

lesson one

JUNE 29–JULY 5

God Created . . .

*“He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy”
(Prov. 14:31, NKJV).*



Here God holds a newly formed Earth with a background of stars. The idea behind it is that God created Earth carefully and gave it to us to care for and enjoy.

Gen. 1:1, 26–31;
2:7; 4:9;
Prov. 14:31

Introduction

The Millennial Solution

For quite some time, the millennial issue has come up in the workplace, society, and even in our church. Often this generation is labeled as distracted, entitled, selfish, apathetic, and the like. This generation has so many resources available at its fingertips, but are they doing anything with those resources?

God wants to breathe His image into us once more.

This week's lesson got me thinking about what our true mission and purpose is as Christian young people while living in an age of technology and distractions—and that mission hasn't changed. Micah 6:8 says our mission is “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with [our] God” (NKJV), and this still rings true, no matter what period of history we are in.

In Genesis 1:1–31 we see that God created Adam and Eve in His image and then gave them dominion and responsibility to care for the earth and everything and everyone in it. Only when we look to be changed into His image once again can we be trusted to have the responsibility to care for those around us. God wants to breathe His image into us once more so that we can make a difference in our communities and to the people under our direct influence. As we continue to fall in love with our Creator, our hearts and minds will be changed to have the desire, focus, and heart to continue to do what is right and to do good to those around us. It is not something we can do in our own strength, and if we continue to be influenced by and to conform to society's standards on what is seen as appropriate for young people, we won't be able to make that impact.

Don't let society label you based on when you were born and, therefore, settle. Instead, become the best you can be and choose to be different. I encourage you to choose to accept the responsibility for and to fulfill the purpose God has for you—the purpose that only you can fill—and to impact the people that God has placed in your path because “who knows whether you have come . . . for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). If you're alive today, it is because you are a recipient of incredible grace and love; every breath that we draw is another reminder of a chance to make a difference today that one day will make all the difference.

Logos *An Ordained Mission of Justice*

Ps. 73:17;
Eccles. 12:14;
Isa. 61:8;
Mic. 6:8;
Rom. 12:19;
James 1:27

Sentenced for Life

Cyntoia Brown was brought up in circumstances that would shake up a large majority of us. She grew up in an abusive home with an alcoholic stepfather while her biological mother worked as a prostitute to support a drug addiction.

At 16, Brown ran away from her adopted family's Nashville home and got caught up in drugs and prostitution. One night, a man who had "solicited her services" picked her up and drove her to his home. At some point, she felt her life was in danger, and she responded by killing him with a gun. Though she claimed self-defense, she was sentenced as an adult to life in prison ineligible for parole until the age of 69.¹

At times, I find myself getting overwhelmed as the reality of world issues such as this sinks in.

How the World Sees Justice (Prov. 28:5; Rom. 12:19)

Brown was clearly a victim of human trafficking but the justice system sealed her fate behind bars. Justice is not always won.

Hollywood portrays crusading heroes who appeal to our inner desire to glorify human strength as justice. We want someone to save the day. We want the solution to be easily pieced together, and we want all of the answers to life's hardest questions. This is what we want *social justice* to mean. But in this corrupted world, all justice means is that no matter what the cause, somebody will always pay.

When the System Fails (Pss. 58:11; 73:17; 119:126–136)

According to the United Nations, four billion people are excluded from the rule of law.² That means the justice system has failed to protect these people from violence. One form of violence today is human trafficking, an industry that generates about \$150 billion US dollars every year.³

Unjust systems prevail in our society, which can be seen further in the oppression of the poor, persons with disabilities, women, and racialized persons in several countries all over the world. Some well-meaning people have taken to addressing these inequities through violence and other militant means, but their efforts won't bring about the solution they seek.

This Is Biblical Justice (Isa. 61:8; James 1:27; 1 John 2; Rev. 12:17)

When we look at what justice means in the Bible, we get a completely different picture. The Hebrew word for "justice" is *mishpat*, which means that we are to treat people equally. The definition extends to more than the

punishment of wrongdoing and includes giving people back their rights. When used, it is often associated with taking up the cause and care of widows, orphans, and other vulnerable ones (James 1:27).

In the eyes of God, justice involves becoming intimately involved in the lives of the people you are fighting for. It means seeing pain and oppression the way God sees it. The founder of World Vision and Samaritan's Purse, Bob Pierce, once wrote: "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God." When you let your heart be broken this way, you come to recognize that it is our duty to do our part to advocate for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed—not to make some kind of name for ourselves but simply because it is right.

This brokenness further means that we should choose to unite ourselves with the bigger cause of God, who is described as being our Advocate (1 John 2:1) in saving people from a lost world and a ruthless prosecutor.

On a grander level, our Father is looking to restore what has been lost in our world: dignity, beauty, freedom, love, and peace. By enacting justice, we uphold God's moral law and vindicate His name.

Do Justly and Love Mercy (Eccles. 12:14; Isa. 1:17–19; Mic. 6:8; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:10, 11; Rev. 16:7)

While we may not have the quick-fix solution we often desire as a society, our duty to humanity doesn't change. Though feeding a homeless man won't eradicate hunger and taking in a young girl from the streets will not end human trafficking, we do it anyway. True justice means doing right even when the solution is not easily in sight. We may never save the day as fashionably as a movie superhero, but we are still called to "do justly, . . . love mercy, and to walk humbly with [our] God" (Mic. 6:8).

In bringing up the justice discussion, we should never forget a most crucial component—which is mercy. Just as God demonstrated mercy toward us in sending us His Son to pay the penalty for our sins (John 3:16), so must we move forward with our appointed mission as His advocates to bring hope and healing to a dying world.

REACT

As you look at all of the oppression in the world around you, what causes might God lay on your heart? How might you seek to get involved?

1. Christine Hauser, "Cyntoia Brown, Trafficking Victim Serving Life Sentence for Murder, Will Get Clemency Hearing," *New York Times*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/07/us/cyntoia-brown-clemency-granted.html>. In January 2019, the governor of Tennessee granted executive clemency to Cyntonia Brown, commuting her life sentence to be eligible for parole in August 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cyntoia-brown-clemency-granted-by-tennessee-governor-bill-haslam-life-sentence-commuted>.

2. Magdy Martínez-Solimán, "Justice and Development: Challenges to the Legal Empowerment of the Poor," *UN Chronicle*, December 2012, <https://unchronicle.un.org/article/justice-what-we-need-post-2015-world>.

3. "Human Trafficking by the Numbers," Human Rights First, January 7, 2017, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/human-trafficking-numbers>.

Testimony

A Debtor Not Only to God

Gal. 5:13

“By the terms of our stewardship we are placed under obligation, not only to God, but to man. To the infinite love of the Redeemer every human being is indebted for the gifts of life. Food and raiment and shelter, body and mind and soul—all are the purchase of His blood. And by the obligation of gratitude and service thus imposed, Christ has bound us to our fellow men. He bids us, ‘By love serve one another.’ Galatians 5:13. ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.’ Matthew 25:40.

“‘I am debtor,’ Paul declares, ‘both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.’ Romans 1:14. So also are we. By all that has blessed our life above others, we are placed under obligation to every human being whom we might benefit.

“To the infinite love of the Redeemer every human being is indebted for the gifts of life.”

“... We are but stewards, and on the discharge of our obligation to God and man depend both the welfare of our fellow beings and our own destiny for this life and for the life to come.”¹

“When men who have been abundantly blessed of heaven with large wealth fail to carry out God’s design, and do not relieve the poor and the oppressed, the Lord is displeased and will surely visit them. They have no excuse for withholding from their neighbors the help that God has put it into their power to provide; and God is dishonored, his character is misinterpreted by Satan, and he is represented as a stern judge who causes suffering to come upon the creatures he has made. This misrepresentation of God’s character is made to appear as truth, and thus through the temptation of the enemy, men’s hearts are hardened against God. Satan charges upon God the very evil he himself has caused men to commit by withholding their means from the suffering. He attributes to God his own characteristics.”²

REACT

1. Whom do society, local cultures, and local groups consider least?
2. God has given us life, food, raiment, shelter, and many more blessings, so name 13 things that God has given you that can benefit the least.
3. Ponder deeply what the last paragraph says, and discuss what this means to you personally.

1. Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 139.

2. Ellen G. White, “Parable of the Rich Man,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 26, 1894.

Prov. 14:31

Evidence *No Resting Place*

Whenever I go on a journey, much planning goes into it: choosing a hotel, flight times, who will pick me up from the airport or whether I rent a car—and if so will I get lost while driving—how much money I need for food, and so on. I always have a sense of anticipation because sometimes things don't go as planned. In addition, I never sleep in full rest mode when I'm on the road because of everything going on—and these are controlled trips, planned trips I would have consented to and normally enjoyed, so I should be at ease and “place all my cares on Jesus” (1 Pet. 5:7). Yes?

How we live and how we care for one another will have a lot to do with our destiny.

Then I observe men, women, and children sometimes forced from their homes, fleeing poverty, starvation, violence, and even death. In some cases, they don't know their destination, and their means of transportation is a container wherein they are packed like sardines or an overcrowded, unseaworthy boat or walking hundreds of miles by foot. The only clothes they have are what's on their back; the only money they have is to pay smugglers to get them as far as they can. No one is picking them up; they have no bed for a night's rest, no food to satisfy days or weeks of hunger. I never got comfortable with the scene of little children at entrances of borders or fleeing in the arms of crying mothers, fearful of harsh treatment and the unknown.¹

Our privileges should be used to help those in need. We are to treat our neighbors as we would want to be treated (c.f. Matt. 25:40, NIV). In a world where there is so much confusion, injustice, and moral decay, let us not dishonor God by asking the question like Cain, “Am I my brother's keeper?” (Gen. 4:9). We have only a period of time to exist on this earth; this life as it is, is not our resting place. How we live and how we care for one another will have a lot to do with our destiny. We are our brother's keeper.

REACT

1. Should you feel an obligation to welcome strangers into your country, community, school, home?
2. What does the Bible reveal about Christ's attitude toward people in need?
3. Can you remember the last time you honored God by helping someone by denying yourself?

¹ Dara Lind, “The Trump Administration's Separation of Families at the Border, Explained,” *Vox*, updated June 15, 2018.

How-to

The Trip of Your Lifetime

| Luke 12:40

Preparing for a trip can take weeks, sometimes months. It all depends on important factors such as the time of year, destination, and length of stay. When my family traveled earlier this year, we had to get passports for three out of the four family members. Much planning went into making sure that we had the required documentation just to leave our island home.

You must think about these things early so that on the day of your departure, you have everything in place.

When preparing for travel, you must consider accommodation, spending money, and appropriate clothes for the destination climate. You must think about these things early so that on the day of your departure, you have everything in place.

It's the same when we're preparing for the trip when Jesus comes, that all-important journey through the clouds to heaven. Before we make that trip, though, we need to prepare.

Important documentation to peruse before travel will be our Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. We can learn how to love God and our neighbors (Exod. 20:1–17), the best foods to eat (Rev. 22:2), and the best time for rest and restoration (Exod. 20:8–11). There is also information about the landscape (Rev. 21:21) and the wildlife (Isa. 65:25).

Excess baggage will not be permitted (Matt. 6:15). Forgive others so that God can forgive you. The joy of the Lord will keep our luggage light, so make sure to stuff all the corners of your suitcase with that.

No need to worry about clothing because God our Father will be our host. He has promised us all robes of righteousness. God will also take care of our food (twelve kinds of fruit) and our accommodation (mansions).

Pack obedience and trust in God. God is the master Pilot, so there's no need to worry; even though we may experience turbulence at times, our safe arrival is ensured.

For any trip to be successful, you must prepare. In the same way we put things in place for our earthly trips, let's make ten times the effort to prepare for the trip of a lifetime.

REACT

1. Are we leaving our preparation for the last minute? (When should you start to pack?)
2. What can we do to ensure that we don't miss the final boarding call?

Jannelle Spencer, Brittons Hill, Bridgetown, Barbados

Gen. 1:26-31

Opinion

Boomerang

A former colleague of mine once said, "I don't need people to survive; I only need God!" I understood how he felt but respectfully explained that the body of Christ must take care of even the least of its members for many reasons, but the most important would be to reflect the love of God to the world. They need us.

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Neglecting to minister to the immediate needs of our community has created a problem that has metastasized to alarming proportions. People who are neglected often turn to crime, which ends up hurting more than just the perpetrators. As philosopher Elbert Hubbard put it, "Down in their hearts, wise men know this truth: the only way to help yourself is to help others."¹ Unfortunately, we are more into helping ourselves.

Are we so busy saving ourselves and close family members that we are forgetting the needy in our communities? The Bible predicted that the increase of wickedness would affect our love for others (Matt. 24:12). Yet, God commands us to continue showing love in the most impossible of situations (John 13:34, 35).

Thankfully, our Savior is ready to use any people who are willing to deny themselves to love their neighbor as themselves. Through us, He is ready to show our needy community members that they have a Creator who loves them and wants the best for them.

True awareness of the needs around us can be so overwhelming, and like the servant with the one talent, it is tempting to think that we cannot make a difference. However, we must not believe that whatever we do will be in vain. Jesus has promised to help us with everything that will bring Him honor. God knew that by taking care of our weakest, we would automatically be taking care of ourselves and preparing a generation to accept what Christ did for them on the cross.

REACT

1. Do you find helping others challenging (the homeless, beggars, the elderly, unbelieving family members)?

1. Elbert Hubbard, *The Philistine* 18, no. 1 (Dec. 1903): 12.

Exploration

Revealing God's Heart

Prov. 14:31

CONCLUDE

Reflecting on the theme for this week, it should touch our hearts to notice just how God feels toward the poor and the suffering. He is reproached when we oppress or offend another who is less fortunate. Because God is love, He calls us also to walk in that same love (Eph. 5:1, 2) and to show who He really is by revealing His heart for those under trying circumstances. When they see, through our actions, that God truly cares about their lives and wants to save them, their hearts will naturally open up to receive God's wonderful, healing love.

CONSIDER

- Getting to know your neighbors. Be a friend to them and find out how you can help them and show you appreciate them.
- Writing a letter about how God feels toward those who are hurting, suffering, and oppressed and how that impacts you.
- Listening to the song "People Need the Lord" by Steve Green. Reflect on how God seeks to help those in need through you.
- Planning a bake sale in your community or your church. Donate the funds raised to a local shelter or a charity that aims to help those who are less fortunate.
- Writing a poem about God's love. Give it as a gift to someone who's hurting to brighten their day. Write the poem with fancy lettering and be creative with the overall presentation.
- Memorizing the lyrics to the song "I'm Available to You" by Milton Brunson. As you think about the words, jot down some ways you can do more for others. Then put those ideas into action! Invite your family and/or friends to join you.
- Putting together care packages that have fruit, clothing items (e.g., socks), toiletries, and a book about Jesus. Plan a trip into the city with family and friends, and hand out the packages to the homeless.

CONNECT

1 Samuel 2:8; Psalms 9:9, 10; 17:5; 147:3.

Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, pp. 186–188.