



REDISCOVERING THE CROSS

SMALL
GROUP
GUIDE

February 21, 2021

JUSTIFICATION: IS IT STILL A CONCERN?

****This week you will notice an emphasis on Justice and Justification. While you study the text from the sermon also make sure to engage with the prompts related to justice and how we can be God's beacons of justice and advocacy in the aftermath of the winter storm.**

HOW DID IT GO? (20 MINUTES)

In light of this past week, take some time to reflect on the questions below as a group.

REACHING UPWARD: GROWING IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

- ❑ How did the events of this last week affect you emotionally, physically, and spiritually?

REACHING OUTWARD: INVESTING IN YOUR NEIGHBORS

- ❑ How did experiencing insecurity with heat, power, and water help you identify with the plight of the vulnerable? Though this week was absolutely miserable, most of us likely did not face food insecurity in the midst of losing water and power (and burst pipes, etc.). Most of us had safety nets to fall back upon. Can you identify with those who lack a safety net in a greater way now? What invitation might God have for us to respond to, as this week's catastrophic events happened on the tail end of our series of Biblical Justice—a call to become people who do His justice, caring and contending for the oppressed and vulnerable?
- ❑ Did the Lord allow you to extend His grace, love, and/or hospitality in some way to a neighbor or friend (or even complete stranger) this past week? Or were you extended grace, love, and/or hospitality by a neighbor, friend, or stranger?

HEAD (15-20 MINUTES)

Read aloud Romans 3:21-26

1. From where/whom does justification come? (Consider all verses)
2. Who is in need of justification? (v.23)
3. Is there anything one must do to be justified? (v.22)

HEAD

Observe the text and the author's main points.

HEART (15-20 MINUTES)

1. One meaning given by Paul to the term “justified” is “reckoned as righteous.”¹ As people who trust in Jesus, we are indeed “reckoned as righteous.” Does this mean that we actually became righteous the moment that we trusted Jesus? Do you feel righteous? What does “reckoned” actually mean here, and who is doing the reckoning? **You could condense the question to this: Is it a noble fiction that I am righteous or am I actually righteous—and what are the implications depending on my answer?**
2. Recall a time when you made an effort to justify something that you said or did. As we think back, we may find that we sought from others an acknowledgment that we were justified in our actions by argumentation and defensiveness. How does this differ from the justification that comes from God? Can we do or say anything that will convince God that we are justified? If that is not possible, what must we do or say to be justified in God’s eyes?

HEART

Envision how the text—when applied—might transform your inner life in terms of your thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.

HANDS (10 MINUTES)

Consider choosing one way to engage with the Lord and our community this week from the options below (your group could do some of these together, too!).

REACHING UPWARD: GROWING IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

- ❑ This week’s LenTEN prayer podcast focuses on lectio divina, or the “divine reading” of this week’s Scripture. Can you take part in this same practice daily and reflect upon the prompts? Note how your observations change day by day. The podcast will guide you through your daily ten minutes—and you’ll be one-sixth of the way there to meeting the LenTEN Prayer Challenge! To access the Podcast, Search “FPC Houston Sermons” on your podcast platform. For more information about our LenTEN prayer challenge or other Lenten resources, visit fpchouston.org/lent-discipleship-series.
- ❑ The renowned Bible teacher and former pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, Warren Wiersbe, in his commentary on Romans², offers five key takeaways regarding justification found in this passage:
 - » Justification takes place apart from the law (v. 21)
 - » It comes through faith in Christ (v. 22a)
 - » It is given to all who believe, not just to Jew or Gentile (vv. 22b-23)
 - » It is a gift to us as an act of grace from a loving God (v. 24)
 - » It comes at great cost to God (vv. 24b-25)

HANDS

Apply the text by moving from inward reflection to outward action looking for practical ways to live the text out in our lives to serve others.

In your devotional time in the coming week, reread this passage (Rom 3:21-26) and focus on one of these points each day. For example, on day one, spend time thinking and praying about the fact that there is a new righteousness available to you, a righteousness that comes from God but which is in no way connected with obeying the law. Consider the implications of this in your own life. On day two, focus on the fact that the only thing you have to do to claim this righteousness is to have faith in Jesus Christ. How could you share this incredible reality with someone you know? ...and so on throughout the week.

- ❑ Luther, Calvin, and most later theologians in the reformed tradition came to believe that justification was a one-time event, not a process.³ **Consider taking a blank sheet of paper and construct a timeline of your life thus far**

1 In fact, the great reformer John Calvin adopted this phrase in his writings about justification. (Ibid, 362.)

2 Wiersbe, Warren. The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 1, Matthew - Galatians (Second Edition). Colorado Springs CO, David C. Cook, 2008, 522-523.

3 McGrath, Alister. Christian Theology - An Introduction (Fifth Edition.) London, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2011, 360-363.

(major life events) and include when you became a Christian. Where does justification (justified) fit on this timeline? Where do these other terms in the lexicon of the gospel such as salvation (saved), reconciliation (reconciled), adoption (adopted), redemption (redeemed), and sanctification (sanctified) show up on your timeline? Focus on which, if any, are one-time events and which are processes that occur over time.

REACHING OUTWARD: INVESTING IN YOUR NEIGHBORS

- ❑ Being an advocate can seem like a daunting task. How can you take one small step this week to rest in God's love while also advocating for someone more vulnerable than yourself?
- ❑ Tim Keller, in his book *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just*, uses the phrase "quartet of the vulnerable." He suggests with this phrase that Scripture identifies the four "players" of the quartet as widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor. Think about your community: Who does the widow, orphan, immigrant, and the poor include? How does your perspective of these terms change as you personalize this "quartet"? Has the pandemic and this past week caused one part of the quartet to resound more loudly in your ear than another?
- ❑ Take this one step further: create a chart where you list the widows, orphans, immigrants, and poor who you personally come into contact with or at least know about in our city or state. From this list, commit to praying for one way you can advocate for someone in this quartet, even during the pandemic.
- ❑ Consider reaching out to an organization you are already familiar with or one listed below following this recent winter storm.

❑ KidsMeals

Kid's Meals mission is to end childhood hunger by delivering free healthy meals to the doorsteps of Houston's hungriest preschool-aged children and through collaboration provide their families with resources to help end the cycle of poverty. They serve many of our ministry partners' children including Nehemiah Center. Sadly, they lost their entire food inventory when power was lost. They must replace the food to be able to feed the 6400 children a day. Families of poverty do not have the financial cushion or food reserves to survive crisis, so the need is significant. They are requesting donations of food items and volunteers to deliver meals. kidsmealsinc.org

- » Current Food needs: desperate need for loaves of bread and proteins—so peanut butter packets, tuna packets, protein bars, and granola bars. They also need shelf-stable and/or soy milk, juices (prefer 100% juice if possible), and small (8oz) bottles of water.
- » Volunteer needs: needed to deliver meals.
- » Financial gifts are needed to help with repair and loss due to the freeze and outage

❑ Attack Poverty

Attack Poverty, one of our priority partners who we frequently collaborate with during disasters, has been deliberately addressing the needs of their communities as a result of the Winter Storm in Texas. See their website for details about volunteer opportunities and ways to support (attackpoverty.org/texas-storm/). If you have questions or want to volunteer there, contact Lea Byrd at lbyrd@fpchouston.org.

NEIGHBOR

Anyone in your life—whether a friend, colleague, family member, classmate, or literal neighbor—to whom you can show God's love.

URGENT DONATIONS NEEDED:

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|--------------------------------|---|---|
| » Blankets | » Contractor/Trash Bags | » Batteries |
| » Water | » Bleach | » Hand Sanitizer |
| » Home Depot/Lowes Gift Cards | » Child related activity needs (Activity Kits, Bible Studies) | » Financial donations are needed for the long-term recovery effort anticipated. |
| » Hats, Socks, Scarves, Gloves | » Pet Food | |
| » Cleaning Supplies | » Baby Supplies (Baby Food, Formula, Diapers) | |

❑ **Houston Responds**

FPC is a founding member of Houston Responds - Central Coalition. Houston Responds: Central is helping bring churches and organizations together to serve families in Central Houston that have been affected by disasters such as this winter storm disaster. The Houston Responds Winter Storm response page provides many of the different volunteer opportunities in response to this disaster houstonresponds.org/disaster. Our Central Coalition disaster coordinator for FPC is Steve Winstead. If you have questions about our work with Houston Responds or getting a group of friends to work as an FPC team, please reach out to Steve at steve.winstead@att.net.

❑ **Gulf Coast Blood Center**

The need for blood in the Houston area is critical! FPC will be hosting a blood drive at the church on Friday, March 12 from 9:30 AM–2 PM in LC 181. To sign up, visit fpchouston.org/events.

❑ **Houston Food Bank**

Food insecurity was already a concern in Houston, and this storm has exacerbated the issue. Our community has endured days without power, warmth and healthy meals. To volunteer visit houstonfoodbank.org.

- ❑ Many of us have a friend or family member who is a practicing Roman Catholic. There are significant differences between the Roman Catholic and Protestant faith traditions surrounding justification and, more broadly, salvation. Reach out in the coming week to a Catholic friend or family member (Zoom calls make this much easier now-a-days) and try to engage in a dialogue with him/her in order to better understand these differences. Simply tell him/her, “My church and Small Group is studying the question, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ I know that you are a practicing Catholic and I’m really interested in how that question is answered in your faith tradition.” The goal here is not to argue or persuade, but rather to listen and understand. Of course, you should feel free to say, “This is what I believe.” Report back to your group next week on how this discussion went. This will also give you a great opportunity to check on your friend to see if they need any assistance in the aftermath of the power outages and water shortages.

