

# 9 JOURNEY TOWARD JUSTICE

Toyohiko Kagawa (1888-1960) was the son of a very wealthy man in Japan. At the age of four his parents died and he went to live with his uncle. As a teenager, he became ill with tuberculosis. A Christian missionary became a friend to Kagawa and helped him as he struggled with his illness. The missionary's love so moved Kagawa that he became a Christian.

One day Kagawa overheard a doctor say that he wouldn't live long because his disease was so far advanced. Kagawa turned to God in prayer and pledged, "O God, if I get well, I will enter the slums and offer myself there as a sacrifice for the poor." As Kagawa's health gradually improved, he did not forget his promise to God. He dedicated his life to the poor people of Japan.

He and his wife lived in a six- by nine-foot hut in the slums. They took care of drunkards, criminals, prostitutes, and orphans. Kagawa cared for the sick through attacks of serious diseases like cholera, bubonic plague, and typhus. He fed the hungry and loved those who came to him.

The bitter life of the poor convinced Kagawa that it wasn't enough just to help individuals who were suffering and poor. One also had to work toward removing the root causes of suffering and injustice.

Kagawa began writing articles, letters, and novels about the conditions of the poor. Kagawa's writing led the way for sweeping social reforms. He founded Japan's first labor union, organized relief work, and established schools and cooperatives for the poor all over the country. The government of Japan responded by putting Kagawa in prison because he threatened to upset those in positions of power and wealth.

## 3 STATEMENTS

- The prophets condemned the kings and the people for not caring for the poor and the powerless.
- True worship of God is always linked to acts of justice toward others.
- Justice means upholding the powerless and holding accountable the powerful.

## the *Source*

### JUSTICE: EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE A PIECE OF THE PIE

Imagine that you are sitting at the kitchen table with your family. It is time for dessert and your favorite pie has just been placed on the table, fresh from the oven. The pie is cut into pieces and passed around. When the pie plate reaches you, there is no pie left. You blurt out, "Hey, that's not fair. Everyone should have a piece of the pie!"

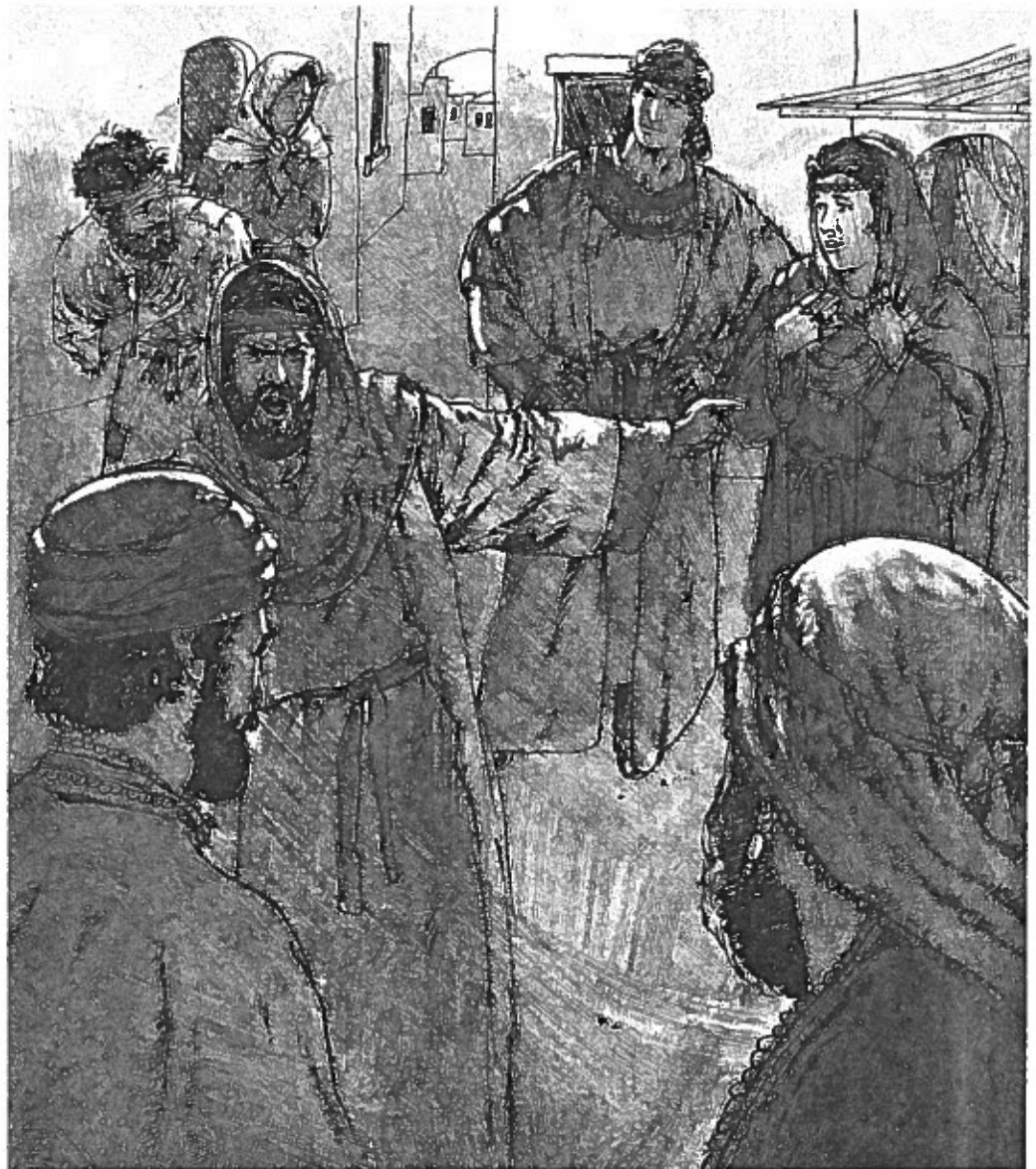
"Everyone should have a piece of the pie." The Law of Moses put forth that same principle when it came to distributing the promised land of Canaan. Every tribe and family was supposed to receive its fair share of land and re-

sources (Numbers 27:1-11). The land and wealth of God's people were to be shared equally among all members. God's people often forgot this call to be just and to care for everyone's needs. The rich and the powerful became wealthy and neglected the needs of widows, orphans, and the poor.

### WHERE THERE'S INJUSTICE, THERE'S A PROPHET

In Session 8, you studied how Israel changed to a government in which power was centered in one person, the king. The king became a powerful person. The king was often tempted to take money and land from the poor in order to make himself and those around him richer. But God did not let this injustice continue for long without judgment

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and punishment. God sent special messengers called prophets to speak God's word. *The prophets condemned the kings and the people for not caring for the poor and the powerless.*

One prophet, Amos, is an example of such an Old Testament prophet. We know only a few things about Amos's personal life.

1. Read Amos 1:1 and 7:14-15. What was Amos's occupation?

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Why did he become a prophet?

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In response to God's command, Amos went to one of the centers of worship in Israel where a worship festival was going on. Amos heard the singing and saw the smoke from the sacrifices floating into the sky. Inspired by God's Spirit, Amos flung open the temple doors and walked into the house of worship. He delivered God's verdict on the religious festivities.

2. What did God think of the people's worship (Amos 5:21-24)?

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3. What did God desire from the people (Amos 5:24)?

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The prophet Amos reminded the people: *True worship of God is always linked to acts of justice toward others.*

## THE BEST OF TIMES, THE WORST OF TIMES

The writer Charles Dickens (1812-1870) began his novel *A Tale of Two Cities* with these words: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." The words refer to the political and economic situation in France and England some 200 years ago when a big gap existed between the rich and the poor. For the rich, it was the best of times; for the poor, it was the worst of times.

Amos declared that God was angry because of a similar gap between the rich and the poor in his day. The rich lived in luxury. The poor lived in poverty and were unjustly treated.

The kings of Israel often abused their power and took advantage of the poor. God's prophets brought God's word of judgment to the kings. An example is recorded in 1 Kings 21. The story tells of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel who ruled in Israel and a poor man named Naboth. Naboth owned a small vineyard that had belonged to his family for many generations. Read the story in 1 Kings 21:1-24.

1. Which of the Ten Commandments did King Ahab and Queen Jezebel break? (See Exodus 20:1-17 if you need a reminder of what the Commandments are.) /

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2. Why would you call Ahab and Jezebel's actions unjust?

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3. What similarities do you see between what happened in the story of Naboth's vineyard and what happens when people are oppressed because of their race? List two or three similarities.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Imagine that you are a modern-day prophet like Amos or Elijah. Write a prophecy or message that applies the words of Amos or Elijah to a contemporary situation of injustice like racism or government policies of apartheid. (Apartheid has been a political and economic policy of segregation against non-European people in South Africa.)

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# Shaping life

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## JUSTICE AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

The journey toward justice has continued from the time of Israel's prophets to our own time. We look forward to a day when God will reorder our world into a world of perfect justice and peace. Until that time, we are called to work to connect the ancient words of the Old Testament prophets to situations and actions in our own time. A crucial part of the prophetic message was a call to justice. *Justice means upholding the powerless and holding accountable the powerful.*

Two different lists are printed below. The first list contains a number of scripture references that are about doing justice and putting our faith into practice for others. The second list describes a series of contemporary situations and statistics. Look up the scripture passages. On the line in front of the scripture reference write the letter of the contemporary situation that that passage most directly applies to. There may be more than one right answer for any one scripture passage.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. James 2:15-17    A. One child in 10 in the world dies before its first birthday. Forty thousand children die each day from starvation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Luke 4:17-18
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Isalah 10:1-2
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. John 10:10        B. One out of every seven North Americans lives in poverty.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Matthew 25:40    C. Every 60 seconds 28 people die from hunger or hunger-related diseases.
- \_\_\_\_\_                      D. One half of the poor in North America are children. One of every four children under the age of six lives in a poor household.
- \_\_\_\_\_                      E. More than 25% of all women who live alone live in poverty.



## FURTHER

### opportunities

#### Bible Reading

Select one or more passages from the list below. After reading it, summarize its main point. Tell how it relates to the session. List one or two thoughts you had as you read the passage.

- Isalah 1:10-17
- Leviticus 25:13-24
- Micah 6:6-8
- Isalah 6:1-13
- 2 Kings 17:1-23

#### Memory

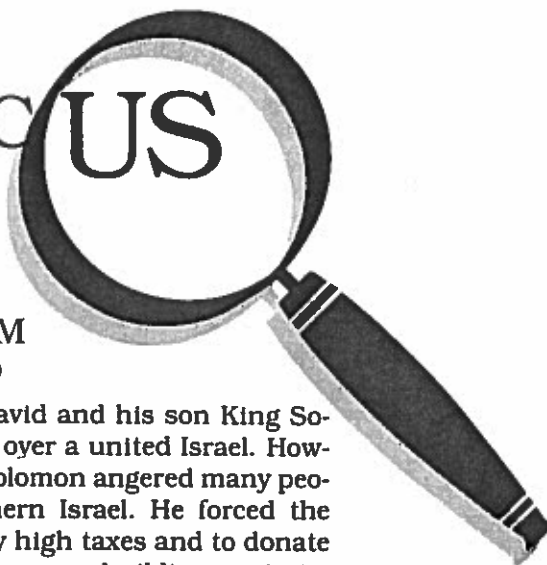
Memorize Amos 5:21-24. True worship of God involves not only what we do in church, but also what we do in our daily lives. How we treat others is as important to worship as how we give praises to God.

As an added challenge memorize Micah 6:8, which summarizes the response God hopes to receive from us.

#### Activity 1

One of the important areas of social justice in which the church is involved is world hunger. Find out how your congregation participates

# FOCUS



## ON A KINGDOM DIVIDED

King David and his son King Solomon ruled over a united Israel. However, King Solomon angered many people in northern Israel. He forced the people to pay high taxes and to donate labor for his many building projects, such as the Temple. He got rid of popular leaders. When Solomon died the people of northern Israel broke free of the united kingdom and set up their own independent country. They established their own king named Jeroboam.

After Solomon's death, the story in the Bible is the story of a divided kingdom. The Northern Kingdom was called Israel. The Southern Kingdom was called Judah. The story in 1 and 2 Kings jumps back and forth between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel lasted about 200 years after the death of Solomon. Its capital city of Samaria fell to the large empire of Assyria in 722 B.C. The Southern Kingdom of Judah, with its capital at Jerusalem, lasted another 135 years. It fell to the Babylonians in 587 B.C.

With a few exceptions, the story of the divided kingdoms is a story of one bad king after another, continual unfaithfulness to God, constant wars, prophets warning and condemning the people and the kings, and eventually final defeat and exile. Although the prophets predicted doom and gloom because of the sins of the people and the king, they also proclaimed God's continued love and attachment to the people of Israel. God would punish the people of Judah and Israel, but God would never completely let them go. There would be a new beginning even after the punishment and disaster of exile.



in a hunger program. If your congregation is not involved, find out how to start a program in your community. Consider including a hunger awareness program in your church's youth program. Materials and suggestions for such a program are readily available from your church's hunger program. You also may want to volunteer to work in a local food shelf or soup kitchen to become informed on contemporary justice issues.

### Activity 2

Become a member of Bread for the World, a lobbying organization that promotes legislation to assist in the fight against hunger around the world. The address is:  
Bread for the World  
802 Rhode Island Ave. N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20018.

You also may wish to write letters to your governmental representatives voicing your concern and opinions on the need for justice and care of the powerless.

### Activity 3

Make a display as a class, showing ways your congregation can be helpful in the local community.