

HUMANIZE ME



Sometimes people say a public figure needs to be humanized. What could this mean except that there are things in this world that make us less than human? Jesus is on a mission to make you more human—the kind of human who looks more like the Son of God. This series tackles the forces that keep us from being just as human as God always intended us to be. And it leads us to discover that when we are humanized, we get to humanize others.

HUMANIZE ME • Luke 18:1–8 • Tim McConnell • September 29, 2019

My first car was a Jeep Renegade. I kind of miss it, to be honest. I loved that car, even though it broke down every two weeks like clockwork, and for much of the time I owned it, I had to park it on an incline pointed downhill so I could pop the clutch to start it! But I loved it. When I was headed off to college, though, I needed something more reliable, so I took it to a used car dealer in Motor City. It was blue, but the paint had oxidized so badly it looked like a faded pair of blue jeans. While assessing the value, the dealer polished and buffed a huge spot on the hood to see if the oxidization could be fixed. They brought it back out with this huge spot on the hood. We didn't make a deal, and I was supposed to drive off with this huge spot on the hood of my car. I was incensed! I went ballistic! I swore I would pursue every legal remedy. I knew lawyers. I was going to sue that dealership into the dirt. I would burn that place down. I didn't care if it meant going all the way to the Supreme Court—I would have justice and they would pay! This was all inside my own head. In the real world, I wrote an angry letter which I never put in the mail. Injustice. Unfair. Have you experienced a little of it? A lot? It can be dehumanizing.

Jesus is on a mission to humanize us. Through this series, we have uncovered a number of surprising ways Jesus is humanizing us. The dehumanizing global forces are also right here at home in our own lives. A list of poverties from the poor community in Rwanda has surprised us because we suffer many of the same things. So far we have talked about dehumanization, hunger poverty, body poverty (how our relationship with our bodies can pull us down), creativity poverty (we were made in the image of our Creator; we were made to make), a poverty of dignity and last week a poverty of progress. Being part of the church means we get to address all these poverties in Jesus' name. We get to change some things. Today we talk about Justice. Not what we think is fair. That's how this word gets abused. But what God thinks is fair. Biblical justice is the world as God would have it. The truth is, I have always lived in a system of justice. I have not suffered injustice. That's why my opening story is about how I was treated at a used car dealership! That's the closest I can come. We live in a community where we can expect equitable treatment, equal protection and privilege under the law. That's not true everywhere, for everyone. The big question today is, what is our commitment to justice? Not just what we think is fair, but

justice—the world as God would have it? Can we be a part of God's work to bring justice to those suffering without it?

The story Jesus tells, we are told, is primarily about prayer. "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1). A widow seeks justice from an unjust judge. A widow would be the person in the community with the least access to legal recourse in Jesus' time. With no father or husband to advocate for her, a widow was vulnerable, helpless. But she's got pluck, right? The judge is a caricature. Jesus is being funny here. "He said: 'In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought'" (Luke 18:2). Totally morally bankrupt. But the widow keeps knocking, doesn't she? She keeps knocking and knocking and knocking. "Hey! Give me justice. Give me justice against the person who took my justice away. You are the higher authority. Make it right." She keeps knocking. What's she looking for? She is looking for courage in the powers that be to exercise justice, to apply justice. Justice doesn't mean anything if it's just on the books, on the pages of the law. It has to be applied. Finally, the unjust judge relents. "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think,'" (Luke 18:4). See, he's a caricature. He's a cartoon figure. "[Even though I am evil and mean through and through] yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!" (Luke 18:5). Basically, he says eventually, "Okay, I'll do it, if only so this whole thing doesn't roll over on me and give me a black eye." Jesus asks, "Do you really think God would act worse than this guy?" Why would we?

It's about prayer, that you should always pray and never give up. What is prayer? Prayer is conversation with God. Jesus is making a point here, that prayer is open to everyone. Widow or judge, man or woman, child or adult, rich or poor, sinner or saint, you have access. Available to you is an open conversation with the omnipotent, sovereign Lord God Almighty. You can make your appeal. It doesn't have to go from local court to district court to circuit court to supreme court. You can take your case directly to the highest Justice there is! You should always pray, and never give up. But we are tempted to give up, because sometimes the conversation doesn't feel like it's going anywhere.

Sometimes prayer feels like hurling our deepest needs against a wall of silence. Where is God? Jesus says, always pray and never give up. God isn't like this ridiculous villain judge. He is good. Keep praying.

The widow in the story wanted justice. The way Jesus said it was that she said, "give me justice against the one who 'in-justiced' me; who 'dis-justiced' me." Should Christians care about justice? Before I became a lead pastor, I worked in Charlottesville, Virginia, for the Center for Christian Study as the campus pastor for the Virginia School of Law supporting the Christian association on campus called Law Christian Fellowship. These young Christian law students wanted to make a difference for Jesus as lawyers. No one was more inspiring to them than Gary Haugen, the founder of the International Justice Mission, so we had speakers come down from D.C. regularly from IJM. Gary Haugen was a human rights lawyer appointed in 1994 by the Department of Justice to investigate the Rwandan genocide. What he saw changed his life, and as a follower of Christ, he knew he had to do something more to change the world. In 1997, he left his practice to form International Justice Mission to see if a small team of lawyers could bring life-saving justice to the poor and disenfranchised around the world. Today they have field offices in 15 countries, have rescued thousands from human trafficking and modern slavery and have put hundreds of violent offenders behind bars. I can't tell you the whole story of IJM or we'd be here an hour, but let me give you a little picture.

What Gary discovered was that people were suffering for lack of justice. They were living beyond the reach of the rule of law. People in poor communities like slums in Calcutta or Nairobi, or rural areas, had no access to the privileges and protections of the law. A man seeks a loan from a nearby brick factory owner to get medicine for a sick child, but the terms of the loan are so severe that the man winds up working at the factory for less money than can repay even the interest on the loan. If he tries to escape the work, he is beaten or his family is threatened. He's a slave. A girl is offered a job in the city to help her family, but is drugged and enslaved in a brothel. Gary discovered these stories and asked, "Don't you have laws against this?" The people would say, "Of course we do." "Why aren't they being enforced?" After a lot of hemming and hawing, eventually it would come out that the owner of the brick factory is the governor's

brother, or the client list at the brothel includes the chief of police. But for Gary, as a Christ follower, that didn't satisfy. Justice had to come. Gary and his team would implant themselves in the community and start knocking. They would keep asking the questions, keep educating local lawyers and authorities, keep revealing the illegalities until, finally, justice would break out.

When people have no recourse to justice, horrible things happen. People get dehumanized. They get treated as less than human. God cares about that. God is just. God loves justice. God hates injustice. The Bible tells this over and over again, almost every page or so, just in case we forget. "He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice," Psalm 9:8. "The LORD is known by his justice," Psalm 9:16. "For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice," Psalm 11:7. "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed," Psalm 103:6. "My arm will bring justice to the nations," Isaiah 51:5. "I will shepherd the flock with justice," Ezekiel 34:16. "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" Amos 5:24. God is just. He loves justice.

In 1998, IJM conducted its first raid of a brothel in India, emancipating the underaged girls held in slavery there. They have continued that work over and over. In one rescue, they freed a 16-year-old young lady who had been locked up and abused for nine months. On her walls they found that she had scrawled a verse from the Bible: "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalms 27:1). She believed her rescue was coming. We know, rescue doesn't always come. Hers did. Because followers of Jesus were moved by the heart of Jesus, to risk it all for Jesus, and break down a wall, and find a girl and bring her home. Where there is injustice, injustice as defined in the eyes of God, let's move.

Jesus said, "I tell you this story because I want you to pray and not give up." Why wouldn't we pray? Why would we give up? When justice is slow coming, we can lose heart. We don't know why some prayers are answered and others aren't. A civil rights pastor once said, "Until you have stood at a locked door and knocked until your knuckles are bloody, you don't really understand prayer." Always pray. Don't give up. God is not like the ridiculous unjust judge. Jesus said: "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones,

who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7-8).

Jesus wants us to look up to this widow, to emulate her. Will you and I have her faith? Will you and I have the kind of persistence of faith that endures? That's the question. Will there be such faith on earth? Will it be found in us? Will we persist in expecting God to move? Will we hang in there believing that God is bringing justice and righteousness by his own right arm? I don't know. But I do know this; we have an advocate. The widow at the judge's door wonders, "Who will advocate for me?" The girl locked behind closed doors wonders, "Who will advocate for me?" When you and I are longing for things to be set right, knocking and knocking, who will advocate for you and for me? The Apostle John wrote, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). Even when the mistake is ours to own. Even when we are caught dead to rights in our sin. Christ has paid the penalty for our sin and now stands to advocate for us. Will we have such faith? I hope so, but whether we succeed or fail, our advocate will never fail.

Romans says, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:33–34). Even when the sin is ours, even when the injustice is ours to own, we have an advocate. Jesus advocates for us in the courts of God's justice. The procedures that convicted Jesus to death on a cross were rife with injustice. Trials were not to be conducted in dark of night. His was. Crimes were to be sustained by two witnesses. His were not. The condemned was to be given opportunity for defense. He was not. There was no justice to be found. Jesus took the injustice to make us justified. Jesus took what wasn't right so you and I could be right. He is our advocate. He is our defense. He is our hope and our salvation.

STUDY GUIDE
HUMANIZE ME • "Justice"
Luke 18:1–8

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Luke 18:1–8.

- 1) Jesus' purpose in telling the parable is named in verse 1: "...to show them that they should always pray and not give up." Do you think that Jesus accomplishes that with this parable? Why or why not?
- 2) Reread verse 3. The widow asks for justice against her adversary. What is the difference between "justice" and "revenge"?
- 3) How would you define justice? What examples of biblical justice can you think of? How is this similar or different than how the world describes justice?
- 4) What experiences do you have of prayers being answered? How long had you prayed for these things?
- 5) Do you have anything you've been praying for a long time that has not been answered? What has that been like?
- 6) Reread verses 7–8. Jesus affirms that God will respond to the prayers of His people for justice. When is this hard to believe? When is this encouraging or easier to believe?
- 7) In what ways might this passage challenge you to think differently about what it means to be human?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Close your time by praying for God's justice to come in our city, nation and world. Pray for the specific injustices you see which break your heart.

IN: Connect with Each Other

Is there anyone in your life who is in a situation where they are longing for justice? Pray for them now.