

Walking with Micah: Bible Study – God’s Justice

The *Walking with Micah* project is helping the Methodist Church in Britain to explore what it means to be a justice-seeking church. This bible study is one of the resources you can use within your church group to guide a Justice Conversation. The hope is that Methodist groups will reflect together and share their responses.

Justice Conversations can take different forms depending on your group and the resources you decide to use, but at the heart of each will be a commitment to:

- listen to people with experience of injustice
- explore where God is, and
- reflect on what a just, equal and life-giving world looks like

This resource is for a Bible Study looking at God’s justice.

At the end of the Bible Study, your group is invited to send in feedback to these questions:

- **Imagine a fair, more equal and life-bringing society and world....what does that look like?**
- **To get there, what is the most important issue that needs addressing?**
- **And what is one key action that needs to be taken to address it?**

Please visit www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah-send-your-response/#e-survey to send your feedback.

You can find other resources for holding Justice Conversations including ideas for youth or intergenerational groups, guided group conversations, as well as for preaching and craftivism at www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah-justice-conversations/. You are invited to use any of these resources flexibly and creatively for your group.

Important, before you begin:

This session has been designed, as far as possible, to encourage full participation of all those in attendance. The facilitator needs to be aware that there is a danger of people being reluctant to contribute, perhaps because of personal experience of injustice or fear that their views will be in the minority. We would therefore recommend that you encourage the participants to respect one another – particularly respecting confidentiality (where it doesn't infringe on good safeguarding protocol).

There may be a danger of some participants dominating the discussion if they have a lot to say. We therefore encourage you to circulate the discussion groups if you think this will help. You could also introduce different facilitation skills, such as a 'speaking object' (like a ball, talking stick etc.) or allowing people to write feedback as well as verbalising it, to allow maximum opportunity for all to participate.

Finally, there is also a risk that some people participating in this session will be upset by the topic under discussion. The sensitivity of the subject needs to be acknowledged at the start of the session and participants need to be aware of the different ways in which they can seek support to help deal with issues – both during the session and afterwards. Whilst it is important, as outlined above, that participants have equal opportunity to speak if they wish, this should always be optional.

Preparation

Instructions for group leaders are in green.

In preparation for the session, you will need

- Bibles or print outs of the Bible passages
 - Sheets of paper or some way of capturing what the group discusses
 - A copy of the **Sheet for note-takers** form which will help you or the notetaker collect your group's final feedback – to be found at www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah-tools/#other
 - A laptop/projector if you decide to show the film, Speaking from Experience (see below)
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- If you are meeting on Zoom or other platforms, you may choose to adapt this session, and you can use creative ways to help people generate ideas or talk in smaller groups. For example you can explore different tools such as Mentimeter (www.mentimeter.com), Poll Everywhere (www.polleverywhere.com), Padlet (www.padlet.com) and Jamboard (<https://jamboard.google.com/> or search in your Google apps).

[5 mins]

Introduction

Welcome the group, let people introduce themselves or catch up with each other. You may like to start with a prayer. Explain that the meeting will focus on what justice means in the eyes of God and what it might mean 'to do justice'. At the end of the Bible Study the group will be invited to send some feedback into the wider conversation about the Methodist Church's priorities for justice.

Prayer

Loving God,
You long for justice for your world.
You long for right relationships, for people to have life in all its fullness.
Your justice turns tables and blesses the poor and the peacemakers.
Help us today to open our hearts and minds.
Help us not just to talk of justice,
but to feel your call on our lives to act for justice
in the name of your son.
Amen.

[10 mins]

Speaking from Experience

All groups taking part in Justice Conversations are invited to *listen* to people with experiences of injustice before starting to *talk* about injustice. One way to do this is to show the short film "Speaking from Experience", in which people speak about their experiences of injustice and their hopes for a just world. This can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah-speaking-from-experience If time is tight, you could alternatively ask people to watch it before they come.

Invite people to incorporate their reflections on what they heard in the film through this Bible study, bearing in mind the sensitivities for many people of discussing issues of injustice.

[15 mins]

The context of the prophet, Micah

Read the following to the group, asking each person to imagine that this story is about them...

You live in a divided Kingdom. You live in the south but you see things happening in the northern Kingdom too. It's an unsettled time, but then again when is it ever really settled! You sense the fear and uncertainty that is around your nation, countries other than your own are gaining power. There may be wars, there may be occupation and there may be oppression.

If this wasn't bad enough, when you look at your own kingdom you see dishonesty in the marketplace and corruption in the government. Wealthy landowners are getting richer by bribing court officials to fix deals in their favour. Small landholders are going out of business and into destitution. You see false prophets leading people astray and priests standing back, letting it happen, as they pocket gifts from the powerful. You see the poor, who far from being helped by those in power, are being oppressed.

Against the backdrop of fear from the growing strength of neighbouring jurisdictions, you see the failing of your own nation's politicians and business and faith leaders. Your nation - built on faith, which has entered into a covenant relationship with God - is not living as God intended!

What is your place in all of this? There is nothing special about you, or at least from the outside that is what people would think! You don't feel that you are special in any way, you are not extraordinary, yet you get the sense that others are oblivious to what seems obvious to you! Your name, roughly translated, means 'Who is like God' and you wonder how aptly named you are. Not because you are under any delusion of grandeur. But this ability to see that to which others appear blind...well, it must be a calling of God? There are others you know like this. People who have something to say, and who speak divine words into ordinary situations.

You do the only thing you can do. This God-given gift to see the world as it is, through the eyes of God, leads you to speak out. You tell your people that they have gone astray. They have lost sight of what it means to live in the way of God, and that they had better do something about it before it's too late. Although you are not popular, you have a deep sense that this is why you have been given this gift from God. And in reality you can do no other. You keep saying things, yet the people keep on with their corrupt ways. Until one day you ask them to answer to God, and ask why they have grown weary of living in God's way? They are silent. This is when you realise that you no choice, you need to explain to them as clearly as is divinely possible; 'God has told you what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?'

In the group, create space for everyone to share thoughts about this story, how they felt putting themselves in Micah's situation and if it resonates with anything that is happening today...

Some questions that may help discussion

- Are there any similarities in this story of an 8th century BC prophet and today's world?
- Sometimes prophets were called "seers". In this retelling of Micah there is the phrase: 'others are oblivious to what seems obvious to you'. How well does this describe prophecy?

- Micah 6:8 has been described by some as the greatest reminder of true religion in the Old Testament., if not the entire Scriptures. How much do you agree with this?

[20 mins]

What is God's view of justice?

Micah delivers God's message to the people of Judea: "What I require is that you do Justice". As a concept, justice can be seen in different ways, here are some examples...

- Legally – justice is seen to be done when a prison sentence is given to an offender.
- When a debt is repaid - an eye for an eye when someone has been wronged.
- Social Justice - all deserve equal economic, political, and social opportunities irrespective of race, gender, status or religion.
- Ethically - what is morally right?

Divide the group into small groups, each to discuss one of the following passages by asking the questions

- What does the passage say about God's view of justice?
- Reading the passages in the light of God's words through Micah's – can you think of examples of how we do justice?
 - Matthew 12:9-14
 - Matthew 5:38-48
 - Luke 1:52-53
 - Matthew 7:12

Return into one group and share what was discussed in each of the smaller groups.

- What do we learn about God's justice from these passages? Can you agree on a definition of what God means by justice?
- What does it mean for us 'to do justice'?

[15 mins]

The Walking with Micah team will be collecting feedback from groups around the country. It will be helping the Church to listen to people experiencing injustice, and to learn from our theology and heritage, and from the wider Methodist family. Together we will identify the stories, principles, practices and priorities to enable us all to be part of a justice-seeking church. For more information visit www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah.

Having thought about justice in the bible record your answers to the following three questions so they may be fed into the Walking with Micah project.

- Imagine a fair, more equal and life-bringing society and world....what does that look like to you?
- To get there, what is the most important issue that needs addressing?
- And what is one key action that needs to be taken to address it?

Close by saying The Grace together.

Thank you for leading this session.

Please remember to contribute your group's feedback to the *Walking With Micah* conversations by visiting www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah-send-your-response/#e-survey

If you'd like to explore further, or lead worship, intergenerational or craftivist sessions, you can find more resources here www.methodist.org.uk/walking-with-micah-justice-conversations/