



Building Kingdom Communities.

Discussion Booklet.



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How to use this booklet

To prepare for each topic of discussion read the two pages of 'Pre-reading' notes in your booklet before you come to the discussion session.

These notes have been collated and adapted from the **On Earth as it is in Heaven** and **Belonging Together on Earth** resources published by Baptist Care SA. Both of those free resources can be downloaded from <https://baptistcaresa.org.au/resources/>. They will enable you to explore the biblical foundation for this study and can inform your discussion on each topic.

Before the first week please read the Introduction to become familiar with the purpose of this study series.

Introduction

Building communities that reflect God

The followers of Jesus are called to form communities of grace and love in which people find welcome, inclusion, hope, restoration and healing – communities of shalom. Jesus suggests such communities will bear witness to the world through their loving deeds that they love, worship and serve Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:13-15).¹

Introduction²

Human beings are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). They are the object of God's love and the beneficiaries of God's gift of the earth and its resources.³

Humankind's calling was to spread across the earth, building communities that reflect the character of God and develop the earth in such a way that it will continue to be a source of nourishment to all living creatures. This vision underpins the rest of the biblical story.

Jesus called the people of Israel to recover this vision. He saw in his disciple group the community of faithful love and stewardship that Israel and humankind were called to be. His was a community in which forgiveness was found in abundance; the naked were clothed; the hungry fed; the sick comforted; the sinner challenged; the outcast embraced (e.g. Matthew 5-7; Matthew 25:31-46).

Jesus' community was one in which love preceded merit, inclusion preceded repentance and grace preceded obedience. His was a community in which the righteousness of the Pharisees (religious leaders), which demanded observance of a complex set of rules and rituals, was rejected for the greater righteousness of love, which saw beyond the letter of the law to the fulfilment of its purpose, that is, the creation of a community that reflected God.

This vision carried over into the earliest post-resurrection Christian communities. They were to be places where social status had no bearing on the regard with which people were held; in which the widow, the poor and the orphan found care; and in which the "works of the flesh" – those behaviours that saw human beings exploiting, abusing or harming other – were replaced with the "fruit of the Spirit": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

The core calling of humankind then is to build worshipping communities that reflect the character of the One they worship and seek the well-being of every person and every creature with which they share the earth. The church as a community should value and practise inclusion, generosity, love and grace.

Justice and mercy

It was the vision for what it means to be God's people that shaped the Old Testament approach to justice. Justice was to treat others in a fashion befitting their status as people created by God, loved by God, and beneficiaries of God's good gifts.⁴

Justice and mercy are integral to Christianity. When the prophet Micah posed the question, "What does the Lord require of you?" the answer was that God calls us to "...act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8) Jesus restated Micah's summary when he noted that for all their religiosity the Pharisees "neglected the more important matters of the law: justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23).⁵

The Bible has a distinctive approach to justice. Justice is part of God's work to set the world to rights. It involves retribution when wrong is done, but it is far broader than this. Justice is concerned not only with retribution against those who do wrong, but with the restoration of those who have been wronged. More often than not, when the Bible focuses on those who have been wronged it refers to the poor, the orphan, the widow and the foreigner residing in Israel. They are not wronged by petty crime, but by the people at the centre of society! The elites, whose lust for power and greed for material gain lead them to violate the right of all human beings to live faithfully before God, enjoy the good things God has provided on the earth, and enjoy the blessings of community.⁶

The discussion covers five topics and follows the Bible's lead by focusing upon groups of people who, more often than not, are found at the margins of our society.

Over the course of five topics, you have the opportunity to discuss what it means for us to build communities that image God and act with justice and mercy toward people.

Discussion topics

1. Communities of Justice – with a focus on people from a refugee and asylum seeker background
2. Communities of Liberation – with a focus on people experiencing homelessness
3. Communities of Shalom – with a focus on people living with mental health conditions
4. Communities of Inclusion – with a focus on people living with disabilities
5. Communities of Grace – with a focus on people exiting the prison system

1. Communities of Justice

Pre-reading: A call to community⁷

When God delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt and brought them to a land of their own, it was so that they might build a community unlike the one they had left and unlike the nations around them. Their life together was to be marked by three things:

1. Their relationship to God. They had been rescued by the one and only God and had become God's people. They were to worship and serve Yahweh and Yahweh alone.
2. Their relationship to each other. In Egypt they had been exploited, oppressed and subjected to indifference and cruelty. They were to be a community in which they valued each other and extended themselves to each other in love, compassion, kindness, generosity.
3. Their relationship to the land. God had brought them to "a land flowing with milk and honey" and divided it among them, so that every person would be sustained by the goodness of the land. Land was passed down from father to son.

Israel was to model life under the reign of God, so that other nations would see and turn to Yahweh. And so, these three relationships constitute the call of God not only on Israel, but on all humanity. We find our place in this world as the creatures of God, made to reflect God's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness etc. to one another, and commissioned to enjoy the abundance of the earth and to nurture it.

The injustice of no land⁸

The widow, the orphan, the resident foreigner, and the poor were those who were commonly exploited, oppressed and excluded from the good gifts of God, and particularly from enjoyment of land. ^a Land was passed from father to son. A widow who had no son, or who was unable to participate in a levirate^b marriage could find herself and her daughters suddenly landless, without an adult male to protect their interests which was the requirement of that day.

A child who was without a father or other adult male protector could likewise see their land stripped away. The resident foreigner, whether an Israelite of a different tribe or someone who was not an Israelite, similarly had no ancestral lands. And "the poor" most likely refers to peasant farmers who had either sold their land under the burden of heavy debt, or were on the verge of doing so.

Over against this injustice, it was incumbent on the people to ensure that the widow, the orphan, the resident foreigner and the poor had access to land, to the productivity of the land, and to the benefits of community.

^a Norbert Lohfink (1991) "Poverty in the Laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible", *Theological Studies* 52:34-50; Naomi Steinberg (2003), "Romancing the Widow: The Economic Distinctions between the *almānā*, the *ʾiššā-almānā* and the *ʿēšet-hammēt*." Paper presented at "Women and Property in Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean Societies," a conference at the Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University. Steinberg points out that three different terms were used for a widow in the Old Testament. The first described a widow who had access to her husband's ancestral lands through her son. The second was a widow who had access to her husband's ancestral lands through the law of levirate marriage. The third was a widow whose husband had no ancestral lands and she was therefore destitute. It is this third group, along with orphans who have no access to ancestral lands that are described in the biblical references to orphans and widows as those in need of justice.

^b Levirate marriage was the custom in ancient Israel operating 'on the assumption that the family as a whole was responsible to ensure the continuity of the line of a dead relative. If he had a brother it would fall to him to take the bereaved wife, and any children of the union would become the heirs of the dead man.' If there wasn't a brother then a near relative would marry the widow. JG Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis 12 – 50*, Inter-Varsity press, Nottingham, 1986, pp. 164-165

Justice and Jubilee⁹

The widow, orphan, and resident foreigner might never own farmland, but they were to be included in the corporate harvest. Every harvest season, landholders were to make only one pass of their field and to leave the edges unharvested. The landless were then free to move in and harvest what remained in the field (Deuteronomy 24:19-21). In addition to this, every third year the tithe that the Israelites collected was to be distributed to the widow, orphan, resident foreigner and the Levites (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-13).

These laws not only provide for the physical sustenance of the poor, the widow, the orphan and the foreigner, but also for their dignity. The creditor must not enter the home of the poor person, for that would shame him; the wages of day labourers must not be withheld for they need these to meet their daily need; the orphan, the widow and the foreigner were not to have charity doled out after the harvest was completed, but they were to participate in the harvest itself (Deuteronomy 24:10-22).

A group of laws around finance, debt and harvest were designed to help people keep their land during times of difficulty; to gain it back in the event they did have to sell; and to thrive in the meantime.

An Israelite who fell into hardship was to be offered an interest-free loan (Deuteronomy 23:19). This would allow them to meet their daily needs and set aside grains for the next planting.

Every seventh year was a Sabbath year. During this year all debts were to be forgiven and any Israelite who had sold themselves into tenured servitude was to be set free, and sent on their way with sufficient to start over (Deuteronomy 15:1-3, 7-15). In Leviticus 25:2-7 the land was also to be given a rest.

Every 50th year was proclaimed a 'jubilee' (Leviticus 25), the hallmark of which was the return of all land to the original families to which that land had been assigned. Any family that was forced to sell their land knew they would receive it back within a generation or two (Leviticus 25:10, 25-28).

Underlying these provisions was the assumption that the land belonged to God and was a gift for the benefit of everyone (Leviticus 25:23-25). This meant every Israelite was due access to their land and to the harvests. The provisions around debt, Jubilee and harvest were not optional extras for those who were kind and generous, but were required of all Israelites.

The poor also had a right to fair treatment in the courts (Deuteronomy 17:18-20).

The fundamental concept of justice found in the Old Testament Law, Writings and Prophets is that people should be treated as they deserve, not only when they do wrong, but at all times. Human beings are created in God's image, are the object of God's great love, and are 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.

Discussion on pre-reading

Question 1. Why did God make the provisions explained in the section on the importance of land?

Question 2. What surprised you or challenge you in the reading?

Question 3. What is a modern-day example of injustice in your local community?

People from a refugee background¹⁰

Introduction

We live in a world in which more than 79.5 million people have been displaced from their homes by violence and persecution at the end of 2019.¹¹ For example, in the last five years half the population of Syria has fled their homes, as their country is wracked by war.¹² In 2017, over 750,000 Rohingya people fled Myanmar (formerly Burma) after the military destroyed their villages and attacked and killed their people.¹³

More than 26 million people have not only fled their homes, but have fled their home-country. If they return, they face the prospect of death, ongoing destruction of their property, and imprisonment. These are some of the world's refugees and asylum seekers.¹⁴

In this study we explore the plight of and consider a biblically shaped response to the situation of people from a refugee and asylum seeker background.

Part A: Your Story

1. What are the first three words or phrases that come to mind when you think of someone who is a "refugee"? These could be your beliefs or what you heard others say about someone who is from a refugee or asylum seeker background. At this stage you are asked to simply listen respectfully to each other.

Card Activity

Your group leader will give you three cards. On each card write a word or phrase that sums up something you believe to be true about "refugees", and/or that you have heard people say about someone who is from a refugee or asylum seeker background. Share your responses with the group. Place your cards on the floor or on a table where everyone can see them. As each person shares you may find yourself wanting to discuss what they have written. At this stage you are asked to simply listen respectfully to each other.

2. Have you been a refugee or had anything to do with people from a refugee or asylum seeker background?
 - How has this shaped your views?
 - If you have had very little personal experience with people who are from a refugee or asylum seeker background, what are the main things influencing your current perspective?

Part B: Their Story

3. Read through the information box "The Global Refugee Crisis". Discuss:
 - What stands out to you?
 - How does this information challenge you?

The Global Refugee Crisis

What makes a person a refugee?

A refugee is a person who is outside his or her home country and unable to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution. She may be rich or poor, highly educated or with little formal education. The issue is not wealth or education, but persecution. Will this person be safe from unjust discrimination, imprisonment, violence, etc. if they return to their home country? A person is called a “refugee” only after the authorities in the country to which they have fled are satisfied that they would be persecuted if they returned to their home country.

A small number of nations host a large number of refugees

Refugees tend to flee to a country that borders their own. Given the top 5 source countries for refugees in 2019 are Syria, Venezuela (although people fleeing are technically classed as Venezuelans displaced abroad), Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar¹⁵, countries with which they share a border are also the countries that host the most refugees. In 2019 the ten nations hosting the most refugees were:

1. Turkey (borders Syria)	3.6 million
2. Jordan (borders Syria)	2.9 million*
3. Colombia (borders Venezuela)	1.8 million
4. Pakistan (borders Afghanistan)	1.4 million
5. Lebanon (borders Syria)	1.4 million*
6. Uganda (borders South Sudan)	1.4 million
7. Germany	1.1 million
8. Sudan (borders South Sudan)	1 million
9. Iran (borders Afghanistan)	980,000
10. Bangladesh (borders Myanmar)	854,800

*Includes Palestinian refugees under UNRWA mandate [https://www.unrwa.org/ Table](https://www.unrwa.org/Table)¹⁶

Australia, being an island/continent nation, somewhat distant from global conflict centres, hosts relatively few refugees (Australia ranked 45th in 2016, taking 42,000 refugees) and has relatively few people arriving at its borders seeking asylum.¹⁷

The burgeoning crisis

It is impossible for any single country or even a handful of countries to resolve the refugee crisis. Rather, we need the international community to work together to protect refugees from further persecution. The current international protection system assumes two things:

1. People fleeing persecution should be offered protection. No refugee should be sent back to the country in which they will be persecuted, but should be offered an opportunity to build a decent life;¹⁸
2. Members of the international community should share the responsibility. Countries that have relatively few refugees arriving at their borders seeking asylum, should offer to resettle a fair share of the world's refugees.¹⁹

Unfortunately, neither of these is actively pursued. Many countries, including Australia, have chosen not to offer protection to people arriving at their borders seeking refuge. And in most years less than 1 percent of the world's refugees are offered the opportunity to resettle in a third country.²⁰ This means that for the last decade and longer, the number of refugees who are provided with a pathway to a new life is very much lower than the number of people who become refugees for the first time. Therefore the number of refugees globally continues to grow. (See <http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/figures-at-a-glance.html> for statistics).

4. After sharing the story of person from a refugee background, reflect and discuss:
 - What stood out to you?
 - How does Omar's story challenge you?

Card Activity

Reflecting on what you learned in 'Their story'

- Which of the cards you created in 'Your Story' question 1 would you remove or modify?
- What new cards would you add?

Part C: God's Story

5. A refugee is a person who flees their home country because of persecution and for whom it is unsafe to return. The vast majority flee to a nearby country, where they wait, often for many years, until it is safe for them to return home. Jesus and his parents experienced this exact pattern. Read the account in Matthew 2:1-23. Discuss:
 - How does Jesus' experience as a refugee affect the way you think about people from a refugee or asylum seeker background?
 - How does this story help you understand what it is to be a refugee?
6. Read the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. Discuss:
 - Do you think this is applicable to our response to people from a refugee or asylum seeker background?
 - If the refugee is like the man beaten and left to die, who are the priests, Levites and Samaritans in our world today?

Card Activity

Reflecting on what you learned in 'God's story'

- Review once more the statements on the cards created during question 1.
- Which of these would you modify or remove?
- What new cards would you like to add?

Part D: Our New Story

7. For Australians there are a number of issues to consider with regard to refugees. There are complex political, economic and social issues seen in questions a-c and a practical issue in question d. It's impossible to cover off on these areas in this study. Select 2 areas including question d to discuss what each person individually, and your church collectively, can do.
- a. How many refugees should Australia resettle from overseas?
 - b. Is it fair to refuse entry to refugees who arrive by boat?
 - c. What will we do about the refugees we sent to off-shore processing centres who still live in PNG and on Nauru? (Read more www.refugeecouncil.org.au/operation-sovereign-borders-offshore-detention-statistics/2/)?
 - d. How can we best care for the refugees who are in Australia?

Part E: Pray

Read through the description of what Baptist Care SA is doing to work with refugees and asylum seekers and spend some time praying for their ministry.

See full size Prayer Cards on next page.



How to connect with the work of Baptist Care SA?

For more client stories both written and video, and more ways to connect with Baptist Care SA visit the website: www.baptistcaresa.org.au/resources/on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven

For more information on all volunteering opportunities, visit the website: www.baptistcaresa.org.au/get-involved/volunteer

If you would like to donate to our current appeal, visit the website: www.baptistcaresa.org.au/donate-now

Help us welcome a child arriving in Adelaide alone and knowing no-one!



“One year ago, when I was coming to Australia, my life was so different. In so many ways. But now, I feel like I got what I wanted which is independence. It’s been the best year of my life. I also felt integrated with the community and I have made some lifelong friends. I have also learnt new skills and Australian culture.”
Irina, Client, Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors Program

Can you imagine what it would feel like to arrive in a foreign country, alone – after being forced to flee your home country, or separated from your parents at a refugee camp?

This is what a number of young people from our Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHM) Program have had to endure from an early age.

Our UHM Program organises residential care and support services for children under the age of 18 who have arrived in Australia on a Refugee or Humanitarian visa without their legal guardian.

We work with these young people to develop their independent living skills and connect them to community (education and employment) to be able to successfully transition into the world when they turn 18.

If you would like to help support these unaccompanied humanitarian minors, why not put together a ‘Welcome to Adelaide’ pack for a young person aged 10-18? This could include something for their new home, some information about Adelaide and any other items that would make them feel welcome.

Please drop off packs to Baptist Care **SA’s Wayville** office.

130 Rose Terrace, Wayville SA during work hours,
Monday to Friday, 9.00am – 5.00pm.



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Building Kingdom Communities.



1. The numbers of refugees has increased significantly in recent years. There are *more than 26 million refugees in the world today. Refugees are people who have left their home country and cannot return due to a well-grounded fear of persecution.
Pray that these people will find safe new homes in countries that provide them with welcome and support.
2. More than half the world's refugees are children and young people under the age of 18 years.
Pray for their safety and protection from abuse, trafficking, and loss of hope.
3. Syria (6.6m), Venezuela (3.7m), Afghanistan (2.7m), and South Sudan (2.2m) are the countries from whom the largest number of people flee and become refugees.
Pray for peace in Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and other conflict zones and nations.
4. The five nations that host the most refugees are: Turkey (3.6m), Columbia (1.8m), Pakistan (1.4m), Uganda (1.4m), and Germany (1.1m).
Pray that these countries will find effective ways to care for the large populations seeking refuge and that the international community will support these countries to provide appropriate care.
5. During the period 2010 - 2019, 400,000 asylum applications were registered by unaccompanied and separated children.
Pray that the children in the care of Baptist Care SA feel safe and welcome and are successfully supported to transition into the world when they turn 18.

*UNHCR June 2020

Source: UNHCR, 'Global Trends forced displacement in 2019'.

2. Communities of Liberation

Pre-reading: An unjust society²¹

Israel during Bible times was a premodern agricultural society in which wealth was generated almost exclusively through farming. Increases in wealth did not come through improving the productivity of land, as much as acquiring land of other people. In other words, the acquisition of wealth was perceived in terms of redistributing a fixed amount of wealth, rather than increasing the total wealth of a community. This meant that for one person to have greater wealth they need to take land off someone else.

One of the features of such societies is that they typically involve the accumulation of large estates by absentee landlords who reside in the cities and towns. These people extract the vast bulk of the product of the land in the form of rents they charged the peasantry to farm the land and in the form of taxes. A typical premodern agrarian society could find 10 percent of the population enjoying two thirds of the wealth produced on the farms, with the peasantry left with just one third of what they produced, an amount insufficient to sustain 90 percent of the population above the poverty line.

It can be difficult for those of us who live in affluent, middle class, democratic societies to understand such exploitation and injustice because we seldom experience it in our own lives. Yet for some people injustice, exploitation and oppression are an ongoing reality.

Jesus the Justice bringer

For the majority of people at the time of Jesus, injustice was an ongoing, draining and damaging reality that punctuated their lives on a daily basis.²²

Imagine the scene captured in the Bible in Luke 4:18–21. It was an extraordinary day in Nazareth. Jesus was visiting his hometown and was expected to speak in the synagogue. He had burst onto the public life of Galilee, blazing like a torch against the night sky, moving from town to town teaching, exorcising demons, healing the sick, and declaring that God's reign was imminent. And now he was returning to Nazareth, the village in which he had grown up. Everyone wanted to hear him.²³

The synagogue service began. Jesus was invited to read the Scripture. He was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah which he opened up and read,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4:18–19 NRSV)

He finished the reading, rolled up the scroll, handed it to the attendant, sat down and said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21)²⁴

It was an audacious claim. The prophet Isaiah had long ago castigated the Israelites for their idolatry and injustice. He spoke of a Servant who would rise up and be used by God to bring justice and peace to Israel and then through Israel to the world. Jesus identified himself as that Servant. Jesus is the justice-bringer.²⁵

Standing with and liberating the lowly

The words 'lowly' and 'downtrodden' are a description of the position of people who are oppressed in hierarchical society

Nicholas Wolterstorff helpfully reminds us that when speaking of injustice our tendency is to use the language of 'in' and 'out', 'margins' and 'centre', whereas Jesus pushes us to think of society in terms of 'top' and 'bottom'.²⁶ (The full quote is included in Appendix A).

Metaphors common in present-day discourse about society are those of the margin and the outside... [The biblical writers] worked instead with an image of up and down: some are at the top of the social hierarchy, some are at the bottom. Those at the bottom are usually not there because it is their fault. They are there because they are downtrodden. Those at the top "trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the earth" (Amos 2:7).

When centre and circumference are one's basic metaphors, the undoing of injustice will be described as including the outsiders. When up and down are one's basic metaphors, the undoing of injustice will be described as lifting up those at the bottom. The poor do not have to be included within the social order; they have always been there, usually indispensable to its functioning. They have to be lifted up.²⁷

One of the noticeable dimensions of Jesus's ministry was his association with people on the margins, those who are 'lowly' and 'downtrodden'. This continued the Old Testament focus on the widow, the orphan, the foreigner and the poor, but expanded it to include other groups who in Jesus' day were also marginalised, such as the leper, the demon-possessed, the blind, the lame, those pushed down and out of access to God via the spiritually oppressive approaches of the Pharisees.²⁸

Not only did Jesus associate with 'the lowly', he treated people in ways that respected their dignity and brought liberation from the powers that bound them.²⁹

Perhaps less obvious but equally powerful, was the liberation Jesus offered from the oppressive culture of the patriarchal family. In Jesus' time women were subject to neglect, physical abuse, had many limitations placed on their participation in social life, and were expected to centre their existence on the honour of their husband. On frequent occasions and in numerous ways, Jesus subverted this patriarchal system. He included women among his itinerant followers (Luke 8:1-3) and redefined the nature of obligation and kinship. Kinship was broadened to include the family of faith Jesus was forming (Mark 3:31-35). In this community God alone would be recognised as father (Matthew 23:9). It was in relation to Jesus and the new community of faith that women (and men) were to define themselves and their life purpose.³⁰

Jesus called the oppressors to repentance. Jesus' challenge was very strong against those who spiritually oppressed others. Throughout the Gospels he goes out of his way to confront them. For example, Matthew 23 is a lengthy and caustic denunciation of the Pharisees (church leaders) for placing heavy burdens on others; for their lust to be honoured; their lack of humility; their distortion of Scripture to justify their sin; their failure to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God; and their hypocrisy!³¹

Jesus' confrontations with the rich called for them to act justly. Israel was never meant to be a nation in which a small, elite had vast land holdings while the majority languished in poverty. The laws of harvest, debt and Jubilee were designed to prevent this occurring. Large landholdings could only be acquired by neglecting "the rights of the poor". This is why Jesus declared woe upon the rich and the

well fed (e.g. Luke 6:20–26). Their wealth and vast land holdings were witness they had ignored the biblical commands to make interest-free loans, forgive debts every Sabbath year, and to redistribute all land every 50 years. Their wealth was eloquent witness to their failure to practise justice, which meant they stood under the judgement of God and that “it is more difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle” (Matthew 19:24).³²

Discussion on pre-reading

Question 1. Who experiences injustice, exploitation and oppression today?

Question 2. In what ways do you picture Jesus as a Justice bringer?

Question 3. What is your response to the concept of ‘top’ and ‘bottom’, where we are more used to thinking of society in terms of ‘margins’ and ‘centre’? What privilege do you have?

People experiencing homelessness³³

Introduction

To have a “home” is to have a place where we feel safe, secure and loved. To have a place where we feel we belong. Yet more than 100,000 Australians are currently experiencing homelessness.³⁴

In this study we explore the nature of homelessness and a biblically shaped response to it.

Part A: Your Story

1. When you think of someone who is “homeless” what are the first three things that come to mind? These could be your beliefs or what you heard others say about people who are experiencing homelessness.

Card Activity

Your group leader will give you three cards. When you think of someone who is “homeless” what are the first three things that come to mind? On each card write a word or phrase – these could be your beliefs or what you heard others say about people who are experiencing homelessness. Share your responses with the group. Place your cards on the floor or on a table where everyone can see them. As each person shares you may find yourself wanting to discuss what they have written. At this stage you are asked to simply listen respectfully to each other.

2. What personal experience have you had with homelessness, or with people who are experiencing homelessness?
 - How has this shaped your views?
 - If you have had very little personal experience, what are the main things that have influenced your views?

Part B: Their story

3. Read through the information box “Homelessness in Australia”. Reflect and discuss:
 - What stands out to you?
 - How does this information challenge you?

Homelessness in Australia

Homelessness is more than “rooflessness”. It is the absence of a home, a place to live where you can experience a sense of safety, security, permanence and belonging. It includes people who are unable to access adequate housing. For example, a person experiencing homelessness may live on the streets, in their car, couch surf from friend to friend etc.

- On any given night in Australia 1 in 200 people are experiencing homelessness.³⁵ More than one-quarter of them are children (i.e. under the age of 18 years).³⁶
- 7% of people experiencing homelessness are rough sleepers; 18% live in supported accommodation; 15% live temporarily within other households; 15% live in boarding houses; and 44% live in severely overcrowded accommodation.³⁷
- Homelessness in Australia is rising. There were 102,439 people experiencing homelessness in Australia in 2011 and 116,427 in 2016, which is an increase of 5%.³⁸
- The major reasons people experience homelessness include: domestic and family abuse (24%); financial difficulties (20%); housing crisis (16%); inadequate or inappropriate dwellings (11%); relationship breakdown (8%); housing affordability stress (5%); other (16%).³⁹
- In 2016 there were 6,203 people recorded as experiencing homelessness in South Australia. More than half were found in just six local government areas: Adelaide, Charles Sturt, Onkaparinga, Playford, Port Adelaide, Enfield and Salisbury.⁴⁰

The impacts of homelessness on an individual include difficulties in maintaining study or employment, health problems and exclusion from participating in social and recreational opportunities in a community. Homelessness financially impacts Australia’s economy as a person experiencing homelessness is more likely to interact with a number of government agencies.⁴¹

4. After sharing the story of person experiencing homelessness, reflect and discuss:

- What stood out to you?
- How does Tyrone’s story challenge you?

Card Activity

Reflecting on what you learned in ‘Their story’

- Which of the cards you created in ‘Your Story’ question 1 would you remove or modify?
- What new cards would you add?

Part C: God’s Story

5. According to the Gospels, Jesus experienced homelessness at various points in his life. It was customary in ancient Israel for people to take travelers into their homes and offer them hospitality. Such hospitality was sometimes extended to Jesus, but at other times it was not.

A scribe came up and said to him, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' (Matthew 8:19-20 RSV)

Discuss:

- How does Jesus' experience of homelessness affect the way you think about homelessness and people who are experiencing homelessness?
6. Read the story of a blind man in Luke 18:35-43. Think about and discuss as a group:
- The ways Jesus responded to Bartimaeus and how this contrasted with the way the crowd treated him.
 - What insights does this provide for how we might approach people experiencing homelessness?

Card Activity

Reflecting on what you learned in 'God's story'

- Review once more the statements on the cards created during question 1.
- Which of these would you modify or remove?
- What new cards would you like to add?

Part D: Our New Story

7. The next time you are confronted with a person experiencing homelessness begging on the street, how can you respond in a way that respects the person's worth and dignity as someone loved by God and created in God's image?
8. If our society is to effectively tackle homelessness, we need to address the immediate causes of homelessness and the wider issue of housing affordability. In March 2018 an alliance of organisations, including Baptist Care Australia, launched the "Everybody's Home" campaign. They argue that in order to address homelessness we need to address the problem of housing affordability. It calls for the Federal Government to:⁴²
- Reset the tax system around housing so that it prioritises first home buyers over investors;
 - Develop a national housing strategy to make available 500,000 social and affordable houses (i.e. rented at 20% or more below market rates) that will be required by 2026;
 - Make renting fairer and provide more rent assistance while the 500,000 affordable houses are being built;
 - Develop a national action plan to end homelessness by 2030 which:
 - "Addresses all the drivers of homelessness, including the lack of affordable housing, poverty and family violence;
 - Rapidly rehouses people experiencing homelessness and helps them stay housed;
 - Addresses the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness; and
 - Commits to ending homelessness by 2030 by taking action to prevent homelessness by delivering rapid access to housing and support people that are needed when people do lose their own home."

What could your group/church do to support this campaign?

Part E: Pray

Read through the description of what Baptist Care SA is doing for people who are, or are at risk of, experiencing homelessness. Spend some time praying for their ministry.

See full size Prayer Cards on next page.



How to connect with the work of Baptist Care SA?

For more information on all volunteering opportunities, visit the website:
www.baptistcaresa.org.au/get-involved/volunteer

If you would like to donate to our current appeal, visit the website:
www.baptistcaresa.org.au/donate-now

A warm welcome and a safe place.

An introduction to Baptist Care SA's Homelessness Services.



Carl walked free from gaol with \$30 in his pocket and accommodation arranged for the next two nights. Two weeks later, he became homeless.

"Baptist Care SA supports people who want to change, and they do, and that's important work. (Baptist Care SA) not only gave me a safe place, they gave me an opportunity to help myself. That's what matters."

Carl, client experiencing homelessness

Today in South Australia, almost 1 in 70 people are struggling to find a safe place to call home. A third of these are children. Housing stress, unemployment, family breakdown, violence and mental health conditions are key factors.

Each year Baptist Care SA's services to people experiencing homelessness provide **35,000 nutritious meals, close to 5000 bed nights and more than 900 emergency* relief parcels**. These go hand in hand with a range of other vital services supporting vulnerable people at risk of homelessness to have access to the basics.

Our services to people experiencing homelessness provide:

- Food and Relief
- Showers, laundry and health care
- Support and accommodation

There are many different ways that you can help give someone a hand up in life and show that you care. Baptist Care SA welcomes your time, talent and/or financial support.

For more information on volunteering opportunities, please contact

E: volunteer@baptistcaresa.org.au or view our website

W: baptistcaresa.sa.org.au/get-involved/volunteer/current-opportunities

If you would like to donate to our current appeal, visit baptistcaresa.org.au/get-involved/donate



*In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, demand increased to 1,873.

WestCare Centre

11 - 19 Millers Court
Adelaide SA 5000

Open Monday to Friday,
9.00am - 3.00pm

T **08 8118 5200**

baptistcaresa.org.au

Building Kingdom Communities.



1. On any given night in Australia, there are 1 in 200 people experiencing homelessness.¹ More than one-quarter of them are children and young people under the age of 18 years.²

Pray that those who are experiencing homelessness will be safe.

2. The number of people experiencing homelessness in Australia is rising. There were 102,439 people experiencing homelessness in Australia in 2011 compared with 116,427 people in 2016. This is an increase of 5 percent.³

Pray that Federal and State governments will develop solutions to help more people find affordable housing.

3. 7 percent of people experiencing homelessness live on the streets; 18 percent live in supported accommodation; 15 percent live temporarily with other households; 15 percent live in boarding houses; and 44 percent live in severely overcrowded accommodation.⁴

Pray that people experiencing homelessness will find more secure accommodation.

4. The major reasons people experience homelessness are: 24 percent domestic and family abuse; 20 percent financial difficulties; 16 percent housing crisis; 11 percent inadequate or inappropriate dwellings; 8 percent relationship breakdown; 5 percent housing affordability stress; 16 percent other reasons.⁵

Pray that people experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence or other relationship breakdown will find healing of their emotional wounds and a healthy pathway forward.

5. In 2016 there were 6,203 people experiencing homelessness in South Australia. More than half were found in just six local government areas: Adelaide, Charles Sturt, Onkaparinga, Playford, Port Adelaide Enfield, and Salisbury.⁶

Pray that the local councils and churches in these six local government areas will be effective in helping people move out of homelessness.

1. Homelessness Australia, 'Homelessness in Australia', Homelessness Australia, 2016, viewed 25 May 2018, <<https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Homelessness%20in%20Australia2.pdf>>

2. Homelessness Australia, 'Homelessness and children', Homelessness Australia, 2016, viewed 25 May 2018, <https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Homelessness_and_Children.pdf>

3. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Census of Population and Housing: estimating homelessness 2016', Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 2018, viewed 25 May 2018, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0>>

4. ABS

5. Homelessness Australia, 'Homelessness in Australia'

6. ABS

3. Communities of Shalom

Pre-reading: Shalom

Biblical scholars often describe the life the Israelites were to enjoy as the experience of “shalom”, which refers to

The positive presence of harmony and wholeness, of health and prosperity, of integration and balance. It is a state of soundness or flourishing in all dimensions of existence – in our relationship with God, our relationships with each other, our relationship with nature, and our relationship with ourselves. Shalom is when everything is as it ought to be. In this sense, Shalom encapsulates God’s basic intention for humanity – that people live in a condition of “all rightness” in every aspect of life.⁴³

Shalom then was the very reverse of the individualistic and selfish pursuit of wealth and wellbeing. It was the enjoyment of life in right relationship to God, each other and the land, lived in community.⁴⁴

The prophet Micah identified justice, mercy and faithfulness to God as the three central virtues of godliness. This is why Jesus echoed Micah’s words when he declared that the weightier matters of the law to which followers of Jesus must give attention are the core issues of justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23). Without these three virtues there can be no shalom for individuals or nations.⁴⁵

Poverty and disadvantage are created and maintained by social, political and economic systems that favour the interest of the powerful over the weak. We are called to combat this by building communities (church and society) that create support systems people need when they encounter crisis.⁴⁶

When we embrace the call to “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8) we turn outward to face the world and focus on those who are hurting, oppressed, exploited, down-trodden, forgotten, disadvantaged, abused. We open ourselves to hear their cries of suffering and hopelessness and we seek to offer care, kindness, hope and relief. We stand in solidarity with them as we seek justice for them. We become bearers, recipients and co-creators of shalom.⁴⁷

Health

Health is more than the absence of disease. It is better described as ‘a dynamic state of wellbeing’ resulting from unity between a person’s body, mind and spirit; and their ability to adapt to, and live in harmony with, other people, the creation, and with God. Illness occurs when there is disruption in any of these relationships. The Biblical concept of health is summarised in the word ‘Shalom’ which scripture describes as physical and psychological wellbeing that includes just and right relationships between people and nations that are a product of integrity, moral and ethical living, and result in people experiencing peace, wholeness, health and a sense of wellbeing.⁴⁸

Salvation⁴⁹

For centuries many have read the Gospels through the lens of individualism and spirit/matter dualism. Spirit/matter dualism divides reality into two parts – the material and the spiritual – and sees salvation as concerned with the “spiritual”. Coupled with the individualist focus of today many have imagined salvation as God forgiving our sins so that our souls (the spiritual part of us) can go to heaven when we die. Yet the biblical vision is much broader. It is of God putting the world right – individuals, communities, and all creation.^c

The salvation Jesus proclaims includes a reordering of the world so that those who have been denied the good things of God’s earth will one day enjoy them and those who have oppressed them will be brought low. Another way of looking at the Beatitudes found in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12) which is often taken as a list of virtues is to the glue that binds them. They all can represent states of people for whom Jesus’s message is good news. They are blessed not because there is something good about their condition, but because the arrival of the kingdom of God will mean a reversal of their situation.

Kingdom Community⁵⁰

The Beatitudes can speak to people who are downtrodden with the promise that change is both possible and coming. The poor in spirit, that is those who have felt the crushing weight of injustice and violence and are drained of hope, will receive the kingdom of heaven. Those who mourn, that is who have felt the loss of livelihood, loved ones, house and home under the weight of the greedy rich and the oppressive Empire of Rome, will be comforted. The meek, who in the Old Testament tradition were those who were dispossessed of their land, will inherit the earth. Those who hunger for justice, whether due to their own experiences of injustice, or their solidarity with those who have experienced injustice, will be filled. Those who have responded with grace and generosity to the suffering and violence around them – the merciful, the pure in heart and the peacemakers – will likewise find the blessing of God’s kingdom, even if their courageous allegiance to its values has cost them in the present.

Over against exploitation and oppression, Jesus calls his followers to build a community of grace, generosity and love, in which people will not fall between the cracks, but they will find the resources, support and encouragement they need to get through life’s crises.

Discussion on pre-reading

Question 1. What do you understand about the concepts of health, shalom and salvation?

Question 2. Read Jeremiah 29:7. What is the connection between individual wellbeing and our communities?

“And work for the peace and prosperity (shalom) of the city (our community) where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare (for in its shalom you will have shalom) Jeremiah 29:7 (NLT)

Question 3. Who is falling through the cracks in your local community and possibly in your church?

^c Tom Wright, **Surprised by Hope** provides a wonderful elaboration of this. T Wright, **Surprised by hope**, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007

People living with a mental health condition

Introduction

Mental health conditions affect around 3.2 million Australians in a 12 month period, however only three percent of the whole population will experience a severe, persisting mental health condition that has a profound effect on the person's capacity to live a productive and enjoyable life.⁵¹ Social isolation is a known catalyst to poor mental health.⁵² Therefore the challenge to improve mental health within our community starts by contesting our culture of individualism and promote authentic, welcoming, connected and inclusive community that accepts and includes everyone.⁵³ Social inclusion is less about 'programs' and more about people living in supportive, engaged and relational community. The significance of meaningful relationships, solid community connections, and the ability to actively participate in community life are known to facilitate a person living with a mental health condition's recovery.

Recovery is not a one-off accomplishment, nor does it mean the person will never have another relapse. Recovery is a changing, dynamic and holistic process of learning to live with and manage a mental health condition as a person journeys toward healing and wholeness. This process (re) establishes personal control and enables the person to regain meaning and purpose in life. It is a whole-person healing process involving action in every dimension of the person.⁵⁴

Recovery is facilitated by healthy positive relationships (with God, with others, and with the creation) which ignite hope, facilitate empowerment, provide growth opportunities and enable freedom to choose positively.⁵⁵

In this discussion we will explore the effect of living with a mental health condition and a biblically shaped response to it.

Part A: Your Story

1. When you think of someone who is "mentally ill" what are the first three things that come to mind? These could be your beliefs or what you heard others say about people who are living with a mental health condition. At this stage you are asked to simply listen respectfully to each other.

Card Activity

Your group leader will give you three cards. When you think of someone who is "mentally ill" what are the first three things that come to mind? On each card write a word or phrase - these could be your beliefs or what you heard others say about people who are living with a mental health condition. Share your responses with the group. Place your cards on the floor or on a table where everyone can see them. As each person shares you may find yourself wanting to discuss what they have written. At this stage you are asked to simply listen respectfully to each other.

2. What personal experiences have you, or someone you know, had of living with a mental health issue?
 - How has this shaped your views?
 - If you have had very little personal experience, what are the main things that have influenced your views?

Part B: Their Story

3. Read through the information box on 'Mental Health in Australia' then answer these questions:
 - What stands out to you?
 - How does this information challenge you?

Mental Health in Australia

Mental health exists on a continuum. For only a small percentage of people (3%⁵⁶) it is persistent and significantly interferes with everyday life. A large proportion of Australians will experience a mental health condition at some stage during their life. Yet it is still surrounded by stigma that can make it difficult for people to be open about their experiences.

- Mental health conditions are common. Almost half the population (45%) experience a mental health disorder at some point in their life. 1 in 5 Australians age 16–85 years will experience a mental health condition in any given year.⁵⁷
- The most common mental health conditions are anxiety disorders (14% population); depressive disorders (6%) and substance use disorders (5%).⁵⁸
- Schizophrenia causes intense episodes of psychosis involving delusions and hallucinations, and longer periods of reduced expression, motivation and functioning. People living with Schizophrenia are no more likely to be violent than anyone else. Up to 1 in 100 people experience Schizophrenia.⁵⁹
- Obsessive–Compulsive disorder causes intrusive, unwanted thoughts, images or urges that are very distressing (obsessions) that the person experiencing this condition tries to relieve via repetitive thoughts or behaviours (compulsions). Up to 1 in 50 Australians are affected by OCD.⁶⁰
- People living with Bipolar Disorder can become euphoric, over–excited, reckless, or imagine that they are more important or influential than they are in real life. People living with Bipolar Disorder can also become extremely low, feeling helpless, sad and depressed, with difficulty making decisions or concentrating. Some people experience mainly the high or euphoric state while others experience mainly the lows, and some experience both extremes, becoming profoundly depressed or over–excited. The person may then behave in an uncharacteristically irrational or risky manner. Up to 1 in 50 Australians develop Bipolar disorder at some stage in their life.⁶¹
- The World Health Organisation estimates that depression will be the leading health concern in the world by 2030.⁶²
- Every day nine Australians die due to suicide and over another 170 will attempt suicide.⁶³

4. After sharing the story of a person living with mental health issues, reflect on and discuss:

- What stood out to you?
- How does Amy’s story challenge you?

Card Activity

Reflecting on what you learned in ‘Their story’

- Which of the cards you created in ‘Your Story’ question 1 would you remove or modify?
- What new cards would you add?

Part C: God's Story

5. The Bible tells a number of stories about people who experienced what we would identify as mental illness. King Saul appeared to be overcome with depressive episodes (1 Samuel 16:14-23), while the prophet Elijah, exhausted by his conflict with Ahab and Jezebel, lost the will to live, developing a distorted view of reality and his place within it (1 Kings 19:1-17).

What do these stories teach us about living with a mental health condition?

6. Christians sometimes quote the biblical command to “not be anxious about anything” (Philippians 4:6) to suggest Christians should always experience peace of mind. Yet on the night of his arrest Jesus was said to be in such anguish that he was sweating blood (Luke 22:44)! While hanging on the cross Jesus cried the anguished prayer of Psalm 22:1

“My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Discuss:

- How do you make sense of Philippians 4:4-7 in the light of this?
- What does the experience of Jesus suggest about how we respond to people in a state of emotional crisis?

Part D: Our New Story

7. Assuming the pattern of 1 in 5 people experiencing mental illness is true of your community and your church; discuss what can you and your church do to remove any stigma around mental health conditions and better support people living with a mental health condition?

Part E: Pray

Read through the description of what Baptist Care SA is doing working with people living with mental health conditions and their families, and spend some time praying for their ministries.

See full size Prayer Cards on next page.



How to connect with the work of Baptist Care SA?

If you would like to use a specific tool to share hope with a friend who is living with mental illness, Baptist Care SA has produced the ‘21 day Hope Pack’, which is a tool that uses a friend to journey alongside a person living with a mental illness such as depression. The Hope Pack is scripture focused and encourages the person to action life-giving healthy behaviours that will help them move toward wellness.

For more information visit the website:

www.baptistcaresa.org.au/resources/hope-pack-and-care-share-pack

For more information on all volunteering opportunities, visit the website:

www.baptistcaresa.org.au/get-involved/volunteer

If you would like to donate to our current appeal, visit the website:

www.baptistcaresa.org.au/donate-now

Healthy minds for Children, young people and their families.

Baptist Care SA's Family Mental Health Support Services .



Supporting children and young people who are showing early signs, or are at risk of developing, mental illness, to improve their wellbeing and enable them to better participate in their communities and reach their full potential.

Sara and Greg struggled to have the same perspectives on how to raise their step children. They were able to raise their shared biological kids with the same standards, but could not agree on the best methods to support and raise their older children from past relationships.

Our Counsellor worked with them to explore their different parenting perspectives and to help them come to a point of understanding. A large part of this process was moving forward using a strengths-based approach, to explore positive areas of connection to help them move past blaming each other.

Baptist Care SA's Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS) provide support for young people aged 0 – 18 and their families.

We work with individuals and their families, as well as using targeted therapeutic group work. Together, we:

- Build individual strengths
- Expand family resources
- Develop a greater sense of connection to community.

This is a free service and referrals can be made by anyone in the community including schools, early learning centres, health workers, community organisations and self-referrals.



Salisbury Office

2/107 Salisbury Highway
Salisbury SA 5108

T 08 8209 5040
baptistcaresa.org.au

Southern Office

18 - 20 Scholefield Road
Seacliff SA 5606

T 08 8177 4900
baptistcaresa.org.au

Building Kingdom Communities.



1. Each year 1 in 5 people in Australia experiences a mental health disorder. Anxiety is the most common mental health disorder, followed by mood disorders (eg. depression) and substance use disorders.¹

Pray for an end to the stigmatising of people living with mental health issues and mental illness and pray for their inclusion into welcoming and inclusive churches and communities.

2. Women are more likely than men to experience anxiety disorders (18 percent compared with 11 percent) and mood disorders (7.1 percent compared with 5.3 percent), while men are more likely than women to experience substance abuse disorders (7 percent compared with 3.3 percent).²

Pray that men and women will seek and receive helpful assistance which enables their recovery from their mental health issues.

3. Younger people have the highest rates of living with mental health issues. One in four people aged 16-24 years had a diagnosed mental health disorder in the past 12 months, compared to 1 in 17 people aged 75+ years.³ In the 16-24 year age bracket, alcohol related disorders are much higher than in other age groups.

Pray that young people will safely navigate their way through the challenges of adolescence and find trustworthy adults who will be role models and mentors to them.

4. Up to 75 percent of adults experiencing homelessness and 40 percent of prisoners live with a mental health disorder.⁴

Pray for improved mental health for people experiencing homelessness and people who are incarcerated.

5. Suicide is the leading cause of death for Australians age 15-44 years. There are eight deaths by suicide per day in Australia.⁵

Pray for people who may be contemplating suicide that they may find reasons to live and get appropriate support. Pray for people who grieve the loss of a friend or family member to suicide. Pray for those working in the area of mental health support. Pray that churches will bring a message of hope and be communities of welcome, connection and support to everyone affected by mental illness and suicide.

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Mental health services in Australia', Australian Government, Canberra, 2018, viewed 25 May 2018, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/mental-health>>

2. The Department of Health, 'Prevalence of mental disorders in the Australian population', Australian Government, Canberra, 2009, viewed 25 May 2018, <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/mental-health>>

3. SANE Australia, 'Facts vs myth: mental illness basics', SANE Australia, 2016, viewed 25 May 2018, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/mental-health>>

4. The Department of Health, 'The magnitude of the problem', Australian Government, Canberra, 2009, viewed 25 May 2018, <<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-f-plan09-toc~mental-pubs-f-plan09-con~mental-pubs-f-plan09-con-mag>>

5. Black Dog Institute, 'Facts about suicide in Australia', Black Dog Institute, Australia viewed 25 May 2018, <<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/clinical-resources/suicide-self-harm/facts-about-suicide-in-australia>>

4. Communities of Inclusion

Pre-reading: Disability

The Gospels declare that in and through Jesus, the future reign of God spoken of by the prophets finds expression. In accord with the Old Testament prophets, it was a kingdom in which there would be a reversal of fortunes for those living with disabilities. They would be brought from the margins to the centre, their bodies would be healed and they would participate in the reign of God. So it was that when John the Baptist sent messengers to find out if Jesus was the One bringing the kingdom, the response of Jesus was⁶⁴

“The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.” (Matthew 11:4-6)

On the one hand, Jesus heals large numbers of those who lived with disease and disability. On the other hand, Jesus called for the formation of communities in which those flung to the margins of society and subjected to the cruel anonymity of poverty, exploitation and despair are sought out and fully included.⁶⁵

Disability in the gospels⁶⁶

The Gospels allow us to glimpse the experiences of people with disabilities at the time of Jesus. A number of people with disabilities are brought to Jesus by their friends and families, suggesting that at least some enjoyed supportive and caring community, but also that their disabilities were seen to make their lives difficult. Others lacked such a supportive environment. The blind and lame can be found begging on the streets; a man who is emotionally and mentally disturbed by a legion of demons is found bound in chains; lepers were isolated. The question of the disciples in John 9:1-3 suggests it was common to see disability as a punishment for sin.

In line with the Old Testament law and prophets, Jesus sees the welcome, inclusion and healing of people with disabilities as an outworking of God’s restorative presence. He heals both bodies and communities.

Healing in the gospels⁶⁷

In the Gospels, healing was a sign that God’s kingdom had arrived in the ministry of Jesus. It was a foretaste of the life of the future, of that time when death, decay and suffering are finally and fully overthrown; bodies, minds, relationships, and even the creation itself are set right forever.

We too hope for that day. We pray to taste it even now in God’s work of healing our hearts, relationships and bodies. Yet we also recognise that God’s grace and kingdom presence is seen in the formation of character and the wisdom gained as we struggle with the vagaries and challenges of life.

On healing of bodies & communities⁶⁸

The arrival of God’s kingdom in Jesus included the healing of diseases and disabilities and the healing of communities. What does this mean for the ways we respond to people with disabilities in our churches today?

It is beyond the scope of this study to offer a theology of healing. We do note however that at the same time the New Testament celebrates healings as a sign of God’s reign, it also recognises the formation of character through suffering and challenge as a sign of God’s kingdom work (e.g. Romans 5:1-5; James 1:1-18).

2 Corinthians 11-12 is particularly significant for how we negotiate disability and healing. In this section of the letter the apostle Paul takes on an unfavourable comparison drawn between him and a group of self-appointed “super apostles” admired by the Corinthian Christians. The super-apostles excelled at public speech and were admired for their mastery of life. Paul, by contrast, lacked rhetorical flourish and his life was marked by tragedy and shame.

In the midst of this Paul learned something profound. He was “given” a “thorn in the flesh”. Scholars speculate what it might have been. Suggestions include lack of rhetorical flourish; poor eyesight (a quite severe disability in the period before spectacles); and repeat bouts of malaria. No-one can be quite sure. All we know is that this thorn was disabling, public and painful, so much so that Paul pleaded with God for healing. But there was no healing. For Paul this would come but only at the resurrection of the dead. For now, the thorn remained, and became the source of enormous strength and blessing, for Paul learned to see God working in and through him while he was weak.

“[God] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

Our approach to disability must embrace the hope of full restoration of the body at the resurrection, celebrate those occasions in which the future resurrection experience is brought into the present in the form of physical healing, and be attentive to the grace and knowledge of God experienced in unique ways by those who live with disability. Any church that seeks to encourage bodily healing must ensure it also makes space for those whom God does not heal before the resurrection.

Alongside this, churches should consider that it may be the church rather than people with disabilities that are in need of greatest healing. One of the most powerful insights that have emerged around disability is that communities that are not inclusive are frequently nominated by people with disabilities as their greatest challenge. Impairment only becomes disability when people with impairment are unable to participate fully in the life of their community.

Given the vocation of the church and of humankind is to build worshipping communities in which people experience God’s love, grace, welcome, kindness, compassion and justice, churches do well to dialogue with people with disabilities to discern whether the person living with disability is experiencing this. Does the physical design of the building, the language and rituals of worship, the timing of events, etc. invite people with disabilities in or make it difficult to participate? Is the person with a disability’s experience one of grace, with their gifting of the Spirit and the wisdom they have gained through their journey and their insights valued and celebrated?

Discussion on pre-reading

Question 1. What surprised you or challenge you in the reading?

Question 2. What is the difference between an impairment and disability?

Question 3. The section ‘On healing bodies and communities’ begins with a statement and question. The arrival of God’s kingdom in Jesus included the healing of diseases and disabilities and the healing of communities. What does this mean for the ways we respond to people with disabilities in our churches today? What is your response to the question?

People living with disability

Introduction

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 epoch has faced the moral and political issue of how best to include and support people with disabilities. (World Health Organisation)⁶⁹

Almost 1 in 5 people⁷⁰ in Australia live with a disability. Disabilities can be physical, intellectual, and mental.

In recent years there has been good progress in overcoming some of the social stigmas, however significant stigma remains, particularly towards people experiencing mental health challenges.⁷¹

It is common for people to think of disability in terms of a person's physical or mental impairments, but this is insufficient to explain how impairment becomes a disability. Disability occurs in the interaction between a person with impairment and the community in which they live.⁷²

People with disabilities face challenges able bodied people don't face. People with disabilities should not be defined by what the person is not able to do, rather by what they can do! People with disabilities have gifts, capabilities, strengths, and life experiences that contribute to the common good of our community.⁷³

Communities that are accessible and open to people with disabilities determine the extent to which the impairment disables the person's participation and experience in life and community.⁷⁴

In this discussion we will explore the effect of living with a disability, and a biblically shaped response to it.

Part A: Your Story

1. When you think of someone who is "disabled" what are the first three things that come to mind? These could be your beliefs or what you heard others say about a person who is living with a disability. At this stage you are asked to simply listen respectfully to each other.

Card Activity

Your group leader will give you three cards. When you think of someone who is "disabled" what are the first three things that come to mind? On each card write a word or phrase - these could be your beliefs or what you heard others say about people who are living with a disability. Share your responses with the group. Place your cards on the floor or on a table where everyone can see them. As each person shares you may find yourself wanting to discuss what they have written. At this stage you are asked to simply listen respectfully to each other.

2. What personal experiences have you, or someone you know, had of living with a disability?
 - How has this shaped your views?
 - If you have had very little personal experience, what are the main things that have influenced your views?

Part B: Their Story

3. Read through the information box on 'Disability in Australia', and discuss:
- What stands out to you?
 - How does this information challenge you?

Disability in Australia

Almost 1 in 5 people⁷⁵ in Australia live with a disability, and 1 in 18 people have a disability that can be categorised as profound or severe.⁷⁶

Disability is significant across all age groups, but increases dramatically as people get older. For example, 1 in 50 children aged 0-4 and 1 in 20 children aged 5-14 live with profound or severe limitation in core activities compared to more than 1 in 2 people aged 75 or older.⁷⁷

In 2015, 50% of people living with a severe disability reported that in the previous 12 months they did not leave home as often as they would have liked; 31% reported difficulty accessing buildings;⁷⁸ 60% reported that they avoided situations because of their disability;⁷⁹ and 22% that they had faced unfair treatment or discrimination because of their disability.⁸⁰

Around 2.7 million Australians are informal carers for people with a disability⁸¹ and one in 10 of these people are under the age of 25.⁸²

People with disabilities are at greater risk of violence and abuse. For example, a 2018 study by the Human Rights Commission found the reported cases of violence and abuse against people with disabilities was almost double that of persons without disabilities.⁸³

4. After sharing the story of person living with disability, think about and discuss:
- What stands out to you?
 - How does Marty's story challenge you?

Card Activity

Reflecting on what you learned in 'Their story'

- Which of the cards you created in 'Your Story' question 1 would you remove or modify?
- What new cards would you add?

Part C: God's Story

5. Read the story of Bartimaeus in the Bible in Mark (Mark 10:46-52).
- What do we know about Bartimaeus?
 - How does the crowd respond to Bartimaeus?
 - How does Jesus respond to Bartimaeus?

6. 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. These 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 that exclude people living with poverty or disability to new ways of being community that are intentionally inclusive.

Think about your church and discuss:

- Are people with disabilities part of your congregation?
- How are people with disabilities currently participating in the life of your community?
- What barriers exist for the full participation of people with disabilities?
- How can your church become more intentionally inclusive?

Card Activity

Reflecting on what you learned in 'God's story'

- Review once more the statements on the cards created during question 1.
- Which of these would you modify or remove?
- What new cards would you like to add?

Part D: Our New Story

7. 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^d). This suggests people with disabilities should be present in our churches and people with disabilities should be received as bringing unique gifts for the building up of our churches.

Think about and discuss:

- How are you valuing people with disabilities and their unique gifts in your church?
- How are people with disabilities participating in various ministries of the church and in church leadership teams?

8. What actions could your group/church could take to become more intentionally inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities? How are you developing a plan for ensuring people with disabilities are included in all dimensions of community life?

Part E: Pray

Read through the description of what Baptist Care SA is doing working with people living with disabilities and their families, and spend some time praying for their ministries.

See full size Prayer Cards on next page.



^d See Guide 10: A Theology of Belonging which explores this familiar passage with detailed focus on 'indispensable' and 'weakness', you can download these resources free from the 'Connections' resources at www.baptistcaresa.org.au

Let's make life better, together.

An introduction to Baptist Care SA's
NDIS & disability services.



"They're really important to me because they help me organize my day, get out and about – everything goes much smoother when they're with me" Michael

Read Michael's story at <https://baptistcaresa.org.au/michaels-story>

It's your life. Let's make it better together.

We all have hopes and dreams, but sometimes they can be hard to reach on our own. When you select Baptist Care SA as your registered NDIS Provider, we work with you to get the best out of your plan.

We listen to you to gain an understanding of your needs, then help you to find ways to work towards meeting those needs, whether it's:

- Support in your daily life
- Assistance to join in with your community
- Help in building positive relationships
- Or ways to improve your health and wellbeing

Our friendly, highly skilled staff look forward to getting to know you. We are committed to providing quality support and assistance with independent living. It's not always easy, but we'll keep it simple and, together, we'll get things done.

With Baptist Care SA on your team, you'll continue to feel valued, while growing in confidence and independence.

Talk to us today.

130 Rose Terrace
Wayville SA 5034
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ndis@baptistcaresa.org.au
baptistcaresa.org.au



Building Kingdom Communities.



1. Almost 1 in 5 Australians lives with a disability¹ and 1 in 18 Australians have a disability that can be described as “profound” or “severe”.² Think of people you know who are living with a disability – how is that disability impacting them?

Pray for their strength, resilience and support.

2. Around 2.7 million Australians are informal carers for people with a disability³ and one in 10 of these people are under the age of 25.⁴

Think of people you know who are carers for a person living with a disability and pray for their strength, resilience and support.

3. The Disability Royal Commission was established in April 2019 in response to community concern about widespread reports of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability.

Pray that the Royal Commission will be successful in its investigations and bring recommendations that help to reduce abuse against people with disabilities.

4. People with disabilities face challenges able bodied people don't face. People with disabilities should not be defined by what the person is not able to do, rather by what they can do! Each person has gifts, capabilities, strengths, and life experiences that contribute to the common good of our community.

Think of people you know who live with disability and contribute significantly to your life, the life of your church, or the life of our community and give thanks for them.

5. Communities that are accessible and open to people with disabilities determine the extent to which the impairment disables the person's participation and experience in life and community.

Think of ways your church/community has shaped itself to be inclusive of people with disabilities and the ways it can become even more inclusive. Give thanks for the things already accomplished and pray for continued progress.

6. Disabilities can be physical, intellectual, and mental. While progress overcoming social stigma is occurring, there remains significant stigma and discrimination. This includes people experiencing mental health challenges.

Think of the responses and values you observe towards people living with disabilities including mental health conditions, and pray that stigma may be broken down and genuine inclusion will become a reality in our churches and our community.

7. **Pray for the work and ministry of Baptist Care SA with clients living with various disabilities and mental health conditions. Pray for the staff and services Baptist Care SA provide to support these people and their families. Pray for pathways to transition Baptist Care SA clients into inclusive and supportive churches and communities.**

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Disability, Aging and Carers: Summary of Findings, Key Findings', 2016, viewed 7 May 2019, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0>>

2. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Disability, Aging and Carers: Summary of Findings, Disability', 2016, viewed 7 May 2019, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4430.0main+features202015>>

3. ABS, 'Disability, Aging and Carers: Summary of Findings, Key Findings'

4. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 'A Profile of Carers in Australia', October 2016, viewed 15 May 2019, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4430.0main+features602015>>

How to connect with the work of Baptist Care SA?

For more client stories both written and videos, and more ways to connect with Baptist Care SA visit the website: www.baptistcaresa.org.au/resources/belonging-together

Connections

In 2018 Baptist Care SA received funding from an NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant to work collaboratively with churches, community members, families, carers and people living with disability to locate strategies that build supportive and inclusive communities for people living with disability.

Whilst the grant has finished resources created by it are still available.

Please visit the website:

www.baptistcaresa.org.au/service/church-services/connections-building-inclusive-communities

For more information on all volunteering opportunities, visit the website:

www.baptistcaresa.org.au/get-involved/volunteer

If you would like to donate to our current appeal, visit the website:

www.baptistcaresa.org.au/donate-now

5. Communities of Grace

Pre-reading: A story from Desmond Tutu⁸⁴

Desmond Tutu was the Anglican Archbishop of South Africa during the years of apartheid. He played a very important role in the overthrow of that discriminatory system. During an interview with the BBC he was asked to describe a turning point in his life. Desmond Tutu spoke of a time when he was a small boy. He was walking with his mother along the footpath of their home town when a tall white man dressed in black came toward them. The apartheid system expected that when a white person and a black person met in this manner, the black person would step down into the gutter and let the white person pass, and tip their hat as a gesture of respect. It was just one of the many ways black and coloured South Africans were humiliated and reminded of their inferior status.

On this day, before his mother could step off the sidewalk, the tall white man stepped down into the gutter to allow Desmond and his mother to pass on the footpath. As they passed by the tall white man he tipped his hat as a gesture of respect to them. Desmond was astonished! He asked his mother who that man was and why he had stepped off the sidewalk for them.

His mother replied that the man was an Anglican priest and he stepped off the sidewalk because he was a man of God. The young Desmond Tutu said it was at that point that he knew he wanted to be an Anglican priest and a man of God.

When we think about ‘doing justice’ we commonly call to mind the great heroes of justice such as Martin Luther King, William Wilberforce, and Nelson Mandela and their heroic exploits in pursuit of justice. Yet for most of us doing justice will mean much simpler acts such as stepping off the sidewalk.

Seeking justice in a post-Christian society⁸⁵

Over the course of the last few decades Australia has transitioned from a nation that identified itself strongly with the Christian tradition, to one that is genuinely pluralist. Now, Australians more commonly define themselves as a multi-faith, multicultural society united around a core commitment to each other’s freedom and the common good. Attempts to legislate Christian morality are considered coercive and inappropriate.

As Christians we can respond by pursuing “faithful presence” in which we faithfully live our lives, seeking to contribute to the wellbeing of our society wherever we can^e with goal that the church should be a graceful presence in its community, and do so in three ways:

1. We seek to model life as God intended it to be. We focus on building communities of faith that are true to the biblical call to love, grace, kindness, generosity and goodness.
2. We seek to be a graceful presence in our local communities, national community and world. We give to each other and to our neighbours that which every person is due as a human being. This will see us get involved with people who are at the bottom of society in practical acts of loving kindness.
3. We exercise a prophetic voice in the public arena. We engage at the political level, not to demand the legislation of Christian morality, but rather to call governments to act in ways that are just and that bring deliverance to people who are exploited, oppressed, and harmed by the systems and people who are powerful within our society.

^e Further reading: James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford 2010), and Mirsolav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*, (Brazos Press 2013)

Being a graceful presence⁸⁶

Changing the world by inviting people to follow Jesus

One of the primary ways we are a graceful presence is by inviting people to follow Jesus. This is not simply so that they can receive eternal life after they die, but that they can recover their humanity. We were created to worship our Creator, love our fellow human being, and to steward the earth.

When people embrace Christ there is then a fundamental realignment of the purpose, direction and shape of their lives, and they start the journey of being transformed into the people they were created to be.

Changing the world by being a community of grace

As we have noted already in this series, followers of Jesus are called to form communities of grace and love in which people find welcome, support, hope and healing. (Matthew 5:13-15). Our churches are to be communities in which old hatreds and prejudices are laid aside and we get on with the business of loving each other. We show that life is about loving God and others, and demonstrate that love can triumph over hate; good over evil; hope over despair; and forgiveness over bitterness.

Changing the world through simple acts of kindness

The white Anglican priest who stepped off the sidewalk for Desmond Tutu and his mother was named Trevor Huddleston. His action reminds us that we can change our world through simple acts of kindness. All suffering is painful, but injustice adds indignity which increases the distress. The person who suffers is treated as though they are of no value, which erodes a person's sense of their own worth and dignity. Likewise, situations of injustice often leave the victim feeling powerless. In these contexts simple acts of kindness and empathy serve to reinforce a person's dignity and value. It could be stepping off a sidewalk, a kind word, a thoughtful note, or an invitation to dinner.

Changing the world by raising a prophetic voice

As we noted in the previous studies, the concentration of power in Israel led to widespread exploitation of the poor. The prophets of Israel served as a counterpoint, calling both kings and the rich to stop using their power to oppress and exploit, and instead to start sharing their wealth and building social systems that were inclusive.

Jesus continued in this tradition. For example, he called on the wealthy to share their wealth with the poor and act justly; challenged the Pharisaic exclusion of people from the community of faith; and drove people out of the temple as a sign that God would bring judgement on those who had turned the temple into a 'den of thieves'.

Changing the world by consuming justly

One of the most profound ways we shape our world is through our consumption patterns. While there is a need to consider the level of our consumption, we still need to consume food. Choosing to consume products that have been produced ethically is one way to act justly. You can download apps and guides from organisations such as www.ethical.org.au to help you identify products that are ethically produced.

Changing the world through strategic partnerships

Many churches are discovering that when faced with issues that demonstrate significant and systemic disadvantage, such as homelessness, refugees, domestic violence, disability, mental illness, incarceration and the like, they have a desire to serve but they may lack the knowledge or specialist skills required to coordinate or operate those services. In these instances, strategic partnerships can be formed with specialist organisations, in which the local church provides volunteers and perhaps resources such as finances, property, and a welcoming church community. The specialist agency provides the professional wrap-around services that the church cannot provide but the church provides the welcoming and supportive community that the services cannot provide.

Discussion on pre-reading

The Gospels are full of examples of Jesus making time for people that others considered unimportant. For example, the story of Bartimaeus discussed in Session 4 Communities of inclusion. Christ heard his call, broke away from what he was doing, and gave the man his undivided attention.

Question 1. Give examples of how you can change the world through a simple act of kindness?

Question 2. Give an example of one way you change the world through consuming justly?

Question 3. How can you as an individual or working together as a small group raise a prophetic voice on an issue?

People exiting the prison system

Introduction

Prisoners are defined “as adults aged 18 years and over who are held in custody, whose confinement was the responsibility of a corrective services agency. This definition includes sentenced prisoners and prisoners held in custody awaiting trial or sentencing (remandees).”⁸⁷ It excludes juvenile offenders, people held in police cells, immigration detention centres, or psychiatric custody.⁸⁸

The demographics of people in prison in Australia is different to the population in general. People often arrive at prison with high rates of chronic health conditions such as mental health disorders, and high rates of substance misuse disorders. People arriving in prison often have significant and complex health needs that may improve during their prison term.⁸⁹

Recidivism is the tendency for people who have been convicted of an offense to reoffend. “Most people (73%) entering prison had been in prison before and almost half (45%) of prison entrants had been in prison within the previous 12 months.”⁹⁰

In this discussion we will follow John’s story,⁹¹ which is subtitled ‘A man learns to love himself and his freedom after over forty years inside Australia’s youth detention centres and prisons’. In the video John tells his story of three decades of moves in and out of addiction, prison and rehabilitation facilities/ programs before he is released from the addictions. It demonstrates that ‘the opposite of addiction is not sobriety... it is human connection.’⁹²

In this discussion we will explore the effect of living in and exiting the prison system, and a biblically shaped response to it.

Part A: Your Story

1. When you think of someone who is an “ex-prisoner” what are the first three things that come to mind? These could be your beliefs or what you heard others say about a person who is someone who is exiting the prison system. At this stage you are asked to simply listen respectfully to each other.

Card Activity

Your group leader will give you three cards. write a word or phrase on each card of the first three things that come to mind when they think of someone who is an “ex-prisoner”. It could be something you believe to be true and/or have heard people say about someone who is exiting the prison system. Share your responses with the group. Place your cards on the floor or on a table where everyone can see them. As each person shares you may find yourself wanting to discuss what they have written. At this stage you are asked to simply listen respectfully to each other.

2. What personal experiences have you, or someone you know, had of people exiting the prison system?
 - How has this shaped your views?
 - If you have had very little personal experience, what are the main things that have influenced your views?

Part B: Their Story

3. Read through the information box on ‘Prison in Australia’ then answer these questions:
 - What stands out to you?
 - How does this information challenge you?

Prison in Australia

Australia is one of many countries that imprison people as punishment for particular crimes. Prison punishes people by removing their freedom. For some the experience can be transformative and lead them to commence a new way of living when they are released. For others the experience has little rehabilitative impact, and for some they may become more criminalised by their experiences.⁹³

- At June 30, 2020 there were 41,060 prisoners in Australian prisons: 37,908 males and 3152 females; 7/10 prisoners were sentenced, 3/10 were awaiting sentence.

The four most common offences were:

1. Acts intended to cause injury (23% of prison population)
2. Illicit drug offences (15%)
3. Sexual assault (14%)
4. Unlawful entry with intent (10%)⁹⁴

- Males account for 92% of all prisoners⁹⁵ and are more likely to have extensive prison histories than females.⁹⁶
- People born overseas account for the 35% of the Australian population aged over 17 years but they are only 18% of all prisoners, while people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up approximately 2% of Australia's population aged over 18 years but 27% of the prison population.⁹⁷
- The median age for male prisoners was 35 years and for females it was 34 years.⁹⁸ People aged 25–34 years had the highest imprisonment rate.⁹⁹
- 2 in 3 people entering prison have used illicit drugs in the 12 months prior to admission to prison.¹⁰⁰
- 1 in 3 people entering prison had high school education level of year 9 or under.¹⁰¹
- 1 in 4 people in Australian prisons receive medication for mental health conditions while in prison.¹⁰²
- More than half of released prisoners expected they would be homeless on release.¹⁰³ "Finding suitable stable accommodation is a major concern for prisoners about to be released back into the community, especially for those with no family support. Prisoners also recognise that where, and with whom, they live immediately after release from prison will affect their likelihood of engaging in drug and alcohol misuse, and criminal activities."¹⁰⁴

4. After sharing the story of a person exiting the prison system, reflect on and discuss:

Discuss:

- What stands out to you?
- How does John's story challenge you?

Card Activity

Reflecting on what you learned in 'Their story'

- Which of the cards you created in 'Your Story' question 1 would you remove or modify?
- What new cards would you add?

Part C: God's Story

5. In the eyes of the Jewish authorities and the Roman state, Jesus was a criminal and was executed accordingly.

- How might the fact that Jesus was considered a criminal impact your attitude towards people who are serving time in prison?

6. Jesus was executed as a criminal and crucified alongside two criminals. These criminals were most likely people who had been part of bandit gangs that committed violent crimes. You can read the account in Luke 23:26-43.

Discuss:

- How does the attitude of Jesus toward the criminals executed alongside him, contrast with the attitudes of the crowds and the Roman soldiers?
- What can we learn from this about a Christ-like approach to people serving prison sentences and those released from prison?

Card Activity

Reflecting on what you learned in 'God's story'

- Review once more the statements on the cards created during question 1.
- Which of these would you modify or remove?
- What new cards would you like to add?

Part D: Our New Story

7. Think about:

- What challenges will a person who is leaving prison be likely to face?
- How might the church come alongside people exiting the prison system and their families and provide support?
- What challenges exist for the church in doing this?
- How can these challenges be overcome, or worked through?

Part E: Pray

Read through the description of what Baptist Care SA is doing working with people leaving prison and spend some time praying for their ministry.

See full size Prayer Cards on next page.



Breaking Free.

A local church-based mentoring program for ex-offenders.



*"I went to Chapel and heard the Easter story – about how Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' closest friends, was a prostitute, but he told her that her faith had saved her. It broke my heart as my partner is living that lifestyle while I am in prison. I couldn't stop thinking about it – I'm sure God was calling me". Aaron**

"I can tell Aaron is absolutely committed to change and wants to come on to Baptist Care SA's "Breaking Free" post release support program. He now has a Bible and we continue to meet. I'm in awe of the Holy Spirit and how He orchestrated things in such an amazing way"

Richard Hawke, Chaplain, Adelaide Remand Centre.

The Baptist Care SA 'Breaking Free' program seeks to offer local churches the opportunity to engage with men and women who have spent time in prison and are wanting to move forward with their lives.

As COVID-19 restrictions eased, we reached out to the churches across the city to form worship teams to help run our chapel services. Six churches have come on board, allowing the services to continue with a dynamic team of musicians as well as pastors and elders who can help lead discussions. This has been an absolute blessing and we thank everyone who has volunteered to be a part of this outreach ministry.

If you would like to be involved, please contact **Richard Hawke**

M: **0400 108 924** or E: **rhawke@baptistcaresa.org.au**



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Building Kingdom Communities.



1. At June 2020, there were 41,060 prisoners in Australian prisons: 37,905 males and 3,695 females;¹

Pray for those who are imprisoned, that they might find the love, support and faith they need to reorientate their lives.

2. The four most common offences were;

- acts intended to cause injury;
- illicit drug offences;
- theft; and
- unlawful entry with intent.²

Pray for the victims of crime and their families, that they might find healing.

3. The median age for male prisoners was 35 years and for females was 34 years.³ People aged 25–29 years have the highest imprisonment rate followed by people aged 30–44 years.⁴

Pray for the chaplains and other staff who work with prisoners.

4. People over-represented in the prison population include: people living with mental health conditions, people using illicit drugs, people with lower formal education, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁵

Pray for each of these over-represented groups, and particularly for our society to address the systemic issues that make people in these groups more likely to be imprisoned.

5. Overall in Australia 44.8% of prisoners released during 2014–15 returned to prison within two years.⁶ "Finding suitable stable accommodation is a major concern for prisoners about to be released back into the community, especially for those with no family support. Prisoners also recognise that where and with whom they live immediately after release from prison will affect their likelihood of engaging in drug and alcohol misuse, and criminal activities."⁷

Pray for those who are leaving prison to find a pathway that leads them away from reoffending.

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Prisoners in Australia 2020'; abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice

2. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Prisoners in Australia 2020'; abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice

3. ABS

4. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'The health of Australian prisoners 2015', Australian Government, Canberra, 2015, p.15. viewed 26 May 2018, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/prisoners/health-of-australias-prisoners-2015/contents/table-of-contents>>

5. AIHW, p.2,12,20.

6. Sentencing Advisory Council, 'Released prisoners returning to prison', Victorian State Government, 2018, viewed 26 May 2018, <<https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/statistics/sentencing-statistics/released-prisoners-returning-to-prison>>

7. AIHW, p. 29.

How to connect with the work of Baptist Care SA?

For more client stories both written and video, and more ways to connect with Baptist Care SA visit the website: www.baptistcaresa.org.au/resources/on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven

For more information on all volunteering opportunities, visit the website: www.baptistcaresa.org.au/get-involved/volunteer

If you would like to donate to our current appeal, visit the website: www.baptistcaresa.org.au/donate-now

Doing Justice ‘On earth as it is in heaven’

One of the greatest challenges for churches and individuals as they seek to become more involved in “doing justice” is that the issues are just so big that we may feel overwhelmed. It is critical to remember that we cannot do everything we want, but we can do some things if we desire. Start with something that is achievable for your church. Find one way to build justice into your church and life, learn and grow, celebrate the changes that are effected, and then consider taking another step. Step-by-step allow your church be transformed into a community of believers who honour God by imitating God’s love, kindness, generosity, compassion, and justice.¹⁰⁵

What Next?

One practical step you can take at the end of your group study is to ask your church leadership to complete the Justice Survey Tool here:

www.baptistcaresa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/On-Earth-as-it-is-in-Heaven-Justice-Survey-Tool-Digital.pdf

Appendix 1

Nicholas Wolterstorff helpfully reminds us that when speaking of injustice our tendency is to use the language of 'in' and 'out', 'margins' and 'centre', whereas Jesus pushes us to think of society in terms of 'top' and 'bottom'.¹⁰⁶

Metaphors common in present-day discourse about society are those of the margin and the outside... [The biblical writers] worked instead with an image of up and down: some are at the top of the social hierarchy, some are at the bottom. Those at the bottom are usually not there because it is their fault. They are there because they are downtrodden. Those at the top "trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the earth" (Amos 2:7).

When center and circumference are one's basic metaphors, the undoing of injustice will be described as including the outsiders. When up and down are one's basic metaphors, the undoing of injustice will be described as lifting up those at the bottom. The poor do not have to be included within the social order; they have always been there, usually indispensable to its functioning. They have to be lifted up.

...A striking feature of the New Testament writings, and of Jesus' preaching as they report it, is the [conviction that] the rectification of injustice requires not only lifting up 'the lowly' but casting down 'the high'. The coming of justice requires social inversion...

Jesus does not mean, literally, that justice requires that beggars become kings and kings become beggars. The beggars would soon start acting like kings. The clue to the meaning of the theme of social inversion lies in his sentence, "all who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted." The coming of justice requires the humbling of those who exalt themselves. The arrogant must be cured of their arrogance; the rich and powerful must be cured of their attachment to wealth and power. Only then is justice for all possible."¹⁰⁷

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