



Just Prayer

*A Journey through the Work of
Prayer and Justice*

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**Throughout this devotional, pseudonyms have been used for the protection of these IJM clients.*

JUST PRAYER: INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, in preparation for the Global Prayer Gathering—one of our most important events as an organization and faith community at International Justice Mission—my colleagues and I gathered around a table to consider our most urgent prayer needs. With more than a thousand prayer partners planning to join us in person, most urgently, we wanted to pray for an end to slavery in our lifetime.

But we found ourselves confronted with fear. First: *if God doesn't answer the way we want him to, what will people think?* And second, the deeper fears: *if God doesn't answer, what will I think? How will I go on believing him? What if I find out he isn't faithful? What if I find out he isn't good?*

Asking Hard Questions

It's so easy to avoid asking God the hard questions. It's uncomfortable, possibly even scary. At the same time, we have seen so many miracles of justice we may be tempted to think it's *our* work, *our* strivings that bring justice to the hurting and oppressed. Maybe we don't really *need* this whole prayer thing at all.

But God constantly uses seemingly impossible obstacles to remind us that the work of justice is done by him. In following Christ in obedience to his justice mission, we have the privilege of seeing *his* mighty power at work.

And we'll miss it if we don't pray.

Encountering God

The heart of our Father is to bring us into deeper relationship with him—to more deeply encounter his character, to walk intimately with him, to hear his voice and to let him hear ours. Remember when Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray? He said, “[Your] Father knows everything you have need of...but ask him anyway...” (Matthew 6:8).

This is the heart of a Father who wants to be in relationship with us. He puts desires in our hearts and draws us by his loving kindness toward him, especially through the things we most desire, or even most desperately need. He knows them, but he wants to talk to us about them. And, from our place of desire and want, we discover *his desires, his wants. We discover his heart.*

And in that process, he may lead us to big and bold prayers. God says, “Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, the ends of the earth for your possession” (Psalm 2:8). This is the promise he made to the Israelites, and it is the promise that holds true for us today. He's saying: Ask me and I will give more than you could imagine—a possession for today and an inheritance for tomorrow, for generations to come. *But will you ask of me?*

Poor in Spirit

We did pray (and continue to pray) for an end to slavery. And we are seeing God move in response to our prayer.

But in that place of desperation—of asking God for something that seemed to be totally impossible—I was reminded that, while it seems like it should take great courage and confidence to ask God for big things, it is exactly as he says: It takes being poor in spirit.

Our greatest moments of faith often come from our greatest desperation—when we feel least confident and least full of courage. When we throw up our hands and say, “Lord, if you are able...” and in the next breath, “Lord, help my unbelief” (Mark 9:22-24).

A Journey Ahead

So my prayer is that you would be led in a journey with our Father, not because of your faith, not because of your courage, not because of your confidence—though I know God has given each of us a good measure of all those things by his Spirit—but because you are poor in spirit. We are desperate for the hand of God to tip the scales in a battle for justice where it seems “the wicked prosper” (Jeremiah 12:1) and the poor and oppressed go without a defender.

I pray that you will join the declaration and promise from our God “because of the groaning of the weak, and the suffering of the oppressed, therefore I will arise” (Psalm 12:5).



Constance Padmore
IJM Director of Prayer Mobilization

P.S. We would love to hear from you about your experience with this pilot resource. Please send any feedback or questions to us at **prayer@ijm.org**.

USING THIS DEVOTIONAL

In each of these sessions, you'll be confronted with two realities. First, you'll read a focus verse from the Beatitudes and encounter the spiritual reality into which Jesus beckons his followers. Then, you'll meet a neighbor from around the world to consider the reality of injustice.

You'll be forced to grapple with the way this spiritual reality should inform how we consider realities of oppression and violence. It won't always be neat and easy.

In addition to the specific questions at the end of each session, use these steps to help focus your prayer and reflection.

1. **Pray:** Ask God to speak to you through the scripture you're about to read.
2. **Read:** Read it once out loud, slowly, thinking about what you're reading. Read it again, slowly, but silently this time.
3. **Reflect:** Ask God what he's saying to you as you're reading. Think about how what you've read and how what God has said changes you. What questions do you want him to answer? What don't you understand in the verse(s)?
4. **Listen:** Stop at those places in the verse(s) that are unclear and ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand. Listen to what God is saying. Meditate on how he might be asking you to follow him in his call to justice.
5. **Pray:** Thank God for your time with him and for what he spoke to you.

As you read through this devotional, may you be replenished by God as you come to him *poor in spirit*, enabling you to *comfort those who mourn*. May you be awed at the hand of God as you *meekly* remember that all power comes through him alone. May he awaken in you a *hunger and thirst for righteousness* that is only satisfied by passionately pursuing him wherever he leads.

Even as your heart breaks for the suffering of the poor, pray for the unjust oppressors that they might repent and receive the same *mercy* God extended to you. May you seek to become *pure in heart and see God* as you pray as if you are there with the oppressed, suffering alongside them. May you actively pursue *peace* so that people might see you as a *child of the Most High God*. And may you *rejoice in persecution*, knowing that the bars of injustice are trembling and weakening at the mighty hand of God.

SESSION 1: THE WORK OF SOLITUDE

“Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down.
His disciples came to him and he began to teach them saying:
‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’” *Matthew 5:1-3*

Picture this scene: Jesus on the mountainside, drawn away from the crowds. Before his disciples reach him, we can imagine Christ in sacred moments of solitude and prayer. He withdrew from those seeking him and, for a moment, laid aside the important work of caring for the needy—the crippled, blind, desperate and destitute—to steal away time with his Father.

We see this pattern of service and solitude woven throughout Jesus’ life on earth. Each time, it begs the same, all too important question—**how were these mountainside withdrawals critical to his mission?**

In the work of justice, we are prone to run toward the brokenness we see, and rightly so; those in great need of rescue and healing are waiting. But Jesus invites us to join him along another pathway to freedom—one that miraculously allows us to be both the rescued and the rescuer—and this is the pathway of prayer. In this intercessory stance, we acknowledge our need for Christ and our power in Christ to combat injustice through the relentless, courageous work of prayer. Jesus invites us into solitude and into the intercessory community that sits at his feet.

Matthew’s gospel continues, “His disciples came to him and he began to teach them...” To these disciples who followed him up to the mountainside, Jesus is perhaps very candidly saying: “Blessed *are you*, poor in spirit, you have sought me out. Yours is the kingdom of heaven.”

This is the beauty of following Christ. We don’t need to bring anything but ourselves. Even in the midst of our own brokenness, if we will come to Jesus, he will restore us.

Over the next weeks of this journey together, we will continually withdraw to the mountainside with Jesus to replenish in the Father’s presence. In doing so, you too will hear the words of Jesus as the disciples did that day on the mountainside: “Blessed are *you*, poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.”

Meet Prema

SOUTH ASIA – Prema* was born into a poor village. When she was a little girl, her father’s alcoholism drove her mother to move with Prema to the city in search of work. While her mother worked to make ends meet, Prema was often on her own. When she was 14 years old, she was betrayed by a boy she thought was a friend.

Prema was tricked by someone she trusted and trafficked to a brothel.

Prema remembers waking up in a brothel, weak and disoriented from the drugs that her supposed friend had given her. “I was alone and scared,” she said. Prema spent her first six days at the brothel locked in a dark room. Then, one of the managers locked her in another room with the first man who would pay to rape her.

For the next year, Prema was violently abused every day: physically beaten by the brothel keepers, sexually assaulted by the men who paid to rape her—all of it through consistent threats, insults and other harassments. “The other girls with me felt that we wouldn’t see the light again,” she later remembered, “and we would be confined in the darkness forever.”

But IJM had started an investigation at the very brothel where Prema was trapped. Prema’s nightmare would not last forever. In 2009, she was rescued from the brothel and taken to a shelter for sex trafficking survivors.

On that day, Prema said, “I saw the light of hope for the first time in a year.”

In the aftercare shelter, Prema started to flourish. The light grew inside her, and she started to dream again. Prema said she wants to be a nurse someday. She also said that she would want to thank the people who came to rescue her, because, she said, “I have been given a chance to stand on my own feet and start a new life from here. I never could have imagined seeing the light of hope again...”

IJM social workers have walked closely with Prema on her journey of restoration. Her caseworker says that Prema is “uniquely gifted in such ways that she is able to live through the challenges she has known and yet still has dreams and hopes for her future.” Prema also decided to testify in court, against the suspected traffickers who caused immense suffering. The trial continues, but Prema is resolute in her hope for other girls like her to find freedom.

“We can’t forget about the other girls still trapped in dark rooms—girls who asked me to pray that they would get taken out and given a chance,” Prema says. “I want them to see that they too can have a new life.”



Discussion Questions

1. Do you commit to withdrawing from life to spend time alone with God? Why or why not? What difference would it make in your day-to-day activity?
2. What is it about withdrawing from the people and tasks in our life to spend time with God so difficult?
3. Re-read Matthew 5:1-11. What does it mean for you to be *poor in spirit*? What do you think Jesus meant when he was telling his disciples that *they* were poor in spirit?
4. At IJM, we see that justice is not a guarantee on this earth, especially for those who are very poor and do not have any earthly power. How do we practice being *poor in spirit* when we do not see justice done on earth?

Prayer Focus

- Ask God for help in understanding what it means to be poor in spirit as you engage the work of justice through prayer.
- Pray for those like Prema who have been abused and exploited—that God would continue to restore their spirit and give them joy in the midst of their pain.
- Pray for those joining God in his work of rescue and restoration—that they would continually seek to be replenished by God.
- Thank God for being able to restore us in spite of our brokenness.

SESSION 2: COMFORTING THE MOURNERS

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” *Matthew 5:4*

As IJM confronts injustice around the world, **we find there is much to mourn:**

- There are **29.8 million slaves** in the world today—more than at any other time in human history.
- **Thousands of widows** are literally fighting for their lives because their land and only source of provision has been violently stolen away from them.
- Each year, nearly **2 million children** are exploited in the global commercial sex trade, and they have no defender.
- **Innocent men and women** are arrested, charged and falsely imprisoned for crimes they did not commit—all at the hands of law enforcement officers abusing their power.
- Police and judges who try to act justly often feel **alone and powerless** against this rampant corruption.

And yet, God says that those who mourn will be comforted. How? Where will they find comfort amid all this darkness?

This is the spiritual reality we must first understand: We follow a God who promises that he loves as a Father does, that he longs to wipe away every tear; his very Spirit is called the Comforter. But at the same time, our great, comforting God has laid out for each of us a role as comforter, too.

After leading the UN investigation of the Rwandan genocide, IJM President Gary Haugen said, “I’ve had people ask me, ‘Where was God in the midst of all of this?’ The more relevant question for me was, ‘Where are God’s people?’ God’s plan to bring comfort to those who mourn is *us*. His plan for restoring the world is *us*.”

In this justice movement, we are seeing God raise up intercessors of faith and courage to pray for those who are yet mourning—praying for comfort and praying that God would send a rescuer. These prayers enable IJM teams to become brave rescuers, but they also bring comfort to the mourners far beyond what we can do on our own. Time and time again, these prayers lead to stories of rescue and redemption beyond belief.

Meet Gertrude

KAMPALA, UGANDA – When Gertrude’s husband passed away, she was left to raise her seven children and several grandchildren all on her own. Because there was no written will proclaiming her rights to the land and home she shared with her late husband, the Ugandan widow and her entire family were extremely vulnerable.

Soon, Gertrude’s abusive brother-in-law, Joseph, seized the opportunity to prosper at her expense.

The powerful prey on the weak

Joseph has power and standing within the small community where he and Gertrude both live. He wasted no time in making his power known to Gertrude. Acting with impunity after the death of her husband, Joseph seized the property that was Gertrude’s only source of income—property that was vital for her family’s survival. Joseph started collecting rent from Gertrude’s land and even sold some plots, prospering at the expense of his increasingly impoverished sister-in-law.

Gertrude clung to her small home, her only remaining security, until May 2010, when Joseph showed up. In front of two of her children and one grandchild, Joseph dragged Gertrude from her home and beat her violently. When he was done, he sat and taunted her, screaming, “Who’s going to help you now?”

No longer safe in her own home, Gertrude turned to IJM for help. IJM helped Gertrude report the crime—and ongoing harassment—to the police. IJM social workers took her to a hospital for assistance and continued to support her family with counseling and other services.

Working with a state prosecutor, IJM advocates prepared an airtight criminal case against Joseph, including eye witnesses who saw the assault and a police surgeon who would testify to Gertrude’s abuse. Court delays pushed the trial back month after month, but IJM never left Gertrude’s side.

No longer alone

Finally, after 16 months, Joseph was staring at his feet listening to a judge explain that he was guilty of assault, that he was going to jail, and that he was going to pay Gertrude for her injuries.

IJM celebrated the hard-fought victory with Gertrude. At that moment, it was clear that Gertrude wouldn’t watch her children or grandchildren die of starvation, disease or exposure. Gertrude would not be one of the hundreds of thousands of Ugandan widows left to face oppressors like Joseph alone.

IJM’s aftercare staff walked closely with Gertrude and her family, comforting her as she mourned the loss of her husband and the abuse she endured at Joseph’s hands. She now raises chickens as a business and lives peacefully on her land.

Thankful for the IJM friends by her side, Gertrude said, “If I had been doing this alone, I would have given up a long time ago.”



Discussion Questions

1. Describe a time in your life where you have felt far from God. How did God use the people in your life to bring you comfort?
2. What does Gertrude and IJM's perseverance say about God's character? How does this relate to James 1:2-5?
3. How are you able to comfort those who mourn? Who in your life might God be calling you to help comfort?

Prayer Focus

- Pray that God would give great comfort to those who are mourning.
- Pray that God would give great strength and compassion to those who are sent to comfort them.
- Pray that God would raise up workers to bring his justice to those desperately waiting for an advocate.

SESSION 3: AN ATTITUDE OF MEEKNESS

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” *Matthew 5:5*

As justice seekers, we are bold and courageous in our prayers and determined in our actions. We zealously take hold of the vision to seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:17). And because God enables us to accomplish amazing things, we can be tempted to hold our boldness, our passion and our zeal as ideals.

But Jesus tells us that the *meek* shall inherit the earth—the gentle and lowly, not necessarily the bold and brave.

For it is when we are meek, when we are not relying on our strengths or talents, that God can really use us. When we acknowledge that our lives are not our own, God can use them for something more.

Meet Pranitha

Pranitha Timothy is the Director of Aftercare in one of IJM's South Asia offices. She works fearlessly to protect poor children, women and men from exploitation in her country: She has led more than 50 rescue operations to free entire families trapped in forced labor slavery, she has served as the chief legal witness in trials against slave owners, and she has developed IJM's landmark aftercare strategy to restore and reintegrate thousands of freed slaves.

Pranitha shares her own story here:

One day at the end of my Masters of social work program, I remember sitting in a chapel, crying and asking God what to do with my life. The chapel speaker was reading Isaiah 42, and I clearly heard God telling me this is what I was to do with my life.

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope." (Isaiah 42:1-4)

What a beautiful mission. I heard God's call to be a light to the nations, to establish justice on earth for those who are in captivity and darkness.

Weeks later I was diagnosed with a brain tumor that was choking my nerves. I had lost 60 percent of the strength in my muscles. I had surgery, but I could no longer speak. I went back to Isaiah 42, which says, "He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets." I could not cry out, but I began working faithfully. After two years, God gave me this voice back, feeble but powerful in his hands.



But the restoring of my voice was not the greatest miracle I have seen; it was his renewal of my heart.

Growing up, my parents were missionaries, and I swore I would never become a Christian. I hated Christ for separating me from my family and making me grow up in boarding schools. I had no morality... I was eventually expelled from college for my behavior. I had reached a place where nothing good could come out of me.

I realized in my brokenness that my only hope was the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. I knew I needed his power to overcome the darkness. At last, I embraced it. The prophet writes, "God took this heart of stone and gave me the heart of flesh." Today I am able to feel emotion.

My calling is my response to the freedom I have in Christ.

1. *We are called to serve.*

God showed me very early in my work with IJM that I am no hero. Time and time again I have heard stories of slaves who cried out to a God they did not know, and he sent our team. I know I cannot do anything without God, but being humble does not mean God will not require anything of me that requires great strength.

2. *This life belongs to God.*

The proper source of strength and courage is not willful determination, but to remember that my life is God's and my strength is his.

A few years ago my colleagues discovered a rice mill where dozens were enslaved by a cruel owner who beat them. When we worked with the government to plan a rescue operation, someone tipped him off and he drove them away. Truly by the hand of God we located the truck 14 miles away. We thought it was over, but the authorities insisted they go back to the rice mill to identify their belongings. The laborers knew the owners would kill them.

Sure enough, when we drove into the rice mill we were surrounded by a mob waiting to attack us. All we could do was pray. God confused the crowd, and after a four-hour siege, the mob cleared a path and allowed us to leave. We were safe, the laborers were safe, and we were able to bring about new lives of freedom.

3. *God is good.*

It would be easy for me to tell you only of the victories, the stories that end in the way I hope they would. But our faith must encompass a God who is good even when what we see in the world is not good. When laborers are hidden away so we could not find them, when former slaves succumb to illness. We are still working with the people we rescued from the rice mill. And *this girl* who was once cold and calculating was able to help rescue them because he is a God who is good.



Pranitha searches for forced labor slaves trapped in a rice mill

Discussion Questions

1. Why is meekness an important quality in the work of justice?
2. How does viewing your life as belonging to God, instead of belonging to you, change the way you live?
3. In what ways might Pranitha's story challenge you to step out in your own faith?
4. In what ways do you feel weak or incapable? How can God use you despite your weaknesses?
5. Where in your life can you seek justice for those who might not be able to? How can you *establish justice on earth for those who are in captivity and darkness?*

Prayer Focus

- Pray for a movement of God's justice—for a generation of believers to give God full access to their lives and have passion to take action.
- Pray for an attitude of meekness—that as we witness God's great power working through us, we constantly lay our pride, successes and talents before him to allow him to use us in greater ways.
- Pray for faithfulness to continue when the work is hard and for us to remember that it is God who will ultimately bring about justice.

SESSION 4: THIRSTING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” *Matthew 5:6*

The Scriptures tell us that righteousness and justice are the foundation of God’s throne (Psalm 89:14). But when we see families held in slavery, vulnerable girls sexually assaulted, widows forced from their homes, innocent men and women in prison—the very foundation by which God established right order and governance appears shaken. The forces of evil in the world threaten to mock the living God, saying “Where is your God? Where is his justice?”

But, throughout the Psalms, God declares that:

- He will not be mocked (Psalm 37)
- He will rule the nations with justice (Psalm 67)
- He will hear the cries of the oppressed (Psalm 12)
- He will arise to bring rescue and justice to the poor (Psalm 72)

It is because of these promises we can be so steadfast in our hunger and thirst for righteousness. We know God will indeed move on behalf of the oppressed if we ask, and ask relentlessly.

So here we must evaluate the way we live and pray. Are we striving for righteousness? Are we merely *asking* for justice or truly *aching* for it? Does our hunger bring us to our knees? If we did hunger in this way—with such desperation that all we could do is pray—how might our world be filled with God’s unshakable justice?

Meet Raman

SOUTH ASIA – Like his father and his grandfather before him, Raman worked in a rice mill. When he was in fourth grade, the owner of the rice mill decided Raman was strong enough to carry the heavy sacks of rice. He was forced to drop out of school and start working.

Raman was a slave—it was the life he had always known.

Years and years ago, the owner of the rice mill had lured the workers in his rice mill with small loans. The men and women thought they could repay the loan through their labor, but it was a trap. They earned pennies every day, barely enough for food to keep them physically able to work. The owner threatened and physically abused them. He added exorbitant interest to the alleged loans so the workers could never leave. The owner bragged openly about his profitable strategy, laughing as he explained: “The debt keeps accumulating...That is how I run the business for 25 years now.”



Trapped inside the rice mill, Raman married and had four children. Just like he had inherited the life of slavery from his father, Raman feared that his children were destined to carry on this generational bondage. Raman later said he felt like a “silent spectator” of his own life—a monotonous cycle of 18-hour days spent picking, boiling, raking and bagging rice. He learned to resign himself and his dreams that his children might play or go to school: “We had no other choice but to continue working.”

But Raman found an advocate.

IJM discovered that the owner of this rice mill was operating his business using forced labor—modern-day slavery. Working with local government authorities, IJM helped rescue Raman and 34 other men, women and children who were slaves in the mill.

IJM helped the families resettle in their native villages, taking the first few steps of freedom together. Raman settled in the same village near the rice mill. A slave all his life, he had nowhere else to go. IJM social workers encouraged him to use the government as a resource, to keep lobbying for the benefits his family deserved.

Raman emerged as a strong community leader in his village, confident in his own voice as a citizen. Over the years, he has repeatedly petitioned government officials to ensure his community receives water, electricity, ration cards and small land grants—more than 70 families have benefitted from his persistence.

Standing up so others can be free

Meanwhile, IJM lawyers prepared a case against the rice mill owner. Shockingly, when his trial concluded, he was fined about \$10 and immediately released. The meaningless conviction emboldened him, and the defiant slave owner restocked his rice mill with new slaves.

He even sent men to Raman’s home and threatened him that they would take revenge on his family. But Raman was no longer afraid. He called the police for help and filed a complaint.

IJM began a second covert investigation with Raman’s help. Once again, IJM and the local government planned an operation, rescuing more than a dozen slaves. A second trial began, and in May 2011, the judge found the slave owner guilty for his crimes and sentenced him to five years in prison. This conviction is the most significant to date in IJM’s forced labor casework in the region.

IJM encourages clients like Raman to speak openly about the trap of forced labor slavery with individuals in their immediate community—a grassroots effort to educate those who are most at risk for trafficking. In 2012, IJM hosted a leadership training event for former forced laborers who have been elected as leaders in their respective communities. Raman was an active participant in the training, and he shared advice with his peers. Raman had every reason to smile as his family looked on; in his words: “We are free.”



Now Raman is a leader in his village

Discussion Questions

1. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? What has this looked like in your life?
2. Why does God care so much about justice, and why does God's plan for justice include using *us*, his people, instead of doing it himself? Read Mark 16:15, Hebrews 13:3 and Matthew 25:35-45.
3. How did God use Raman's story to bring hope and inspiration to others?
4. Read Isaiah 1:17. What does that mean for your day-to-day life?

Prayer Focus

- Pray for us to truly hunger and thirst after righteousness even as evil mocks our efforts.
- Pray for the church to achingly pray for God's righteousness to be revealed in the world.
- Pray for those who are enslaved to be set free, and for those like Raman, who are adjusting to new lives in freedom.

SESSION 5: MERCY FOR THE UNMERCIFUL

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.” *Matthew 5:7*

One of the most difficult things to do as justice-seekers is to pray for the perpetrators of injustice, showing mercy to those who, in our human estimation, deserve no mercy. We are humbled by the words of Jesus in this Beatitude as we remember that he showed us mercy when we ourselves deserved none. And he has called us to do the same.

Jesus went to the cross for the sins of all humanity. In one great act of mercy, he fulfilled the greatest act of redemption and justice. And this is the example he sets for us and reveals to the world within us – we are called to be ministers of his justice *and* his mercy. We are compelled to show mercy even when it seems undeserved.

IJM’s Senior Vice President of Field Operations, Sean Litton, explains:

“When there is a conviction in one of our cases, when someone is actually found guilty and they are forced to deal with the reality of what they’ve done and now the consequences of it, it’s never a happy moment.”

“The abuse that they were committing was destroying the people that they were abusing, but *it was also destroying them*. And the hope then is that now that they are forced to confront it, they’ll repent of what they’ve done. They’ll find healing, they’ll find forgiveness, and they’ll find a new life. But that’s up to them; those are their choices to make.”

We must always remember the human faces of injustice—that slave-owners and rapists are men and women just as we are. But, while we acknowledge their human flaws, we are caught in the tension between showing mercy and advocating for justice on behalf of those they have abused. This is where God calls us to pray for his wisdom and mercy in the world.

Meet Yulisa

LA PAZ, BOLIVIA – Yulisa* was a very quiet 5-year-old when IJM Bolivia first met her. Just three days earlier, the little girl had been found at the bottom of a well in her neighborhood. Her uncle had taken her from her room in the middle of the night and sexually assaulted her. Then he threw Yulisa in the deep hole, trying to cover up his crime.

A neighbor found Yulisa and carried her home to her parents; they had been frantically searching for their little girl. The relief at finding her was quickly replaced by shock when they realized what had happened to Yulisa. The family was desperate for someone to help their daughter.

Defending the defenseless



They wanted justice, but they knew they could never afford a lawyer with the father's meager earnings as a day laborer. When Yulisa's mother heard about IJM, she set up a meeting right away. IJM Bolivia took the case, gathering evidence for the trial and making sure Yulisa started to receive therapy she needed.

Yulisa and her parents decided to participate in the trial. The small girl answered questions in the Gesell Chamber, a colorful room in the Bolivian courthouse set up behind a one-way mirror so children do not have to face their aggressor. Yulisa bravely answered questions about the horrific abuse from a trained child psychologist. Her testimony was recorded as evidence.



Yulisa with her family

Finding peace and protection

As the case moved closer to conclusion, the obstacles began. One of the “citizen judges”—similar to American jurors—seemed to sympathize with Yulisa's uncle, the suspect. At another point, the judge announced that a court employee had filed Yulisa's testimony incorrectly. Due to this technical error, the little girl might have to re-testify, dredging up the memories all over. Although Yulisa ended up not having to share about the abuse again, the verdict remained uncertain until the very end.

In April 2012, the judges gave a unanimous verdict: Yulisa's uncle was found guilty. He will spend ten years in prison. Her family was overjoyed and filled with relief. IJM continues to support her family and provide therapy for Yulisa. An IJM social worker says, “When I first met Yulisa, she was so quiet. The therapies, the attentiveness of her mother—it's really made a difference in Yulisa's life.”

Another social worker from IJM Bolivia explained that her role in helping “families find peace and protection between pain and bitterness” is possible because of the support of IJM supporters who pray consistently for the work.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to show mercy in your life?
2. How does God call us to respond for those who persecute us? What does Matthew 5:44 say about this?
3. How can you pray for people like the man who abused Yulisa?
4. What makes *extending God's mercy while revealing his justice* difficult in your life?

Prayer Focus

- Pray for the abusers and perpetrators of injustice around the world to repent of their crimes and seek redemption in Christ.
- Pray for the aftercare workers counseling the victims. Pray for the survivors to reach another place of healing by learning to forgive their oppressors.
- Pray for a merciful heart, that we would be able to forgive and love others in light of the mercy and love we have received.

SESSION 6: SEEING GOD

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” *Matthew 5:8*

God dwells in the high and holy place but also amongst the broken and lowly. We often think about wanting to “see God” according to our own place of need, but as we approach this Beatitude, we are reminded of the places beyond our own need—places where we may most deeply see God.

As followers of Christ, we are called to become pure in heart like our Savior. God’s heart is for others; we see this most clearly through Jesus willingly dying on the cross for a sinful world. To become pure in heart like him, we must seek him, and intercede for others as Jesus does for us. As we consider the most broken, desperate and destitute places of need in our world, the Lord asks, “Will you seek me here?” Will you labor in prayer as if you too dwelled with the poor, the abused, the enslaved, the wrongfully imprisoned?

Hebrews 13 commands us to pray for the oppressed as if we were suffering with them. This exhortation is a holy invitation to bring pure hearts of intercession into his throne room, on behalf of those with whom he dwells—and there, in that place, we will see our God.

Meet Noi

CHIANG MAI, THAILAND – Growing up in Northern Thailand, Noi studied hard through grade school until her family could no longer afford her education. Noi qualified for a scholarship, but she could not receive it because she was not a Thai citizen. Noi was legally entitled to citizenship under Thai law, but she did not have the paperwork to prove her citizenship.

Her education was in jeopardy because she wasn't considered a citizen—even though she was legally entitled to become one.

Noi was stateless, one of an estimated *two million* people in Thailand who do not have their legal citizenship rights. She belongs to a hill tribe, one of the ethnic minority groups that has been historically marginalized and denied basic rights.

Because Noi lacked a simple identification card—one that would count her as a Thai citizen—every attempt to make a better future for herself was blocked. Noi says simply: “You cannot even imagine what life is like without an ID card in Thailand.”

Without citizenship, children may not be able to graduate from school. And if they do get to go to school, they might not get an official degree or certificate. Without citizenship, adults cannot travel about freely, and they cannot legally work. Without legal papers, Noi had to take whatever job she could get. At 19, she started working at a large supermarket warehouse, where she earned half as much as the



other Thai employees. But Noi could not complain. There was no legal action she could take—not without an ID card.

Noi lived in fear of the police, worrying they might ask to see her papers. She avoided using public transportation, because she feared she might run into a police officer.

Noi knew that she was qualified to be a Thai citizen, and she knew it was the only way she would ever feel safe. She braved her way to a local government office to apply for citizenship, and then made *ten more trips* as her application was delayed time and time again. Each time, the officials ignored her or asked her to pay an exorbitant bribe. Noi was starting to lose hope.

A friend told Noi about IJM Thailand, who had helped him get the citizenship he too deserved. When IJM staff met Noi, they knew right away that she should be eligible for citizenship. IJM staff contacted major government bodies on Noi's behalf and filed a legal case to direct the local government office to simply review Noi's application.

Finally, after three years of hard work, IJM took Noi to pick up her ID card—proof at last that she was a real Thai citizen, with the rights she always deserved.

“Noi lived a life of invisibility. When she was not a citizen, no one saw her,” said one IJM staff member. But now, the door to Noi's future is wide open: “She has life, she can do anything...she can achieve her dreams!”

With an unshakeable confidence, Noi says, “I am no longer afraid of anything now, because I have citizenship.”



Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be pure in heart and why is it important in order to see God?
2. Is it ever difficult to see God in our culture, where we have what we need and are very rarely destitute?
3. What does Noi's story teach us about perseverance? How does Noi's perseverance relate to the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8?
4. How can we pray for people (like we are there with them) when we are often very far away?

Prayer Focus

- Pray for those suffering from injustice as if you are there beside them experiencing their pain.
- Pray that those seeking and advocating for justice would see God's hand at work in all circumstances.
- Pray that God would hear the cries for justice from all the people like Noi who are still awaiting citizenship in their countries.

SESSION 7: VICTORY THROUGH PEACE

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” *Matthew 5:9*

Being a peacemaker is not a passive, quiet stance.

In fact, the Scriptures describe peace through a very different perspective. Peace is likened to a river (Isaiah 66:12)—unstoppable, flowing, covering rocks and debris, shaping its own course. It is the God of *peace* who will soon crush the evil one under his feet (Romans 16:20). Peace is the part of the armor upon which we stand, the footwear allowing us to be ready for challenges ahead (Ephesians 6:15). And Jesus ultimately leaves his disciples with *his peace* in preparing them for his departure and the work ahead (John 14:27).

Peace is a more powerful force in terms of intensity and impact than any oppression. It is for this reason justice-seekers must be carriers of peace, makers of peace and dwellers in peace. We must be marked by peace and thereby known as children of the Prince of Peace himself.

Meet Marian

CEBU, THE PHILIPPINES – With a bright smile, Marian* mentors girls recently rescued from sex trafficking in the Philippines. She is eager to help them learn how to regain confidence and joy, because she knows what they are experiencing. Marian is a survivor herself.

“It was as if I was no longer in this world.”

Marian was born into a large family, with little to go around. She dropped out of school in fourth grade, and she moved to Cebu City to help earn money when she was 16. On her own for the first time, Marian was tricked and trapped in a bar where she was sold for sex.



She later compared her life in that bar to a tree that has lost its leaves—“practically dead.” She said, “[was] as if I was no longer in this world.”

Four months after the nightmare began, Marian and 19 other young women were rescued. The police called IJM after the rescue operation for legal advice and to help provide aftercare for the trafficking survivors. Marian and the other girls first went to HerSpace, a safe place set up exclusively for trafficking survivors so they can receive crisis care and share their stories.

As Marian settled into a long-term government aftercare shelter, she was rebellious and acted out. She was defiant and did not trust anyone. It is not unusual for trafficking survivors to struggle with anger, confusion or even a desire to return to their lives in the places they were abused. Trauma-focused therapy and months, if not years, of patient counsel from dedicated social workers is critical to helping survivors rebuild trust and regain their sense of self-worth.

Profound transformation

As the months passed, Marian started to bloom. She found comfort and joy as she participated in church services the aftercare home held for the community, even learning guitar so she could help lead the singing. Within two years, Marian caught up in her studies and passed the exam she needed to take to get into college. Now, she is an independent student at a community college living on her own.

Everything is different in Marian's life today. She says, "There is now happiness and joy that earthly things could never give; that joy which no matter where you go, you know there is someone watching over you, someone cares for you."

Discussion Questions

1. How has God called you to be a peacemaker?
2. What is difficult about envisioning peace that's not passive and calm?
3. How might Marian's newfound peace in spite of her suffering impact others?
4. Read Ephesians 6:13-20. What opportunities has God given you to use peace as your armor in your community?

Prayer Focus

- Pray for supernatural peace for those fighting against injustice as they confront great evil.
- Pray for those struggling to find peace after experiencing violent abuse.
- Pray for strong partnerships between IJM and the government, law enforcement and court officials in the countries where IJM works. Pray that these officials will create systemic change that will protect the rights and dignity of all people in their communities and bring peace and security to their regions.

SESSION 8: JOY IN PERSECUTION

**“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” *Matthew 5:10***

The work of justice is not easy. As we intercede on behalf of victims of oppression, we will meet adversity. You may experience doubt and question whether praying is actually enough. There will be the voice of the accuser that says you should be spending your time more efficiently—the voice that taunts “God is not listening.” And perhaps there will even be the voices of criticism, someone who may not understand your calling or commitment to pray for the work of justice.

There will be arrows of persecution thrown at you that will feel like daggers in your spirit. But when that persecution comes, know your prayer is making an impact. Know you are advancing the kingdom of heaven here on earth—a kingdom that is rightly ordered and governed by righteousness and justices. And having done all of this: “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12).

Meet Michael

NAIROBI, KENYA – Michael was framed for the violent robbery and murder of a UN security official. He was completely innocent. All the witnesses said that Michael was not the right man, but he was arrested, tried and sentenced to death by hanging in 2010.

Asking God to turn tears of sorrow into tears of joy

IJM Kenya had defended Michael's innocence in court, and the conviction was a shock. IJM's Director of Aftercare in Kenya said, “I'm not sure I believed it, but as our whole team wept and sobbed that day around our conference table in Nairobi, I told the team, ‘We are crying tears of sorrow today, but God will turn our tears to joy when one day Michael sits in freedom around this very table.’”

That team was determined to keep fighting for Michael. They appealed to the Kenyan High Court, but it was already four years behind on its cases. Michael was 78 years old and had already spent a year in jail for a crime he did not commit. Instead of having Michael wait another four years for his case to be heard, IJM Kenya decided to ask the High Court to let Michael out of death row at the maximum security prison while he waited for his appeal.

IJM was asking the High Court to grant bail to a convict. Even though we believed Michael was clearly innocent, he had been declared guilty. Bail had never been granted to a convicted man in Kenya's history. But bail was a possibility under Kenya's new constitution, which was made law shortly before Michael's conviction.



While IJM pursued the precedent-setting request in court, we asked all prayer partners to pray for this seemingly impossible request.

Persevering in prayer

In 2010, IJM asked the 1,000 people who joined us for our annual Global Prayer Gathering to persevere in prayer for Michael's freedom. It seemed impossible, but we encouraged one another to keep thinking of Michael as though we ourselves were innocent and in prison.

Just six weeks after GPG, the High Court heard Michael's request for bail. When the judge heard Michael's plea, he was appalled at the injustice. The judge strongly criticized the prosecutor for advancing such a ridiculous case, and then, in an unprecedented ruling, he released Michael on bail. *Michael was free*. He walked out of prison and into the arms of his family and friends.



IJM Kenya staff rejoiced around that same conference room table where they had previously cried tears of great sadness when Michael was convicted. God had heard the cries of his people. He replaced those tears of agony with shouts of joy. Michael's case is still on appeal, but he awaits the chance to permanently clear his name *in freedom*.

In 2011, Michael made his first overseas trip to join us at the Global Prayer Gathering. This is what he shared with us:

“I am here to say thank you for praying for me. I did not give up hope because I knew IJM and IJM's friends remembered me. IJM's social workers took such good care of me and my family while I was in prison.

But more than that, God remembered me. I knew that God knew me inside out. I knew he saw me. I told him: 'The police won't listen to me; you have to fight for me.' I was shaken when I was condemned by that judge to die, but I did not give up hope in the God who loves me. I belong to him. Every breath.

I have had many hard times in life. Through it all, God has taught me to trust him patiently and to hope in suffering. There is a lot of suffering in my country at the hands of the government and the police, but I have hope for Kenya that it can be better. Good people help fill me with this hope.”

Discussion Questions

1. Do you ever feel like praying isn't enough? What does James 5:13-17 say about the power of prayer?
2. How have you seen God work through your prayers?
3. How does Michael's faith in spite of injustice challenge or inspire you?
4. The Bible states that followers of Christ will be persecuted. How might you be persecuted as you follow him in your community? How can you prepare for it?

Prayer Focus

- Pray for God to give us strength in the face of persecution as we fight for justice.
- Pray for those around the world who are persecuted, for those who have lost hope.
- Pray for those who are wrongly imprisoned, like Michael, and ask that they would be set free.

CLOSING REFLECTION: WILL YOU CONTINUE TO PRAY?

Great movements of history – from early abolition to civil rights – have often been led by the Church and fueled by prayer. **Prayer builds and illuminates the pathway.** As we engage the work of justice through prayer, we join a global movement of intercessors, co-laborers and justice seekers spanning history to bring slavery and violent oppression to an end.

In a world of slavery, human trafficking and other forms of violent oppression, when darkness leads us to despair, we must bring out the light that dwells within us. We must set our hearts and affection on the source of that light—Christ himself—and in doing so, we will be empowered to stand still, to pray and to “see the glorious works of the Lord” (Psalm 46:8-9). He is laying the path. And we are illuminating it with each prayer, with each step we take. **The way of justice is led by the way of prayer.**

We must be relentless in our intercession. Without it, we will be groping in the dark, without vision, without a streamlined advancement to the end goal. Intercession maintains the end goal as its aim – it never loses sight, because the heart of the intercessor relies on the heart of God. In the movement to end violent oppression, intercession must lead the way.

The work stands to fail or succeed on one central factor—will the intercessors choose to pray? Will you?

GO AND DO LIKEWISE: FIGHTING INJUSTICE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

God has called each of us to his work of justice. We've already joined his mission by engaging in the work of justice through prayer. Even as you intercede on the behalf of the oppressed, you might be interested in getting even more involved. Below are some suggestions for how to take the next step:

1. **Pray** about how God wants you to get involved. IJM has a number of ways in which you can do so, from prayer to volunteering.
 - a. Check out [IJM.org/get-involved](https://www.ijm.org/get-involved)
 - b. Look around your community for ways to minister to the hurting. Use IJM's [Community Justice Assessment Tool](#).
2. **Get involved** in an IJM campaign:
 - a. [IJM.org/FreedomMaker](https://www.ijm.org/FreedomMaker) – An easy way to set up your own campaign to raise resources to fight injustice. This year, give up your birthday with a **Big Birthday Wish** campaign and help IJM bring rescue around the world!
 - b. [IJM.org/FreedomPartner](https://www.ijm.org/FreedomPartner) – Give a monthly gift of \$24 or more so IJM can show up, 24 hours a day.
 - c. [FreedomCommons.IJM.org](https://www.freedomcommons.ijm.org) – Advocate with your elected officials and take action to fight slavery in the U.S. and abroad.
 - d. Take your church deeper on a justice journey with **DIVE** or involve your youth in the **24-Hour Justice Experience**. Find everything you need at [IJM.org/resources](https://www.ijm.org/resources).
3. **Read** *The Just Church* to learn how you can get your church involved in the work of justice. [thejustchurch.com](https://www.thejustchurch.com)
4. **Act**. It sounds simple, but acting on ideas is the hardest step. Unfortunately, if we never act, nothing gets done and justice remains an elusive accomplishment.

LEADER'S GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

You don't need a lot of experience to lead a small group – just a desire to know God more intimately and to help others also journey to that end.

Here are some tips for preparing your small group to work through this devotional:

Preparation

Pray.	Ask God to reveal truths to you that the group needs to hear as you prepare.
Read beforehand.	Read through the entire session at least once or twice to familiarize yourself with the topic you'll be discussing before each session. Jot down any insights or questions that come to you along the way.
Explore.	If you discover you have questions as you're reading the material, or you simply want to have a broader understanding of the session's topic to help your small group better understand, explore outside resources and make some notes. Check out <i>The Just Church</i> by IJM's Jim Martin as a start.
Get context.	Some sessions have additional verses to look up. Read the entire chapter in which the verse is located to understand the context.

Leading

Pray.	Begin each session in prayer. Ask God to open your hearts to hear clearly from him.
Get to know one another.	In your initial meeting, ask everyone to introduce themselves and share where they are in their justice journey (e.g. what led them to more seriously pursue justice, where are they hoping to grow).
Be mindful.	Not everyone will have the same background, and everyone will be at different stages in their walk with Christ. Be ready to explain "churchy" terms that some might not understand.
Foster an atmosphere of real sharing.	Groups that want to go deep have to be real with each other, but not everyone is comfortable being open. To encourage sharing: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initiate openness by being honest about your personal journey and questions.• Create a confidentiality agreement to keep anything shared between group members private.
Encourage everyone to participate.	Have people take turns reading different verses or sections. Try to encourage everyone to answer the questions, but don't force anyone to answer if they're uncomfortable.
Facilitate.	Some people are more assertive in discussions while others can be hesitant to speak up. Here's how to mediate so that everyone gets fair time: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let people talk if they feel led, but be ready to gently interject if others haven't had much chance to speak.• Encourage quieter members to share by asking openly for new opinions or by

	<p>asking them directly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always wait a few moments before continuing on to another point.
Go with the flow.	Although these sessions each have a specific focus, be open to where the Spirit leads. Seemingly off-topic points might reveal truths you've never considered before.
Encourage questions.	Don't be afraid of not knowing the answer, and don't be afraid to pose your own questions! Direct the questions to the group and see if anyone has any insights. If none of you knows the answer, pray about it at the end of the session.
Pray (more).	Spend serious time in prayer. Have everyone pray, whether aloud or silently. Have a moment of silence before praying to allow everyone to clear their minds and to enter into the presence of God.
Engage.	At the end of the devotional, we've included ideas of how your group might want to get even more involved in the work of justice. Pray about what direction God wants your group to take, then plan together how each of you can take part.

We would love to hear from you about your group's experience with this pilot resource. Please send any feedback or questions to us at prayer@ijm.org.