



Belonging Together **on Earth**

Discussion Guide

PART FIVE IN THE TEACHING SERIES ON BIBLICAL JUSTICE BY SCOTT HIGGINS...

On Earth

as it is in Heaven

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On Earth as it is in Heaven

Discussion Guide

Rev. Scott Higgins

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After concluding at Baptist World Aid, Scott founded A Just Cause, a delegated body of Australian Baptist Ministries, designed to equip churches to pursue justice issues within Australia. He also initiated Converge, an annual gathering of Baptist leaders from across Australia to lobby Federal Parliamentarians on issues of justice; and served on the Boards of Micah Challenge and Stop the Traffik.

Scott lives in Newcastle with his wife Sandy and two of their three children, and is an active member of Hamilton Baptist Church.

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Introducing Belonging Together on Earth

Jesus was asked by his disciples how they should pray, and he replied 'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' (Matthew 6:10)

The kingdom of God was not something that would arrive in the future. It commenced and began being realised in the life of the disciples and the early Christian church. Jesus calls his followers to be a community in which everyone is included and is valued for their unique gifts and contribution.

On Earth as it is Heaven

In 2018 Baptist Care SA, in conjunction with Baptist Churches of South Australia, produced the 'On Earth as it is Heaven' resource on Biblical Justice that focuses on how Christians can 'do justice' in contemporary Australia. On Earth provides practical examples for churches and individuals to connect with Baptist Care SA's current work with four vulnerable populations: people experiencing homelessness, people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, people living with mental health conditions, and people exiting the prison system. In 2019 we are pleased to add a fifth group for whom justice is imperative, namely people living with disabilities.

Belonging Together on Earth

Our new resource is called 'Belonging Together on Earth' and builds our biblical understanding of justice around nurturing inclusive community within churches, for people living with disability and their carers.

Disability touches almost every Australian at some point in their life. Jesus spent a lot of time ministering to people with disabilities, so it is only natural that as followers of Jesus we would also pay attention to including and supporting people with disabilities in our church communities. The 'Belonging Together on Earth' resource will help you to do this. The resource includes:

- *Background:* may be used for sermon research, or as notes for small group exploration on the topic
- *Sermon Outline:* assists the preacher to construct their sermon. It is based around the encounter between Jesus and a blind man called Bartimaeus, in the Gospel of Mark. The guide provides material to use in a sermon and describes an approach that can be used rather than an outline or full text
- *Discussion Guide:* useful for small group study or a larger workshop
- *Prayer Card:* this card can be printed out (or ask Baptist Care SA for printed copies) and distributed to every person at church/home group. Encourage people to place the card on their fridge or another place where they will see it each day, and pray one prayer point each day for the coming week
- *Additional downloadable resources:* stories, video clips and ways to connect with the ministry/work of Baptist Care SA. Visit www.baptistcaresa.org.au/belonging-together

The purpose of this resource is to help people in churches to be more aware of disability, and consider their facilities and practices so they can find more/new ways to be intentionally inclusive. Ideally, the sermon and the Bible study go hand-in-hand, with the sermon either preceding or following a church-wide Bible study in midweek small groups.

We encourage leaders to include space for the exploration of personal and church-wide practical actions. Set aside time to hear the voice of people living with disabilities in your church. Make use of additional resources and speakers available from Baptist Care SA to support your exploration and locate points of mission and ministry connection. You may choose to conduct an accessibility audit of your church building and practices relating to various disabilities, and then agree on some actions to implement going forward. You may be surprised at how easy this is and how helpful it can be, because accessibility actions are often no cost or low cost, yet they have profound impact! There are audit suggestions and accessibility guides available from the Baptist Care SA website that you can use or adapt: www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections

Notes for Group Leaders

You will need to guide the discussion:

- Remind people they are to hear each person's starting perspective in their answers to questions 1 and 2. If participants seek to launch into debate during these questions, the group leader needs to bring them back to the task of 'just listening to one another'.
- Encourage people to own their perspective by using first person language, "I think...", "I feel..." etc. When participants use generalised language such as "We think..." or "We feel..." or make categorical statements such as "All disabled people are..." it has the potential to spark debate and shut down discussion, whereas using "I" language opens discussion.
- Make sure every participant is invited to contribute without pushing it too hard. Your group will have some talkative participants and others who are quieter. It can help to invite quieter people into the conversation with an opening like, "It would be great to hear what Jenny thinks about this. Please tell us your point of view Jenny."
- There is a lot of ground to be covered in each study, so allow at least 60 minutes to enable free conversation that keeps the discussion flowing, so you are able to get to the end of the study.

Belonging Together on Earth

Disability is part of the human condition. Almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life, and those who survive to old age will experience increasing difficulties in functioning. Most extended families have a disabled member, and many non-disabled people take responsibility for supporting and caring for their relatives and friends with disabilities. Every era has faced the moral and political issue of how best to include and support people with disabilities. (World Health Organisation)¹

In recent years, disability has been the focus of significant attention in Australia. Governments have developed multi-year strategies to improve the inclusion of people with a disability in everyday life; the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has been launched,^a and a Royal Commission into the abuse of people with disabilities has been commenced.^b

In this study we will take time to consider the experiences of people with disabilities and consider the ways our church can be a more inclusive and caring community.

1. One in five Australians live with a disability,² that is, some kind of physical, emotional or mental impairment that restricts their capacity to participate in everyday activities. This means that almost every Australian will be impacted by disability at some stage in their life, either through experiencing disability themselves, or being a friend or family member of someone living with disability. **How has disability impacted you?**
2. Watch the 6 minute video about Marty Turios at <https://vimeo.com/120747574>. **What emotions did you feel while viewing this story? What did you find most encouraging and/or challenging in Marty's story?**
3. Read John 9:1-7. When Jesus' disciples asked "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" they reflected an attitude that was common in the ancient world. People with disabilities were considered cursed by the gods/God as punishment for something they or a family member had done. **What impact might this way of thinking have on a person with a disability? In what ways do Australians attach stigma to people with disabilities? What impacts might this have?**
4. Read Luke 14:1-12. People with disabilities feature prominently in the Gospels. Jesus healed people whose physical or mental condition made it difficult for them to participate fully in the life of their community. This included people who were blind, unable to walk, had deformities in their limbs, were deaf, and more. These healings were signs the kingdom of God was arriving in Jesus' ministry. Yet healings weren't the only way the arrival of God's kingdom was signalled. In Luke 14, Jesus counsels people who have structured their communities in ways

a. For more information see NDIS, 'How the NDIS Works', <<https://www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/how-ndis-works>>

b. For more information see Royal Commission into Violence, 'Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability', <<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>>

that exclude people living with poverty or disability, to new ways of being community that are intentionally inclusive. **Think about your church. Are people with disabilities part of your congregation? How are they currently participating in the life of your community? What barriers may exist to their full participation? How can your church become more intentionally inclusive?**

5. The New Testament celebrates the idea that we are all gifted by the Holy Spirit to build up the church (e.g. 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:1-6).^c This suggests people with disabilities should be present in our churches and they should be received as bringing unique gifts for the building up of our churches. **In what ways are people with disabilities a gift to you and to your church? How are people with disabilities participating in various ministries of the church? How are they represented in church leadership teams?**
6. On the basis of what you have considered in this study, brainstorm how your church can become more accessible for people with disabilities. Now brainstorm actions your group/ church can take to address accessibility issues and become intentionally inclusive of people living with disabilities. Select one or two suggestions and action these.

Baptist Care SA has developed 10 practical guides to promote disability inclusion that will support your Bible study and action plans. They were developed by people living with disability and give practical and simple tips for your consideration. The guides and additional resources are free to download from the Baptist Care SA website www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections

c. For more information see Baptist Care SA '[Guide 10: A theology of belonging](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections)' which explores this familiar passage with detailed focus on 'indispensable' and 'weakness'. Found via www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections

References

1. World Health Organization & World Bank, *World Report on Disability 2011*, World Health Organization, 2011, p.3, viewed 7 May 2019, <<http://www.who.int/iris/handle/10665/44575>>
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *'Disability, Aging and Carers: Summary of Findings, Key Findings'*, 2016, viewed 7 May 2019, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0>>

On Earth as it is in Heaven

In 2018 Baptist Care SA in conjunction with Baptist Churches of South Australia produced the 'On Earth as it is Heaven' resource on Biblical justice which considers the ways Christians can 'do justice' in contemporary Australia. It explores what the Bible says about justice and the way Jesus teaches his followers to live a just life.

'Human beings are created in God's image, are the object of God's great love, and the beneficiaries of God's great gift of the earth and its resources. Justice demands that we treat each other in a manner befitting this.'

The Teaching Series includes the following downloadable components:

- Introduction
- Background Document
- Sermon Outlines
- Discussion Guide
- Prayer Cards
- Justice Survey Tool – for pastors/church leadership to use to help their church become more justice centred

The [On Earth as it is Heaven](#) resource components can be used individually, as a package or in a variety of combinations.

There is a series of 4 sermons building on each other, or a one-off sermon...

- Sermon 1: The world we want to see
- Sermon 2: The justice of Jesus
- Sermon 3: Where does the problem lie?
- Sermon 4: How can we do justice?

'On Earth as it is Heaven' provides practical examples for churches and individuals to connect with Baptist Care SA's current work with four vulnerable populations. The Discussion Guide and Prayer Cards focus on these four groups, and client clips and stories are provided for inclusion in sermons. The groups are:

- **People from a refugee background**
- **People experiencing homelessness**
- **People living with mental health issues**
- **People exiting the prison system**

***Prayer Cards**

Printed copies of the cards are available FREE of charge from Baptist Care SA. If you are intending to use these in your church or small groups, please contact us and we'll supply as many copies as you need. Contact our Church Support Team via churchsupport-team@baptistcaresa.org.au to receive your copies.

For more information about 'On Earth as it is in Heaven' visit www.baptistcaresa.org.au/onearth

Connections Resources for inclusive church communities

Our communities are not to be places where we merely share space, but they are to be places where we proactively work for one another's welfare.

Inclusion is not about creating more programs, it is about the culture of our churches reflected in the language we use, accessibility of our churches, and creating opportunities for full participation of everyone so we can all contribute and grow our gifts.

As part of the Connections project, Baptist Care SA held focus groups and had a steering group for the project of people with lived experience of disability and carers who co-designed the content and provided photos for the 10 practical guides for inclusion. These guides use the voices of people living with disability to provide their top tips for inclusion, providing information, personal stories and examples that work for local churches.

1. **Disability awareness:** Care for others
2. **Intentional inclusion:** We are better together
3. **Accessible church:** Disability is not the issue, accessibility is
4. **Effective communication:** Relationships start with communication
5. **Creating support:** Look out for one another's interests
6. **Carers' perspective:** Welcome and understanding
7. **Managing challenging behaviour:** Working together to find a solution
8. **Connected community:** Promote your activities
9. **Autism-friendly church:** Engage, affirm, challenge
10. **A theology of belonging:** 'All one in Christ Jesus'.

The [Connections Resource](#) page contains additional resources referred to in the guides covering:

- Websites resourcing inclusive communities
- Resources for churches
- Audit tools for inclusive communities
- Communication resources
- Transport in South Australia
- Carers support
- Managing challenging behaviour
- Autism friendly church

For more information about the Connections Resource visit www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections



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