



Let's pray:

November 2023

How can we pray well as we head into this new month?



Justice Matters

'But that's not fair! I washed the dishes two days ago, he hasn't done them in ages.'

'It's not fair – we all obeyed the rules, but they didn't.'

Whether you're a seven-year-old seeing injustice in dishwashing or an adult reflecting on the 'Downing Street lockdown parties,' we all have this yearning to be treated fairly, treated well, – we want to be treated in a just manner, because justice really matters.

'But,' you might ask, 'Does it really matter that much? Isn't 'justice' just a buzzword that people have started using recently?' To which I would say, "Good question, let's investigate."

Come back with me to the land of Egypt in about the fourteenth century BC. You may recall that centuries before, Joseph, his father and brothers had come to live here. They lived prosperously and increased greatly in number so much so that generations later when a new king, Pharaoh, came to power he felt so threatened that he put them into hard slavery (Exodus 1).

During this time, God raised up Moses who challenged Pharaoh to let the people go. Time and time again he asked, but the king would not relent. In the meantime the Israelites were treated even harsher, making them extremely vulnerable. But then, when the time seemed even more desperate, God acted decisively – we now know this time as Passover. On that night, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and ordered that all the Israelites leave immediately – thus began the long journey back to the land of Israel. The Israelites were now free, no longer living in cruel and unsafe conditions. God had acted decisively to free them. He acted in a just manner. **Justice really matters to God.**



Now one of the interesting things we find as the Bible unfolds is that the people of Israel are instructed to continually look back to this incident when they are being informed on how to treat their most at-risk people. It goes like this, because God is just in the way He treated you when you were vulnerable in Egypt you must be just in the way you treat the most vulnerable among you.

“Do not mistreat or oppress a refugee, for you were foreigners in Egypt.” (Exodus 22:21)

“Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this. (Deuteronomy 24:17-18)

Justice is at the very heart of the Exodus story because it's at the very heart of who God is.

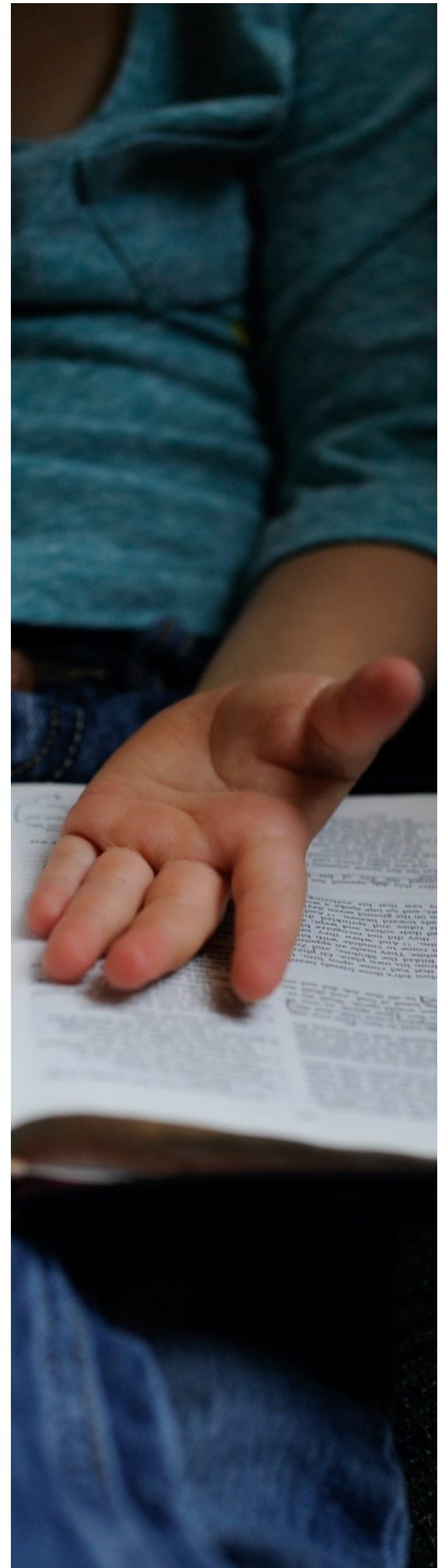
As the Bible unfolds further God keeps on emphasising His care for those on the margins and that He wants us to meet their needs. He wants us to make their problems our problems.

‘And the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah: “This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. 10 Do not oppress the **widow** or the **fatherless**, the **foreigner** or the **poor**. Do not plot evil against each other.’ (Zechariah 7:8-10)

‘He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’ (Micah 6:8)

In Matthew 25:34-40 Jesus emphasises His great joy when people meet the needs of others. James 1:27 tells us that true walking with Jesus is ‘to look after widows and orphans...’ – those who lacked stability, security and support.

Running right through the heart of the Bible, like the centre of a stick of seaside rock, is justice.



Every 15 minutes in the UK, a child or teenager will come into care. The reasons why they're unable to remain with their birth family are vast and varied; every child's story is unique. But these children need the same things that all children need to thrive. They need **stability** and **consistency**, with as little disruption as possible. They need to **feel safe**, both in their environment and with the people who care for them. They need **love and support** from a caregiver who they feel they can trust, who will help them develop their sense and understanding of their **identity**.

But right now, there just aren't enough people who can care for these children and young people. Right across the UK there's a significant shortage of foster carers. Nearly a quarter of young people in care are over the age of 16, yet there are limited high-quality options for accommodating these young people in safe, appropriate places. There are children waiting more than 18 months for an adoptive family who can offer them the care they need.

The result of this shortage is that children are experiencing multiple moves in short spaces of time because a long-term home can't be found for them. There are children who are being moved far, far away from everything and everyone they know, because there aren't any carers in their local area. There are children who have to be separated from their brothers and sisters, because there are no available carers who can look after them together. There are children waiting long periods for news, for answers, for permanence. These outcomes are worlds away from what we know these children and teenagers need; from what we'd long for them to have; from what we know will set them up to thrive.

This itself is injustice; this for any child is injustice.

But we know that **injustice has layers**; and there are intersections where discrimination and inequality hit from more than one side. For children and young people who are Black, who are part of a sibling group, who are older or who have a disability, things can be even harder. Many are experiencing long waits. Many are experiencing multiple moves. Many are being moved far from all they know. Many are being separated from their brothers and sisters.

As God's people, it's our responsibility to respond to the needs of these children. As God's people, we must seek justice.





Points for Prayer

Pray for Black children in care, who are disproportionately represented in the care system. While Black children make up 5% of the general population, they make up 7% of the population of children in care.

Pray for children over the age of four, for whom it may be harder to find an adoptive family when this has been deemed the best decision for that child.

Pray for teenagers in care. 25% of children in care are over the age of 16, yet there are limited high-quality options available to them. Many teenagers are being housed in accommodation that is entirely unsuitable for them.

Pray for siblings who risk separation due to a shortage of carers who can look after more than one child.

Pray for those who wait longer for an adult who can meet their unique needs.

Let's pray boldly that the Church will respond to the needs of these children and young people. Let's ask God boldly that He might show us what we, as individuals, couples, families and church congregations, can do to play our part.