

*Blueprint for a Better*  
**World**

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“ ‘ *You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD* ’ ’ ”

*(Lev. 19:18, NKJV).*



The world is on a blueprint. Because the world has fallen into sin, a plan was created to return it to its former glory—a plan that we are very much involved in.

## Introduction *To Know God Is to Know Justice*

Prov. 31:8;  
Mic. 6:8;  
Zech. 7:9, 10;  
John 13:34, 35

In the past few hundred years, it seems that humanity has made great strides toward justice and equality for all people. We have witnessed the human rights movement (1899–1920), the black lives matter movement (2013) and the #MeToo movement (2017). However, when we look at our world in its current state, with political oppression, racial and educational inequality, economic injustice, exploitation, and violations of all kinds toward those most vulnerable, it is evident that we are far from God's ideal.

### **At the very center of justice is the simple, yet profound, principle of love.**

We fall short because our justice system and our human ideas about social justice are inherently flawed. We cannot exercise justice correctly with our secular laws while ignoring the justice Giver and the Creator of all that is fair.

We realize that in the grand scheme of things, only God can deliver ultimate justice to this wicked world when He returns. Yet, we recognize that we must be actively engaged in all aspects of social justice as followers of the One who is perfectly just.

Our knowledge and understanding of God are reflected by how much we share His passion for justice.

His instructions to us while we are on this earth are to care for the vulnerable and to demonstrate His character through our loving actions.

In Micah 6:8 God tells us, “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” (NIV). Here God is telling us to take action when we see injustice. It is not optional for God's people; it is an integral part of who we should be.

To take it further, acting justly is to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute” (Prov. 31:8, NIV) and to base our lives on love toward God and man. Take it from Him: “ ‘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’ ” (Zech. 7:9, 10, NIV).

In essence, at the very center of justice is the simple, yet profound, principle of love. Our love for God is measured by our love for people. This is why Jesus commands us to “love one another” (John 13:34), which results in our dealing justly with everyone. This, according to Jesus, is what demonstrates to the world that we are Christians: our love for others (John 13:35).

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Lev. 19:18

## Evidence

# *A Model of Love and Forgiveness*

The book of Leviticus outlines the priestly duties and sacrificial system of the sanctuary. God established the system to model His love to us in dealing with our sins (Rom. 5:8; Heb. 9:22). The book of Leviticus also outlines the conduct that God expected of His people in relationship with one another. He desired them to be a holy people to Himself and a channel of blessing to one another and the surrounding nations.

### **He wanted to teach His people a heavenly culture and lifestyle that was rooted in love, not in selfish practices based on sensual desires.**

We must remember that God had just delivered the children of Israel from Egypt, where they had been slaves for roughly four hundred years. During that time, they had been exposed to and learned many of the customs of Egypt. Furthermore, God was leading them back to Canaan, where there were customs and practices that were an abomination to the Lord. He wanted to teach His people a heavenly culture and lifestyle that was rooted in love, not in selfish practices based on sensual desires.

Through Moses, God gave specific instructions for how the priests were to conduct the ritual services that pointed to Christ shedding His blood as the ultimate sacrifice to forgive the people of their sins (John 1:29). God wanted to demonstrate that He is a loving God and made a way to cover our sins so that He could be in communion with us. By design, when a person would kill the animal sacrifice, it would leave a lasting impression on the person's mind and cause that person to abhor sin and turn away from it.<sup>1</sup>

God also wanted to demonstrate that if He can forgive us, we should be kind to one another and forgive each other (Eph. 4:32). Vengeance and holding a grudge toward someone who may have wronged us is something that He did not want in the character of His people (Exod. 2:13; Lev. 19:18). His people were to be a loving people; a people with a moral character far different from that of the nations around them (1 Pet. 4:8, 9).

### **REACT**

1. Have you accepted the reality that God has forgiven you through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ?
2. What is keeping you from extending forgiveness to others?

<sup>1</sup> Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1978), pp. 693–696.

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# Logos *Blessed to Be a Blessing*

Prov. 11:25;  
Isa. 58:1–8;  
Matt. 5:16;  
Rev. 18:1

## ***Cry Aloud (Isa. 58:1)***

The call of Israel was a call to be a blessing to the nations that surrounded it. In Isaiah 58:1 we see a cry to call out the iniquities and transgressions of God's people. To better understand the reason for the cry, we must consider the context. The Lord gives a command in Isaiah 56:1 to "keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed" (NKJV). We see in this passage that justice and righteousness are interconnected. Both justice and righteousness are part of God's plan of salvation and part of His plan to demonstrate His character to the world.

This combination of justice and righteousness leads to the condemnation of the leaders of Israel. The leaders of Israel failed to fulfill the call that God gave them. Isaiah 57 lists the unrighteous deeds of the leaders of Israel. One of those unrighteous deeds was that "the righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart" (Isa. 57:1, NKJV). The leadership of Israel allowed the people of God to completely forget the moral obligation and blessing they needed to be to the world.

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with their religious experience, God's character  
is revealed to the world.**

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## ***False Religion (Isa. 58:1–5)***

As we continue in Isaiah 58, we see false religion being demonstrated in verses 1–5. The Israelites thought that by doing their religious works of fasting, praying, and offering sacrifices that they were doing their religious duty. Yet even though the Israelites were doing their religious duties, their religion was superficial because the sacrifices themselves lacked the justice and righteousness needed to demonstrate the righteousness of God to the world. The appropriate fast God wanted from Israel was to demonstrate justice and mercy to the surrounding nations. So God asks, in verse 5, what is the acceptable fast for Me?

## ***True Religion (Isa. 58:5–7)***

True religion, according to verses 6–9, includes loosing the bonds of wickedness, letting the oppressed go free, sharing your bread with the hungry, giving a place for the homeless, and clothing those who are naked. True religion is to be concerned for the less fortunate and to fight for those who aren't receiving justice. It brings satisfaction when we match our care for the less fortunate with our religious practices. The purpose of the gospel and the plan of salvation is to combine both justice and righteousness. This was how Israel would be a

blessing to the world. Once the gospel is experienced and demonstrated, the world will see the glory of God's character.

### ***The Glory (Isa. 58:8, 9; Matt. 5:16; Rev. 18:1)***

When God's people combine their religious fast with their religious experience, God's character is revealed to the world. The promise is given in verse 8: "Then your light shall break forth like the morning" (NKJV). The conjunction then denotes that what follows results from what precedes it. As Israel fed the poor, clothed the naked, provided homes for the homeless, and fought for the oppressed—this combined with its religious duties—the result would be God's light (glory) breaking forth like the morning.

Light is synonymous with God's glory in the Bible (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). In a world darkened by the lack of a revelation of God's character, our actions reveal whether or not we are living out the message we claim to proclaim. In Revelation 14:6–13 God gives modern Israel the final message that must be given to the world. One of the first injunctions is to give glory to God. Then Revelation 18:1 gives the result of demonstrating His glory (character) to the world: "After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory" (NKJV). This glory is why Jesus emphasized the importance of demonstrating good works in the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5, when He stated that our lights should "shine before men." The purpose? "That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (verse 16, NKJV). The world desperately needs to see this glory, and the Lord has mandated us to share it.

### ***The Gift That Keeps on Giving (Prov. 11:25)***

King Solomon, the wisest man on earth, emphasized the importance of being generous and giving. Solomon stated, "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Prov. 11:25, NKJV). The apostle Paul emphasized the same point in 2 Corinthians 9:6—"He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." God wants us to experience the happiness and joy that comes with service. He has blessed us with homes, jobs, food, family, and more; but when we keep those blessings to ourselves and do not impart the blessings to others, we miss the special blessing God wants us to receive. All that He has given to us is so that we may be a blessing to others. For as we water, we will be refreshed as well. Service is a gift that keeps on giving.

### ***REACT***

1. Is there a call as Christians to be actively involved with the social justice issues of the day (immigration, distribution of wealth, poverty, crime, etc.)?
2. Has there been a time you have gone out of your way to help someone when it seemed to be an inconvenience? How did you feel afterward?

**Testimony**  
*Second Tithe: Israel's  
Blueprint for Welfare*

Deut. 15:11

"A second tithe of all the increase was required. . . .

"Every third year, . . . this second tithe was to be used at home, in entertaining the Levite and the poor, as Moses said, 'That they may eat within thy gates, and be filled.' Deuteronomy 26:12. This tithe would provide a fund for the uses of charity and hospitality. . . .

"The law of God gave the poor a right to a certain portion of the produce of the soil. When hungry, a man was at liberty to go to his neighbor's field or orchard or vineyard, and eat of the grain or fruit to satisfy his hunger. . . .

"All the gleanings of harvest field, orchard, and vineyard, belonged to the poor. . . .

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**"Great evils would result from the continued accumulation of wealth by one class, and the poverty and degradation of another."**

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"Every seventh year special provision was made for the poor. . . . Of that which the land produced spontaneously they might eat while fresh, but they were not to lay up any portion of it in their storehouses. The yield of this year was to be free for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and even for the creatures of the field."<sup>1</sup>

"Such were the provisions made by our merciful Creator, to lessen suffering, to bring some ray of hope, to flash some gleam of sunshine, into the life of the destitute and distressed.

"The Lord would place a check upon the inordinate love of property and power. Great evils would result from the continued accumulation of wealth by one class, and the poverty and degradation of another. Without some restraint the power of the wealthy would become a monopoly, and the poor, though in every respect fully as worthy in God's sight, would be regarded and treated as inferior to their more prosperous brethren."<sup>2</sup>

**REACT**

1. Although the Lord, through Moses, gave Israel many laws to "place a check upon the inordinate love of property and power," was the nation's system immune to corruption or hoarding of goods?

2. How are these laws, made to help the unfortunate, designed so wisely to encourage diligence in the beneficiaries?

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1. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 530, 531.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 534.

Phil. 2:3, 4

## How-to *Selfless in a Selfish World: Is It Possible?*

We live in a pretty selfish world where, each day, we are bombarded with advertisements to buy more things that can please us, watch more entertainment, and eat more food to satisfy our appetites. How can we, as Bible-believing Christ followers, live selflessly in a world immersed in selfishness? How can we not slip into the trap of living for our own pleasure? Isn't the influence of those surrounding us too great and overwhelming?

Yes, it may seem impossible, but since God has called us to put aside self, it is possible through Him and Him alone! Here are some tips drawn from the Bible to help with that goal.

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### **Since God has called us to put aside self, it is possible through Him and Him alone!**

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*Spend time with God.* Do it. Every day, learn from the supreme Model of selflessness. Make sure the influence of Jesus on you is stronger than the world's! If we come to God, He promises to teach, instruct, and counsel us (Ps. 32:8).

*Give* (Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35). Learn the lesson of giving. It is important to develop the joy of giving rather than receiving. It is important to give from the heart, "not reluctantly or under compulsion," as the Bible teaches us (2 Cor. 9:7, NIV)

*Serve* (Matt. 20:26, 27; 1 Cor. 10:24; Phil. 2:3, 4). Besides giving, we must learn to serve. Many people give money to different charities, mission projects, and other causes but may never be involved in any of them through personal service. Serving others is as important as giving money, if not more important. Serving others should be our priority. In serving others we learn to think less of ourselves. In the life of Jesus, we can see daily selfless service for others. Be intentional, every day, to help and serve other people in any capacity you can. Pray to God for His leading for you to be a blessing to someone every day.

### **REACT**

1. How are giving and serving different? Which one do you think is harder for most people to do? Which one do you find harder?
2. How does Jesus' selflessness sharply contrast with the selfishness of those around you?
3. Does there seem to be an unacceptable level of selfishness in our modern culture? How does it compare to what Jesus calls us to do?

## Opinion

# Heavenly Versus Earthly Things

Matt. 6:33

Many people who migrate to the United States have one thing in mind: achieve the American dream. People want to work hard to obtain an education and a well-paying job, start a family, and buy a house, a car, and other commodities that give a sense of accomplishment.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to improve your lifestyle or to provide commodities for your family to enjoy. However, many times “the dream” becomes the focus of our attention, which in turn becomes our reason to live. Many times it goes so far that it takes the place that God should have in our lives. Thus, we often make decisions based on getting us closer to the dream instead of getting us closer to God.

### Focus on people instead of temporal possessions.

Losing sight of heaven changes who we are and what we live for. It makes us focus on ourselves. We become so self-centered that others become unimportant; our wants supersede others’ needs. This is exactly what the devil wants. He wants to divert our attention from what God has called us to do—to serve and be a blessing to others. Instead of growing to be more like Christ, we do the opposite.

Matthew 19:16–22 tells of a young ruler who had been blessed with great possessions. Not only was he rich, he also was a decent person. However, his wealth was the god before the real God. Jesus told this young ruler to stop focusing on his “American dream” and start using his blessings to be a blessing to others by meeting their needs. Sadly, the young ruler did not love his neighbor as himself.

Reflecting on the life of Jesus, we see evidence that He focused on helping others and being a blessing to them. Jesus always took care of others’ needs, both physical and, more important, spiritual. Jesus was more interested in meeting people’s needs than in obtaining a title, earning good money, or having possessions and commodities. He focused on His mission and did not deviate from it.

God has blessed us in many ways; let’s be a blessing to others. Focus on people instead of temporal possessions (Matt. 6:33, NKJV). May our investments be in heaven instead of in earthly things.

### REACT

1. Is your “American dream” getting in the way of blessing others?
2. What are some ways we can invest in heaven?
3. How can we remind ourselves to be a blessing with our blessings?

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Matt. 24:12;  
1 Cor. 13:1–3

## Exploration

# *The Mind-set to Be a Blessing*

### CONCLUDE

God's people are vessels through which He can pour out His blessings on the earth. Our selfish nature makes it easy for us to forget and be content to say a prayer of thankfulness and go about our own lives. To fulfill our original purpose, we must change not only our actions but also our way of thinking. In Matthew, we are warned that the abundance of evil would make us indifferent and that the "love of many" would "grow cold" (Matt. 24:12, NKJV). Many think it's "Christian" to avoid conflict, but we should be standing up for the weak. We are followers of Christ first, upholding the Bible, and representing Him wherever we go through whatever we do, remembering that without love, whether we are standing against the unjust or being a blessing to those in need, it is nothing (1 Cor. 13:1–3).

### CONSIDER

- Baking bread or some cookies and taking them to a neighbor, using the opportunity to get to know the neighbor.
- Gathering a group of friends and getting involved with your local food pantry, homeless shelter, or community center.
- Putting together care packages for refugees.
- Rewriting the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) using modern-day circumstances.
- Thinking about, discussing, and comparing circumstances in which the biblical, Christian thing to do is to remain silent and others in which it is to take action.
- Writing a journal entry or illustrating the different ways in which God could use you to be a blessing to those you come in contact with.
- Researching different agencies and organizations that you can get involved with to help those in need.

### CONNECT

Exodus 13:14; 21–23.

Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, chap. 46, "Duty to the Unfortunate"; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, chap. 6, "Not Judging, but Doing."