

# Stand Up: Take Action Against Poverty



## Youth Resources for Micah Sunday

18 October 2009

### Resources

The following resources are available on [www.micahchallenge.org.nz](http://www.micahchallenge.org.nz) Look through them and choose what works for your group.

- Global Poverty activity
- Links to Stand Up Campaign resources
- Prayer ideas

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### Bible Study Resource

Here are three Bible studies that can be used as a lead up to looking at Micah Sunday.

These studies are from *Making the Most of the Rest of Our Lives* by Tim Dearborn and Don Posterski, © World Vision 2006

### Suggestions for use

The studies are designed for people who are serious about taking the next steps in following Christ. They assume a desire to walk with God in the world as witnesses to Christ and the coming kingdom. We suggest that copies of this resource are printed out for each participant, so that participants can take turns reading out the study text.

Each study also has space for participants to keep a journal of their own thoughts coming from the study materials. Participants should be invited to bring a suitable notebook of their own, or notebooks could be made available at the first session.

Flip charts or large sheets of paper and coloured pens should be available for group activities each time.

Each study should take between 40 minutes and one hour.

### Study 1

#### Agents of Change

##### **God loves us so much that God accepts us just the way we are.**

Everyone longs to be loved and accepted. The good news of the Gospel is that the acceptance and forgiveness we seek is a gift – a gift of grace. We are loved and accepted not because of our good deeds or pious prayers, but because the God of love offers us new life in Christ. Jesus invites us into the divine embrace, freely. That's the good news... but there is even more.

##### **God loves us too much to leave us the way we are.**

As wonderful as it is to be accepted, our human spirits long for more:

We want change.

We want to be different.

We want our world to be a better place.

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Life that leaves us trapped in our personal inadequacies and insecurities is not good enough. Circumstances that paralyse people in needless suffering and inherited injustices must be overcome. We want transformation – deep and enduring change for ourselves and for others.

### Reflection (3 minutes)

As an entire group invite people to call out areas of the world where they long for the transforming love of God to penetrate. As they are named, write them on a whiteboard or flip chart.

The great news is that God is not content to leave us – or the world – in a confused state of suffering and alienation. Since the first expressions of sin and brokenness scarred the beauty of creation, God has been in pursuit of transforming change.

Amazingly, God’s vision for change involves us. God’s strategy for change is to propel us into the world as agents of change. Our calling, our commission, is to be empowered by God to be agents of change. Jesus makes this clear in the final words of Matthew’s gospel.

### Listen to the final words of Matthew’s gospel and underline anything that strikes you regarding God’s purposes for our life.

Jesus' eleven disciples went to a mountain in Galilee, where Jesus had told them to meet him. They saw him and worshiped him, but some of them doubted. Jesus came to them and said: “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.” (Matthew 28:16-20)

### Reflection (7 Minutes)

Discuss as an entire group

- This passage is often referred to as the *Great Commission* and interpreted as the *evangelistic mandate*. What strikes you as you read the passage?
- What comfort do you take from the fact that, even then, “some doubted”?
- Consider this Oxford Dictionary definition of the word *commission*: “commission: n. the authority to perform a task or certain duties; an instruction, command or duty given to such a group or person; an order for something, esp. a work of art, to be produced specially.” Does this definition shed any light on Jesus’ command to his followers?

**We don’t have the authority to go in our own name.** Our ambitions, determination or even our best intentions are no match for the Great Commission challenge. We go in the *name* of Jesus, with the *authority* of Jesus. The integrity of the commission depends on the authority of the one who mandates it. As the Son of God, Jesus has the credentials to assert: “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*” (Matthew 28:18; see also Colossians 1:15-20).

### Listen as we read the following comments on the Great Commission. As you listen, circle anything about these emphases that is new or surprising to you as aspects of the Great Commission.

A careful look at the mandate is surprising. The scope of Jesus’ authority is not limited to matters in heaven and our personal salvation. Jesus’ authority extends as well over all things on earth. The scope of the Great Commission extends to every aspect of life in the world. Accordingly, the commission commends four dimensions of “earthly” transformation and change:

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1. God wills political transformation: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” There are no rulers, leaders, governments, political parties, corporations, CEOs or even forces of darkness that are outside the sphere of Jesus’ authority. In the end all authority will be brought under the Lordship of Christ.
2. God wills cultural transformation: “Go and make disciples of all nations.” When God calls us to become disciples of Christ, God recognises the value-shaping impact of our culture. Following Christ occurs within a time and place – a culture – and often there is dissonance and even conflict between culture and Christ’s will for what is best and right. In Jesus’ vision it is not only individuals who are ‘discipled’ but also cultures.
3. God wills spiritual transformation: “Baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. Baptism is more than a spiritual rite of passage. It is our public identification with Jesus. It is sign and symbol for what God has done for us in Christ. Baptism is our way of participating in Christ’s death and resurrection. We are buried with him in the waters of baptism, and we rise as new creatures, clothed with the new life of Christ. We are changed (see Romans 6:4; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 2:6-12).
4. God wills social transformation: “Teach them to observe all that I commanded.” Following Christ is not simply professing faith in him, or accepting the truth of all he taught. Rather it is observing and implementing all that he commanded. It is striking that most of Jesus’ commands pertain to our everyday life. The faith has interpersonal and social implications – love your enemies; turn the other cheek; pour cups of cold water in service to the poor; don’t take fellow disciples to court’ don’t put your trust in treasures. Following Jesus is a lifestyle adventure that translates belief into behaviour.

### Reflection (10 minutes)

- What did you circle as new or surprising?
- Discuss in groups of three or four how these insights compare with what you have heard before about this passage. What questions does this reading of the Great Commission raise?
- Ask several volunteers to share their insights with the entire group.
- Return to the list of areas in the world that need God’s transforming love. Select three or four and invest several minutes in prayer together for God’s love to penetrate these raw edges and rough places.

### *As you leave...*

Find one person this week outside this study group with whom you can share an insight you have gained regarding the scope of the Great Commission. Don’t debate the insight with the person. Simply describe it and ask for his or her reaction.

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## Study 2

### Great Expectations

It is one thing to picture ourselves standing with the early disciples, receiving the Great Commission. It can be easy to circle new and interesting ideas on a piece of paper, but it is quite another thing to actually go out and find ways of putting this into practice in daily life. In this session we will examine our calling. What exactly is God asking of us?

**In every situation we enter we want to know what is required of us.** What is expected? Jobs have performance indicators; families expect certain behaviour; coaches in all sports have fitness standards. We are used to requirements, but we perform best when we know in advance what they are.

### Reflection (5 Minutes)

- Discuss in pairs some of the behavioural expectations that you learned growing up from your family, friends, or other influential people in your life.
- What was expected of you? Why?

**When it comes to life, what's required of us?** How do we know if we are on the right track, doing what is expected of us? Every person, regardless of how privileged or impoverished, wants to know the answer to this. It is the fundamental human question. The biblical answer to this question is shockingly simple and profoundly practical.

### Read in unison:

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
But to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

*The prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, Amos and Hosea, proclaimed God's call for our spiritual life. He says that it shapes our social engagement. In his village Micah had daily contact with poor people who were exploited by the rich and powerful. He watched indignantly as they lost their houses and had their lands seized. In Micah's mind the corruption among religious leaders and the inhumane treatment from business and political power brokers were rooted in a woeful lack of justice, kindness and humility. His prophetic voice not only addressed serious matters in his immediate context but also proclaimed a timeless standard of what God expects from people who seek to live faithfully.*

*This call to justice, kindness and humility reaches widely and applies specifically. It has personal, interpersonal and societal implications. If Jesus' command to his disciples was the Great Commission, then God's words through the prophet Micah must surely be the Great Requirement. It is one command expressed in three dimensions that define what is good: (1) do justice, (2) love kindness (often translated "mercy"), and (3) walk humbly with God.*

### Reflection (10 minutes)

- Write in your journal a short paragraph about which of the three dimensions receives the most attention in your church and in your own experience. Why?

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- Identify three different corners of the room as justice, mercy and humility. Stand in the section that represents the dimension that you think receives the greatest emphasis in our Christian experience.
- Have one person in each section describe how and why this dimension is emphasised.

**As we listen to the following definition of justice, underline ideas that are the same as your current understanding. Circle anything that is new or surprising.**

What does it mean to do justice? The biblical word for justice means “to make things right.” When the Bible mentions justice, one of nine words frequently follows: *widow, fatherless, orphans, poor, hungry, stranger, needy, weak* and *oppressed*. The word justice shares the same linguistic root as righteousness, which means to be right. When we justify something, like the right margin of a page, we make it straight. To adjust a picture on the wall is to straighten it. To do justice is to make life right.

This may indeed mean punishing wrongdoers and compensating victims, but in a fuller sense it means to straighten out situations and relationships so they are right, so they are as they should be. Practically it means that widows, orphans and the poor and oppressed get a fair chance to live right – to have opportunities to work, live with dignity, and pursue fullness of life.

God’s purpose is not only to make the lives of victims of injustice more tolerable (charity and relief) but also to make them right. Justice involves positioning people so they can begin again. And just as God changes us in Christ so we can begin again and do right, we have the privilege – and are required by God – to be agents of change by doing justice and making life right for others.

Few of us desire to be punished or cast out. When our attitudes and actions are wrong, we instinctively hope for mercy. We prefer to be treated as we *don’t* deserve. We desire to be embraced in love.

However in the long run, doing wrong and receiving perpetual mercy and forgiveness may not help us. Excessive mercy overprotects us from the consequences of our actions, and disaster will eventually strike. The greater crisis, however, might be not experiencing the right sized gifts of mercy. We might not learn how important it is to grant the gift of mercy to other people in our lives.

### Reflection (15 minutes)

Discuss in pairs (5 minutes):

- Is there anything about this description of justice that surprises you?
- How does this meaning of justice compare to the common understanding (and practice) of justice in your society?

Combine pairs into groups of four (8 minutes):

- Without making any physical contact, create a sculpture with your bodies that you think expresses the relationship among justice, mercy and humility.
- Take turns as groups looking at each other’s human sculptures.

As an entire group, vote on the sculpture that most creatively shows the relationship among justice, mercy and humility, and give a prize to that group.

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Throughout this study we have been focussing on God's call in our lives to be agents of change, participating in God's transformation of every aspect of life. God's will is to make life right. God wills justice. Expecting justice is actually good news.

**Read Psalm 85:10 in unison:**

*Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.*

**Pray as an entire group**, praising God for being a God of mercy, truth, justice and peace. Name before God specific situations where life needs to be made right for people.

*As you leave...*

Be aware of justice and mercy this week. Cut articles from newspapers that illustrate issues of justice and mercy. Bring them to the next session.

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## Study 3

### Making Room For Mercy

#### Note to group leaders:

- Depending on the size of your group, tape together large sheets of paper and mount them on a wall. Write across the top “Great Commandment, Commission and Requirement”. Have tape available for participants to post newspaper clippings.
- Bring a bucket of soil to use at the end of the session. Depending on the size of your group, you may need several containers (so that there is room for everyone to gather around one of the containers).
- Participants can take turns reading aloud the text in the workbook.

As we enter the room, attach the newspaper clippings we brought portraying issues of justice and mercy to the poster in the front of the room entitled “Great Commandment, Commission and Requirement.”

In our last session we looked at the harsh reality of injustice and the hard work of living right. Micah cried out against injustice and issued a message for God’s people about how to live right. Loving kindness, or mercy, is part of Micah’s radical call. But what exactly is mercy?

The root of the Hebrew word for mercy is also the root of the word *womb*. A womb is where life is born. Mercy also brings life forward. And here is where mercy and justice come together as intimate friends. Mercy extends second chances. Justice makes life right and allows us to begin again. When mercy and justice embrace, we are the recipients of life-giving and life-transforming gifts from God. When we have the privilege of extending mercy and justice to others, we are gifts from God in their lives.

#### Reflection (5 minutes)

- Describe in your journal a situation when you received mercy from someone. How did it feel?
- Is there someone in your life who would benefit from receiving a gift of mercy from you? A family member? Someone in your class at school? A work colleague, friend, foe or neighbour?
- Is it easier for you to receive the gift of mercy or to extend it to others?

#### Small Group Reflection (7 minutes)

- What is the relationship between justice and mercy? Take paper and coloured pens and, as a group draw that relationship.
- Post the drawing on the wall for all to reflect on and enjoy.

**What does good look like? As we listen to the following reflection on justice, mercy and humility, look at the newspaper clippings posted at the start of the session. If the Great Requirement defines what is good, then what would goodness look like in those situations?**

We don’t do justice well when we approach others self-righteously, judgementally or critically. Nor do we improve life for others if we simply extend mercy, forgiving all wrongs and never making anything right. Justice can be harsh when expressed on its

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own. Mercy alone can be unprincipled and lacking in substance. The two are connected, not only in Micah's great answer to the big question of what is required of us, but also in practice.

When people around us advocate for our well-being (for our life to be made right), and when they extend mercy rather than press for retribution, we are humbled in their presence. Experiencing God's mercy generates humility. And therefore, the third dimension of the Great Requirement is to walk humbly with our God.

The word humility shares the same root as the word *humus*, which means 'soil'. In humility we walk on level ground with others, our feet treading the same soil. Whatever our social standing may be, we do not think we are more important or more highly valued by God than anyone else. We share a common need for mercy and a common longing for justice. In our pursuit of justice we walk with those who have been victimised – and even with the victimisers.

So, what does the Lord require of us? What is good? To walk humbly with our God, and to stand on level ground with all people on earth. To receive mercy, and to live mercifully in our relationships with others. To make life right by seeking to create just societies in which individuals, families and communities can reach their God-given potential. This is our Great Requirement – one command expressed in three dimensions.

Let us gather around the newspaper clipping poster in the front of the room and pray, either silently or aloud, for whatever is needed in these situations. Pray that the people involved do and experience what is good.

The following story is about someone who has experience all that and more.

### Justice-Mercy-Humility

#### Read and consider:

Chilufya was raised in a supportive family. She had the good fortune of graduating from college and becoming a travel agent. However, her parents both died, leaving her responsible for a younger brother. Unable to find a job in the travel industry, she finally succeeded in gaining employment as a shop assistant. She was relieved to provide food, and apartment and money for school fees for her brother.

However shortly after beginning to work in the store, the manager made sexual advances to her, demanding favours. She refused and lost her job, her apartment, food and the ability to support for her brother's schooling. In desperation she and her brother moved in with a friend. The friend demanded that Chilufya contribute to expenses and introduced her to an alternative way of earning income.

Choosing between homelessness and starvation for her and her brother or the defilement of selling her body, she chose the latter. She went to work on what is known in Africa as the AIDS Highway. It stretches north-south through the heart of Africa, and it can take a truck driver nine months to make the round trip journey between Uganda and South Africa. Bureaucracy and bad roads bog them down. Each border crossing can bring a three-week wait – unless drivers are willing to bribe customs agents. Bored and lonely in these sleazy border towns, the young men seek other forms of diversion. Thus they

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contract – and spread – HIV/AIDS. They carry it back home with them to their wives. The sex workers are often driven by desperation to this demoralising and now deadly occupation – prostitution is the profession of last resort as they seek income to support their siblings and children.

“I was brought up a Christian, but I do not attend church now,” explains Chilufya. “When I am near a church, all I can see are the things I have done. How can God even look at me, knowing what I have been doing? This is never what I wanted. I know I can’t keep on doing this. I can’t keep on doing it.”

World Vision has renamed this highway the Corridor of Hope and has established drop-in centres in the border towns. It is a meeting point for the drivers with education programmes of the dangers of HIV/AIDS. For the women, World Vision also provides drop-in centres, including counselling programmes, health clinics and education about HIV/AIDS. During the day the women enjoy the camaraderie and dignity generated by playing on football and volleyball teams. Yet at night they succumb to the indignity and danger of climbing into drivers’ truck cabs.

### Reflection (15 Minutes)

#### Discuss in groups of four: (10 minutes)

- What are the biggest challenges for World Vision staff and other caregivers in expressing justice mercy and humility to Chilufya and others along the AIDS highway?
- How does Micah’s definition of what God requires of us and is declared good influence you and your sense of Christian purpose and vocation?

#### Write in your journal: (5 minutes)

- What are several challenges you face in your own context as you live out justice, mercy and humility?
- How is God calling you to grow in your integration of the three?

Let us gather in groups of six to eight, each around a container of soil. Pass the container and invite each person to take a small amount of soil and place it in the palm of his or her hand.

Affirm your faith in unison by saying:

Justice. Mercy and humility meet as my hands touch this earth – the needs of the world – to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, who humbled himself to the point of death on the cross. We humble ourselves before God and before one another, that God might bring life and goodness to the world through us.

#### Pray together the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi:

*Lord make me an instrument of your peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O heavenly Father, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in*

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*giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

*As you leave...*

The harsh reality of situations like Chilufya's can be overwhelming. Yet we have the privilege of learning about, experiencing and expressing to others opportunities of transformation, of deep change. We have seen the evidence of God's power to bring about mercy, justice, humility and love where before there was little. This week, keep your eyes and ears open for evidence of the fruits of Micah's call in God's spheres of transformation.

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### ***Franciscan Benediction:***

You may like to use this Franciscan benediction at the end of each study:

May God bless you  
with discomfort  
at easy answers, half-truths,  
and superficial relationships  
so that you may live  
deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger  
at injustice, oppression,  
and exploitation of people,  
so that you may work  
for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears  
to shed for those  
who suffer pain, rejection,  
hunger and war  
so that you may reach out  
your hand to comfort them  
and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you  
with enough foolishness  
to believe that you can  
make a difference in the world,  
so that you can do  
what others claim  
cannot be done:  
To bring justice and kindness  
to all our children and the poor.  
Amen.