students to think about the infinite worth and value of every human being.

We place value on the object by virtue of who created it. God took His stamp, His image, and implanted it on every human being on this planet. That gives each human being infinite value and worth.

We never lose our value in His eyes. Even when our lives are full of sin—even when we have been guilty of oppressing others—He steps in and removes our guilt when we repent. Because God is holy He will not justify our guilt, but Jesus—the One with no sin or guilt—took our sin and guilt upon Himself. He removes our sin and offers us forgiveness in Christ.

We can and should apply that same value to others. We do just that when we:

- ▶ **work tirelessly to stop the great injustice of abortion;**
- ▶ **let those who are struggling under the guilt of knowing they have had past experiences with abortion know that God's grace is available for them, if they will only come to Him in humble submission and repentance;**
- ▶ **treat all people fairly and work for the justice of others.**

SAY: Most of all, we treat others with the value they deserve when we point them to the freedom we all need in Christ.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, “How can we help defend those who can't defend themselves?”

Commentary

EXODUS 23:8-9


Greed is a frequent motive and means for denying justice to the innocent. A bribe is the offer of material reward to someone who can produce a favorable result. Once again, the standard is God's righteous nature and refusal to receive a bribe (Deut. 10:17). The use of bribes is typically a way of denying justice to the poor (v. 6) because wealthy people can afford to offer what the poor cannot. God warned Israel against corruption by allowing greed and bribes to control their judicial process, but indictments by prophets such as Isaiah (Isa. 1:23) and Micah (Mic. 3:11) show the nation's failures.

Normally, we want justice to be blind and unprejudiced, but a bribe blinds the clear-sighted. The truth should be clear, based on the evidence, but the introduction of bribes blots out the truth and corrupts the words of the righteous. One who ordinarily might testify truthfully is corrupted by the acceptance of a bribe. Modern legal systems based on biblical law criminalize the offer and acceptance of bribes because they corrupt justice.

God declared that standards of justice for Israelites and foreigners must be the same. Impartiality required Israel to dispense equal justice to everyone regardless of their national origin. As an incentive to treat foreigners justly, God reminded Israel of when they were foreigners in the land of Egypt. They were not treated justly in Egypt and they knew what oppression based on race felt like.

God warned the Israelites not to be like the Egyptians and oppress foreigners when they became the ruling authority. The Hebrew verb behind "oppress" literally means "to squeeze" and was used elsewhere in Scripture to describe the donkey pressing Balaam's foot against a wall (Num. 22:25). The more common metaphorical use of the word in the Old Testament refers to cruel treatment.

God's protections for foreigners revealed Him as the Creator of all peoples. The absolute principles of justice and truth, based on God's nature, meant there should never be one standard for Israel and a different standard for foreigners. God's revelation of law to the nation of Israel foreshadowed the future establishment of the kingdom of God available to all who would place their faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ. Historically, the nation of Israel failed to uphold the principles of truth and justice consistently and was judged by God for their failures. As a result, God promised to send a Ruler who would rule justly and dispense justice perfectly (Isa. 9:7).



TIP: Ask students to share about times in their lives when they were the outsiders.

TIP: *Some of the topics in this series can hit close to home for your students. Some of your students may need further counsel about these issues. Don't be afraid to ask for help from your church leadership if you don't have an answer or you feel a student needs more counsel than you can provide.*

APPLY IT

SAY: Consider what you can do this week to address the pain of wrong decisions and defend the lives of others.

READ: Ask for a volunteer to read aloud a few ways students can take what they have learned and **Apply It**.

- ▶ **Pray.** Pray each day for the thousands of unborn babies who are at risk right now. Pray for the women and families that have been affected by abortion. Pray for our politicians and officials to enact pro-life legislation.
- ▶ **Extend grace.** Show love and grace to those who have had past experiences with abortion or other acts of injustice. Lovingly point them to the grace of Christ.
- ▶ **Get involved.** Consider writing letters to your congressional representative and other elected officials. Donate money to a crisis-pregnancy center. Volunteer at a center or support an unwed mother as she carries her baby to term.

GUIDE: Lead students to consider which of the three suggested responses to the Bible study most closely applies to them and their current circumstances.

ASK: Which of these responses do you personally need to focus on most as you live this session out? Allow time for responses.

WRAP UP

PRAY: Close in prayer, interceding for the innocent—that God would protect them and shield them from injustice.

ASK: Ask students about last week's **Live It Out** options. Discuss any responses and encourage students as they choose to apply the Bible to their lives.

GUIDE: Encourage students to complete one or both of the **Live It Out** activities for the week. Let them know you will discuss them next time you meet.



For **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife

LEADER LIVE IT OUT

Before the session, challenge yourself to grow with your students through this Live It Out.

Called To Action | Psalm 82:3-4

“Social justice” has become a term that is synonymous for doing good or helping others. It is a broad term that covers awareness of human trafficking to helping supply clean water. Whatever the need, we as Christians can never truly be a source of hope until the gospel accompanies the filling of that need. This week, talk with your family and friends and pick one social justice topic and plan a mission day where you raise awareness about it. Your students have the same challenge. Consider joining with them. Make sure that the gospel is as much a part of that day as is the social justice aspect.

Check out the plan below:

- ▶ **Choose a topic of social justice (abortion, human trafficking, bullying, poverty, school violence, etc.).**
- ▶ **Meet with your family and/or group to discuss how to get involved.**
- ▶ **Pick a date for the mission day.**
- ▶ **Make a plan to include the gospel message, making it the focus of the fight against the injustice.**
- ▶ **After the event, ask to share your experience with your church.**

Notes:

ONE CONVERSATION™

Use these discussion starters to help foster a spiritual conversation with your family.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE: Justice is what most people look for in any society. Unfortunately, the reality of injustice is just as common. We all want justice when we’ve been wronged, but are we as ready to step up when it’s someone else needing justice? We cannot ignore injustice because our apathy or inaction is simply another form of injustice. We can’t right every wrong, but God calls us to be His champions for justice.

Scripture: Exodus 23:1-3,6-9

STUDENTS

THE POINT: God wants us to defend those who can’t defend themselves.

- Discuss with your student some of the injustices you see in your community and how you can take action to help.

Discuss the following quote: “It takes great courage to open one’s heart and mind to the tremendous injustice and suffering in our world.”¹ —Vincent A. Gallagher

1. Vincent A. Gallagher, *The Truth Cost of Low Prices: The Violence of Globalization* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2006), 96.

LIVE IT OUT: Your student has been encouraged to do one or

both Live It Out activities in the Personal Study Guide. Here are some suggested ways to help your student:

*If your student chooses to do **Called To Action**:*

- Help your student determine what social justice topic to choose.
- Commit to serve alongside your student.

*If your student chooses to do **Do More**:*

- Encourage your student to stand up against bullying.
- Be an encouragement to students, or even other adults, who may be bullied in your community or church.