

Love-Driven Justice: *Part One*

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on *Love-Driven Justice* by Bishop Matt Whitehead
in Light + Life Magazine, March 2021



Recovering a Biblical Vision of Justice

This is the first study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download [part two](#), [part three](#) and [part four](#).

Begin with prayer.

A simple scan through the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible will reveal the use of the word justice 130 times. The highest number of instances is found in the writings of Isaiah the prophet with 30 mentions of justice. His words can be difficult to read, but God's heart can be clearly discerned.

Isaiah 59:1-15 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. (2) But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (3) For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken falsely, and your tongue mutters wicked things. (4) No one calls for justice; no one pleads a case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments, they utter lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. (5) They hatch the eggs of vipers and spin a spider's web. Whoever eats their eggs will die, and when one is broken, an adder is hatched. (6) Their cobwebs are useless for clothing; they cannot cover themselves with what they make. Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. (7) Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. They pursue evil schemes; acts of violence mark their ways. (8) The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks along them will know peace. (9) So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. (10) Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like people without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead. (11) We all growl like bears; we moan mournfully like doves. We look for justice, but find none; for deliverance, but it is far away. (12) For our

offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: (13) rebellion and treachery against the LORD, turning our backs on our God, inciting revolt and oppression, uttering lies our hearts have conceived. (14) So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. (15) Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice.

Isaiah uses many descriptive words to describe the people of Israel due to their lack of justice and righteousness. List some of them here:

Let's hear from Bishop Matt Whitehead:

Justice is a Bible Word.

Justice is a pervasive biblical theme that is often paired with righteousness. The Old Testament prophets cry out on behalf of a just and righteous God who demands justice and righteousness in His people. The Hebrew word for justice, *mishpat*, has in its root the concepts of fairness and equity for all, particularly the disadvantaged. So, when judges exercise justice, they don't take bribes or treat the rich better than they treat the poor. The Hebrew word for righteousness, *tzadeqah*, means living in a right relationship, treating everyone with fairness, generosity, and equity. In his book "Generous Justice," Tim Keller calls *tzadeqah* (righteousness) "primary justice." It is "behavior, that if it was prevalent in the world, would render rectifying justice (*mishpat*)

unnecessary, because everyone would be living in right relationship to everyone else."

Jesus' primary objective was not to establish a better society and thereby to accomplish deeper spirituality. He brought *heaven* to earth, thereby releasing deliverance, freedom, salvation, holiness, justice, and true righteousness. As His disciples, Jesus calls us to do the same. Our spiritual forefathers, John and Charles Wesley, proved that holiness contained the power that transformed 18th century England as converted people radically benefited the world around them.

Describe in your own words, what fairness and equity mean to you.

Why do you think justice is so important to God?

Is the idea that justice is a Bible word – and so near to the heart of God – new to you?

How does this definition change, enhance or clarify any thoughts you've had concerning holiness?

Biblical Justice vs. Social Justice

You might equate *biblical justice* with current *social justice* movements. Has that been your experience? Bishop Matt offers this comparison:

Christine Erickson, the director of the OneLess ministry for children at risk, [notes](#), “In contrast to social justice, which focuses on a temporal view of addressing injustices in society, biblical justice starts with the eternal in mind. It starts by seeing people as God sees them — recognizing that we are all created

in the image of God. And it is incumbent upon Christ-followers to pursue physical and spiritual freedom for the oppressed so others can also become what God created them to be. If we have experienced freedom, how can we not pursue freedom on behalf of others?”

Honestly consider for a moment the starting point of biblical justice as described by Christine Erickson – that it begins with the eternal in mind. Do people see others as equals? Why or why not? What is at work in biases we have against others?

Erickson continues that “it is incumbent upon Christ-followers to pursue physical and spiritual freedom for the oppressed...” Do most Christians tend to pursue righteousness for others or wait for them to come and ask? Why?

What might it take to become a people that pursue justice for those who simply cannot find their way to freedom for whatever reason(s), physical or spiritual?

Evangelism with Compassionate Action.

We’ll conclude this first part of four in this series with a look into various passages of Scripture. First, read this final segment from Bishop Matt, then read the Scriptures. For each one, write down any observations that jump out of the verse to you (key words, phrases, things that touch your heart) and then consider how they apply to our lives today.

Biblical, *Love-Driven Justice* is the conjoining of evangelism and compassionate action. They are not mutually exclusive. As God moves toward us in compassion and mercy, we are transformed by His love and then find ourselves driven toward those on the margins of society. Jesus got up-close-and-personal with the marginalized, and there He demonstrated His grace, love, and mercy. In His going, Jesus preached the good news to all. He surprised many with His inclusion of the outcast, equitable treatment of the lowest and least, welcoming strangers, and embracing the “unclean.” To love from a distance is not in keeping

with the character of Jesus. *Love-Driven Justice* is centered in Christlikeness and His clear example in the Scriptures. For us, His disciples, the implication is clear: we should mirror Christ’s method and message in our world today.

The Scriptures are full of references to God’s preference for the poor and God’s heart for justice and righteousness. There’s not enough space to list every reference but look at this sampling from God’s Word:

As to Foreigners:

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:33–34)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to the Weak, Fatherless, Poor, Oppressed:

Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. (Psalm 82:3)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to Our Obligation to Fairness and Equitable Treatment of Others:

Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:9)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to Defending the Oppressed:

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to Our Commitment to Be Merciful and Compassionate:

This is what the Lord Almighty said: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.” (Zechariah 7:9–10)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to Our Call to Mirror God's Holiness, Righteousness and Justice:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to Religion That Is Acceptable to the Father:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:27)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

Love-Driven Justice: *Part Two*

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on *Love-Driven Justice* by Bishop Matt Whitehead
in Light + Life Magazine, March 2021



Recommitting ourselves to model Jesus' love-driven way

This is the second study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download [part one](#), [part three](#) and [part four](#).

The values of *The Free Methodist Way* include *Love-Driven Justice*. Bishop Matt Whitehead, in this second in a series of four Light + Life Study Guides, focuses on our need to recommit ourselves to love others as Jesus loves them – and *us*.

Begin with prayer.

A simple scan through the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible will reveal the use of the word justice 130 times. The highest number of instances is found in the writings of Isaiah the prophet with 30 mentions of justice. His words can be difficult to read, but God's heart can be clearly discerned.

“People blindness.” That's what Dr. Delia Nüesch-Olver called us to recognize in a Light + Life magazine article from March 1997:

In America we don't like to talk about issues of race or class, but there is an epidemic of people blindness. We need to learn to see the uniqueness of different people groups and use different methods and styles to reach different people. It takes effort to connect with people who are different from ourselves. But if we don't do that, in reality we are saying that everybody needs to be like us, to do things our way if they want to find Jesus Christ in the Free Methodist Church. If we want to be like Jesus we need to take part in restoring sight and vision to those who have people blindness — helping them to see those people

groups that are ignored in the past because of their accents, traditions, skin color or economic status.

Nearly 24 years later, her message is equally as compelling. We need fresh, loving eyes that see opportunities for gospel transformation among the many people groups that God has brought to live among us.

In a proper understanding of Love-Driven Justice, modeling Jesus focuses on the recipients of the gospel proclamation: the poor, the prisoners, the disabled, and the oppressed. Remember, it was in the synagogue in Nazareth that Jesus quoted Isaiah to announce His mission and who was to receive His good news:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

This declared prophecy was Jesus' commission from the Father, His assignment to His disciples –

which extends to us. These are our marching orders, and holy love is the cadence to which we march.

Additionally, in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus challenges us with a vivid reminder that our judgment hinges on how we treat those in need. Using the imagery of sheep and goats, Jesus makes the startling statement that as we minister to those in need, we are ministering to Him!

Dr. Nüesch-Olver begins this portion of the article with discussing “people blindness.” To what degree are we *people blind*? Who do we pay particular attention to and who would we rather ignore? Why is this?

Consider for a moment that Jesus overlooked us. That we, somehow, were left out — not befriended by Him, loved by Him, or seen by Him? Can you even dream of such a thing? If Jesus is not blind to our needs, why are we, who call Jesus Savior and Lord, quite blind to the needs of others?

What is broken in us that we can ignore brokenness in others? What can we do about that?

Bishop Matt mentions Matthew 25:31-46. Let's read it together and respond to this gospel reading:

Matthew 25:31-46 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. (32) All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (34) “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ (37) “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ (40) “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ (41) “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ (44) “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ (45) “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ (46) “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

What acts of ministry did the sheep (those on the right hand of Jesus) do? (See v.35-36.)

How would you feel if someone ignored, snubbed, or harmed — physically or verbally — your spouse? Your child(ren)? Would you take it personally? Why?

Why does Jesus seem to take it personally when the “least of these brothers and sisters of mine” are ignored? (See v.41.)

One of the most striking comparisons in this passage is the reactions of the two people groups. Those on Jesus’ right hand act as if they are undeserving of such a reward! They are humble and can’t recall when they “fed,” “clothed,” or “invited” Jesus in. In contrast, those on Jesus’ left try to justify themselves. They are aghast that Jesus is condemning them! They seem to have no idea why or to what they are being held accountable.

What drove those on Jesus’ right hand to minister so humbly to the least?

What drove those on Jesus’ left hand to ignore the least?

Selective Neighboring

If that weren’t enough, Jesus says this in His Sermon on the Mount:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43–48).

The people of Jesus’ day talked themselves into selective neighboring by misinterpreting Scripture, which led to the self-justified hatred of “outsiders” (non-Jews). The Word of God said “love your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:18) but never said to hate one’s enemy. That was a human add-on. We cannot hide any longer behind false smoke screens of misinterpretation of Scripture, believing that we are somehow self-justified by our inequitable treatment of others through selective neighboring.

Jesus must be our primary source of interpreting what the Scriptures ask of us.

Consider for a moment that we may misinterpret Scripture to justify our in-action to pursue love-driven justice for the least of these. Do you believe we have done so? How? Can you think of an example?

What kinds of things can we do — individually and collectively — to act more and more lovingly to the *least of these* in our own neighborhoods?

Close in prayer.

Love-Driven Justice: *Part Three*

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on *Love-Driven Justice* by Bishop Matt Whitehead
in Light + Life Magazine, March 2021



Rebooting Our Thinking About Equity

This is the third study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download [part one](#), [part two](#) and [part four](#).

This is the third study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download part one, part two, and part four. Equity is a loaded and emotionally charged word for many today. In his article, Bishop Matt Whitehead invited us to reboot our thinking regarding this word. To do so, we should be encouraged to set aside our preconceived notions or thoughts, and humbly enter into this conversation.

Begin with prayer.

Love-Driven Justice is active, not passive — movement, not stagnation. Progress on societal issues of equity for people of color since our founding in 1860 does not mean our work is *finished*. In the same way, even though B.T. Roberts wrote [“Ordaining](#)

[Women”](#) in 1891, that doesn’t indicate we have arrived at a place of real equity for women. Just because our social structures are far different than millennia ago when prophets wrote does not change the meaning of “foreigners.” Our work is not finished.

Bishop Matt begins with the reminder that “our work is not finished.” As you read this part of his article, what work is he referring to? Write your thoughts here:

Particularly, three people groups are mentioned: People of color, women, and foreigners. Considering that we are discussing how to reboot our thinking about equity, discuss with your group your thoughts about each people group, and whether or not they are treated with equity compared to their counterparts in our society today, and the basis for your answers.

1. People of Color vs. White People. (It will be particularly helpful for people of color in your group to give their insights and be heard.)
2. Women vs. Men. (It will be particularly helpful for women in your group to give their insights and be heard.)
3. Foreigners vs. Citizens. (It will be particularly helpful for any foreign nationals, here on a visa, to give their insights and be heard.)

Bishop Matt reminds us that “Love-Driven Justice is active, not passive — movement, not stagnation.” How can we be a people actively moving in the direction of equity for all people?

A Story About Our Founder.

Roberts saw the egregious discrimination against non-whites (African Americans and Native Americans), which disturbed him deeply. In his definitive work on B.T. and Ellen Roberts, “Populist Saints,” Dr. Howard Snyder tells a story reported by B.T. Roberts’ son, Benson, providing insight into the character of his father:

Roberts was traveling by train, as he frequently did. At one stop a group of about 10 well-dressed young African Americans boarded the train and entered his car. One of the passengers was incensed to see these black youth and insisted the conductor put them in second class.

“They have first class tickets,” the conductor explained.

The passenger grew irate and said he shouldn’t have to ride with [expletive deleted]. At this point Roberts intervened, defending

the young men and women. He “urged their cause convincingly, as he well could do,” Benson wrote. The youth took their seats, and the train went on.

When the train reached their stop, the youth gathered around Roberts and ... sang him “a most beautiful song” — a private concert. Roberts learned that these young men and women were the famed Jubilee Singers from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

It would be unthinkable to deny a person of color a seat today on a train, bus, or plane. But though we may agree on that singular point, we are still divided over other matters of equity. Today, we engage more insidious forms of “selective seating” where people of color are not offered opportunities to lead, given equal opportunity to share their insights, or treated with the same dignity offered to whites. Inequity is alive and well.

Roberts lived in a different day where slavery was still a daily reality. Although that is not the case today, what do you make of Bishop Matt’s statement that we “engage in more insidious forms of ‘selective seating’”?

Do you agree or disagree that inequity is “alive and well”? Why?

Psalms 9:8 He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity.

We read in this verse that God is a righteous judge. Are you glad that He judges you fairly and in light of His grace? Write down all the reasons you are grateful for God’s equitable judgment and righteousness.

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

In contrast, we see in Micah 6:8 that God asks us to be people of mercy, justice and humility. Equity is certainly a part of that equation. Why does God ask us to treat one another in this way?

Silence in the face of inequity was not B.T. Roberts' way, and it is not *The Free Methodist Way*. *Love-Driven Justice* positions itself in places where false accusation, inequitable treatment, unjust and oppressive systems, and active, unjustifiable harm to others do their evil work. *Love-Driven Justice* speaks for the voiceless unborn, the trafficked, and those

physically abused behind closed doors. *Love-Driven Justice* advocates, gets involved, and speaks up. Honestly, we are not yet fully awakened to biblical justice, mercy, and truth in our church, and we must search our hearts to see our barriers to equity and tear them down.

Equity Is a Sign of Spiritual Awakening.

Today, there is a movement — numerous church and para-church groups asking God to bring spiritual renewal and awakening. This is a wonderful thing! Consider for a moment the bold title above: “Equity Is a Sign of Spiritual Awakening.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

In what ways can the church speak up today, like B.T. Roberts did so long ago? Why might we be hesitant to do so?

Close in prayer.

Love-Driven Justice: *Part Four* Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on *Love-Driven Justice* by Bishop Matt Whitehead
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Revisioning Our Future

This is the fourth study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download [part one](#), [part two](#) and [part three](#).

When nothing changes, nothing changes. For those in our society who have distinct advantages over others, same might be just fine. However, same for others means continued poverty, oppression or disadvantage in a number of ways.

In this fourth and final study guide, you'll be asked to engage a great deal in prayer. These times and seasons of prayer are guided and will ask you to focus on particular needs in your own community — wherever you may be.

Begin with prayer.

And now, let's read the final segment of Bishop Matt Whitehead's article.

Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction. (Proverbs 29:18)

Vision comes from God and unifies the people of God. Perhaps one indicator of disunity is that we have, in many ways, cast off the restraint that prophetic vision gives us. I, along with Bishop Linda and Bishop Keith, am committed to casting God's vision.

Wherever you find yourself on the social or political spectrum we're asking you to consider recasting your theology — realizing that justice is a biblical issue birthed in the heart of God. We call you to recommit

your life to modeling Jesus' Love-Driven ways — knowing that Christ in you is the hope of glory for the poor, oppressed, widow, fatherless, foreigner, and orphan. And finally, we implore you to rethink your understanding of equity. Equitable treatment of all people is God's way of justice, driven by holy love.

Joshua stood before the people of Israel and said, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. ... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Friends, what will we choose — collectively as a family of Christ's disciples? As for your Board of Bishops, we are committed to serving the Lord through *Love-Driven Justice*.

Re-read Proverbs 29:18. In all our conversations throughout these four study guides regarding love-driven justice, what role do you believe revelation from God will help us?

How do you see we, God's people, "casting off restraint" when God's vision is not before us?

Through these studies, what has changed about your thinking or understanding regarding justice, equity and love?

A Time of Guided Prayer for Love-Driven Justice

Thinking of the deep needs in your community or region where injustice and inequity is an issue, list below what you believe are the top four needs that need God's intervention and mercy:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Group Prayer:

For each of the needs above, direct your prayers in three directions: 1) That God would come to the aid of the people represented by that need, 2) That God would provide revelation for us to see the need in the way He sees it, and respond with love, mercy, and compassion, and 3) That God would give you and your church a clear and compelling vision that engages your involvement in the solution.



- God Help!
- God, break our hearts!
- God, give us Your vision!



- God Help!
- God, break our hearts!
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- God Help!
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- God, give us Your vision!

If you are engaging this exercise in a group, write down any and all insights you receive from the Holy Spirit during your prayers and then, after your time of prayer, share them with one another. Quite often, God will give many people similar or connecting thoughts that reveal His vision for your church.

Close in prayer.