

Gleaning Wisdom from the Proverbs, #12—

Proverbs and Justice

--CEFC 12/9/18

I find that there are lots of ways that a person can be drawn to the Christian message.

Some are burdened with guilt,
and they discover a tremendous relief in the forgiveness found in the gospel—
Jesus died in our place to take away our sin.
We are cleansed white as snow by God's grace.

Some are drawn by a hunger for love and acceptance,
and they find in the message of Christ a gracious embrace
from a God who welcomes them into his family
as his own adopted sons and daughters.

Others are gripped by fear,
by the uncertainties of life and by the certainty of death,
and they are given assurance and peace from the One
who has endured the worst that life can offer, even to the point of death,
but who has emerged victorious as a risen and glorified Savior,
who promises to never to leave us or forsake us, come what may.

And still others are looking for meaning, purpose, and direction in life,
wondering what life is all about.
They find in the message of the gospel
a source of real contentment and satisfaction that can be found nowhere else.

I think I fell largely in the last category.
I remember as a teenager asking myself what I was here for?
What was worth pursuing?
What would make my life worth living?
And I came to see that if the Christian message was true,
and if I was indeed created by God,
and that God had revealed himself in Jesus,
then where else could I go for direction in how to live well.

The Bible gives me a vision of the "good life" that I was looking for—
it provides God's wisdom for living.
Certainly, as I grew in my understanding, I came to appreciate all these other ways
that the gospel met my deepest needs—
for forgiveness,
for love and acceptance,
for peace and assurance.
But in the beginning, it was the wisdom of God for living well that most drew me.

And the book of Proverbs that we have been studying for the last couple of months
is especially directed to that
end.

That's just how the book begins—

Prov. 1:1—"The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

2 for attaining wisdom and discipline;

 for understanding words of insight;

3 for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,

 doing what is right and just and fair;"

Lady Wisdom calls out for our attention,

beckoning us to follow her ways—

Seek wisdom and "Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—

every good path (Prov.

2:9).

Prov. 3:13 **Blessed are those who find wisdom,**

those who gain understanding,

14 **for she is more profitable than silver**

and yields better returns than gold.

15 **She is more precious than rubies;**

nothing you desire can compare with her.

16 **Long life is in her right hand;**

in her left hand are riches and honor.

17 **Her ways are pleasant ways,**

and all her paths are peace.

18 **She is a tree of life to those who embrace her;**

those who lay hold of her will be blessed.

Here is the way to the good life—

the way to real human flourishing.

Isn't this what we all want, deep inside—a good life?

And the Proverbs declares that this "good life" that wisdom brings

begins with **the fear of the Lord**—

Prov. 9:10-- "**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,**"

Prov. 14:27-- "**The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,**"

True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord

because from the fear of the Lord comes the recognition

that God knows what is good,

and we don't,

so we must listen to what he has to say.

Have you come to that conviction?

So what does this "good life" consist in?

What does this biblical wisdom tell us?

Without question, according to Proverbs,
the good life is a righteous life.

Righteousness—living rightly before God—is a dominant theme in the book.
The antithesis, the contrast, between “the righteous” and “the wicked”
occurs 117 times in its 31
chapters.

God’s wisdom is moral more than it is intellectual.

A life lived in wisdom, a righteous life,¹ pleases God;
it is the life that receives God’s blessing;
it is the life that abounds in God’s peace and love—
the things that make life most worth living.

And, significantly, this righteousness to which we are called,
also includes what we call “justice.”

Again, Prov. 1:1—“**The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:**

2 for attaining wisdom and discipline;
for understanding words of insight;
3 for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,
doing what is right and just and fair.”

And in Proverbs 2—

Seek wisdom and “**Then you will understand
what is right and just and fair—every good path** (Prov. 2:9).

Righteousness and justice—

We often think of them as belonging to very different realms of human life—
with righteousness being more about personal moral purity and religious piety
with justice referring to public social welfare and judicial fairness.

But the Bible ties righteousness and justice very closely together.

In the book of Isaiah, for example,

these two words—the Hebrew צְדָקָה and מִשְׁפָּט—
are found in parallel in the same verse 16 times.

And in the New Testament one Greek word—δικαιος--can be translated
either as “righteous” or “just,” depending on the context.

They both refer to the way things ought to be in God’s world—
they speak, especially, of right relationships among people.

They both reflect the way God’s own character
is to be reflected in the world he has made.

The psalmists speak often of this--

Psa. 33:5—“**The LORD loves righteousness and justice;**”

Psa. 36:6—“**Your righteousness [O Lord] is like the highest mountains,
your justice like the great deep.**”

¹ Cf. how “the righteous” and “the wise” have the same referent: Prov. 9:9; 10:31; 11:30; 23:24.

Psa. 97:2—"Clouds and thick darkness surround him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne."

Psa. 50:6—"the heavens proclaim his righteousness,
for he is a God of justice."

The prophets, too, declare God's righteousness and justice
and demand that any religion without these qualities
is an abomination to the Lord.

And Proverbs can sound very much like the prophets
in the prominence it gives to this theme:

I think of Prov. 21:3—"To do what is right and just
is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice".
which sounds very similar to the first chapter of
Isaiah.

The "good life" of Proverbs—the life of wisdom—
is necessarily a life that displays God's righteousness and justice.

This is the way God created the human beings to live as his image in his creation—
This is the way to attain true peace, that *shalom*—
which is more than simply an absence of conflict,
but the positive presence of harmony and wholeness
of health and prosperity,
of human flourishing in all its fullness.

This peace, this *shalom*, requires righteousness and justice—
the right ordering of human relations.

There is no real peace without justice.

So what, then, is "**justice**" in the Bible?

The notion of justice is deeply engrained in the human soul,
and it emerges very early in the development of a child.

How quickly, when they feel they have been shortchanged
in the distribution of some goodies,

do they cry out, "That's not fair! He got more than me!"

I can't tell you how many times I've heard that at our house!

It's a cry for justice.

It's about giving to each person what they are due.

Justice is about being "fair." /

The first aspect of this fairness,
and the one that most quickly comes to mind,
is what is called "**procedural justice**."

It involves treating people equally before the law—
especially without regard to ethnicity or economic worth or social status.

This idea is represented in that familiar image of Lady Justice
 holding the scales of justice while being
blindfolded.

This notion of equity before the law is deeply embedded in Biblical law—
 Lev. 24:22—"You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born.
 I am the LORD your God."

Lev. 19:15—"Do not pervert justice;
 do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great,
 but judge your neighbor fairly."²

This insistence of impartiality before the law certainly stands against
 any form of racial or ethnic discrimination or profiling.

And this equal treatment ultimately has its grounding in the divinely created order—
 Prov. 22:2—"Rich and poor have this in common:
 The LORD is the Maker of them all."

Don't we hear that verse echoed in those famous American words,
 "All men are created equal
 and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

Our common humanity as creatures created in God's image
 provides the basis for this fundamental principle.
 Our value as human beings doesn't come from our economic worth or our social status;
 our value comes from our relationship with the God who created us.
 This is the source of our common dignity as human beings,
 and our equal treatment before the law—
 and the very notion of "human rights"—flows from this truth.

This is why the Proverbs rail against the practice of bribery, in particular,
 which so clearly undermines this principle—
 Prov. 17:23—"A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret
 to pervert the course of justice."

Procedural justice demands equal treatment before the law,
 but there is more to justice than that.

This is a fallen world,
 and the reality is that the legal structures that govern our common life
 are created by those with power,
 and they tend to be structures that inevitably tilt in their favor.

Legal equality can still be blind to social inequality—
 As one writer has observed,
 "In its majestic equality, the law forbids rich and poor alike
 to sleep under bridges, beg in the streets, and steal loaves of bread."³

² Cf. also Deut. 1:16,17.

³ French author [Anatole France](#) in 1894, *The Red Lily*, [Chapter VII](#).

Laws may apply to everyone in the same way,
but they do not affect everyone in the same way.

The Bible is very sensitive to the inequalities that can exist
through the imbalances of wealth and power.

This leads us to a second aspect of justice called "**distributive justice.**"

This refers to the way that goods are distributed in a society.

The general principle of distributive justice

is that each person should receive what he is due.

But how is that determined?

There is no insistence in the Bible that there must be an equal distribution of life's goods.

Many factors may come into play that affect how much a person may receive—

including a person's own effort,

their moral choices,

and the degree to which they live wisely.

These may all affect what a person is due in the distribution of goods.

So we read in Prov. 6:10—"A little sleep, a little slumber,

a little folding of the hands to rest—

11 and poverty will come on you like a bandit

and scarcity like an armed man."

Or in Prov. 14:23—"All hard work brings a profit,

but mere talk leads only to poverty."

But the Proverbs also recognize that injustice can distort a just distribution.

Prov. 13:23—"A poor man's field may produce abundant food,

but injustice sweeps it away."

And for that reason, we find a very significant biblical theme related to justice.

We are called to treat everyone the same,

but, because of the imbalance of power in the world,

God puts himself on the side of the poor and the powerless.

To mistreat them is to mistreat God himself,

14:31--He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,

but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

And ultimately, God himself will be their advocate and defender--

17:5--He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker;

whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.

22:22,23--Do not exploit the poor because they are poor

and do not crush the needy in court,

for the Lord will take up their case

and will plunder those who plunder them.

Prov. 23:10 **Do not move an ancient boundary stone**
or encroach on the fields of the fatherless,
 11 **for their Defender is strong;**
he will take up their case against you.

In other parts of the Bible across the canon,
 this concern for the poor and the powerless is affirmed--

In the prophets
 Zechariah declares--"This is what the LORD Almighty says:
'Administer true justice;
show mercy and compassion to one another.
Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor" (Zech. 7:9-10).

In the Psalms we read --[The Lord] **upholds the cause of the oppressed**
and gives food to the hungry. . . .
The LORD watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked" (Ps. 146:7,9).

In the Law of Moses—"the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords,
the great God, mighty and awesome,
who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.
He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow,
and loves the foreigner residing among you,
giving them food and clothing" (Deut.
 10:17,18).

This is who God is—this is how he is to be known--
 Psa. 68:4,5—"Sing to God, sing praise to his name, . . .
his name is the LORD—
A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling."

Widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor—
 these are the vulnerable in society—they have no social power.
 The widow has no husband to watch over her rights,
 the orphan has no parents,
 the poor have no money,
 and the foreigner has no family and no friends.
 Because of that, God himself pledges to be their protector.
 His justice requires it.

I remember how I saw this principle at work in our home as the father of four boys.
 The older ones didn't like it,
 but when they were growing up,
 I often found myself taking the side of Cason,
 who was by five years the youngest.

I did it simply because I knew how easily they could take advantage of him.
 And I can assure you, they did take advantage of little Cason.
 At least Cameron and Matt did, especially Cameron—
 usually not Will, our oldest—in fact, he often came to Cason’s defense.
 Together, we had to balance the relational power structure of our family.

And that’s what God does—he takes the side of the powerless.

Now, we have to appreciate just how revolutionary this is to our understanding of God.
 In virtually every ancient culture of the world,
 the power of the gods was channeled through and identified with the elites of society,
 the kings, priests, and military captains, not the outcast.
 To oppose the leaders of society, then was to oppose the god.
 But the God of the Bible is different—he stands on the side of the powerless.⁴
 He identifies himself with the weak and marginalized of society.

And when we turn to the New Testament,
 what is said in the Proverbs in a symbolic sense,⁵
 comes to its full and complete expression.

God actually comes among us—
 and when he does, he doesn’t come as a prince in a magnificent palace,
 but as a baby, who is laid in a feeding trough.
 When his parents present him in the temple to be circumcised,
 they can only afford the offering of two pigeons—
 what was prescribed for those too poor to offer a lamb.
 He grew up as a carpenter’s son in a backwoods town of Nazareth in Galilee,
 far from the power center of
 Jerusalem—

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
 In his ministry, he lived and preached among the poor and the sick,
 and he himself had nowhere to lay his head (cf Lk. 9:58).

And at the end of his life,
 he rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey,
 spent his last evening in a borrowed room,
 and when he died he was laid in a borrowed tomb—
 his only possession was his robe,
 for which the Roman soldiers cast lots.

Jesus quite literally identified with the poor—
 and not only with the poor, but also with those deprived of justice.

His trial before the Jewish court was a joke.
 He was convicted on trumped up charges
 that even the Roman governor didn’t believe.
 Still, Pilate had Jesus flogged and then cruelly crucified.
 Never had there been a greater miscarriage of justice.

⁴ See Keller, *Generous Justice*, p. 6.

⁵ On this, see Keller, *Generous Justice*, p. 186.

Yes, our God identifies with the poor and oppressed.

And Jesus sends out his brothers into the world,
and in their poverty—
in their hunger and thirst, their nakedness, and their captivity—
we encounter him.

For when he comes in his glory to judge the earth,
King Jesus will say.
**"I tell you the truth,
whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine,
you did for me"** (Mt.

25:40).

Such is our God.

**"He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,
but whoever is kind to the needy honors God"** (Prov. 14:31).

Again, why should there be this preferential treatment of the poor?

Because, as one writer put it,
"Injustice is not equally distributed."⁶

That's why Israel had laws specifically designed to protect the poor—
like the law of gleaning, which prevented a landowner
from harvesting to the very edges of his field,
so that poor people could come in and forage food for themselves.

Or the law requiring the cancelation of debts every seven years (Dt. 15:1-3).

Or the law of the Jubilee, a kind of bankruptcy law,
which required that every fifty years
land ownership be returned to its original owner
who had lost it to debt (Lev.

25).

The God we worship is a God of justice
who is concerned for the poor and the powerless.

So, the good life we are called to
is one in which God calls us to give people what they are due.
We are commanded to do what is just and fair.

In Prov. 3:27,28 we read—"**Do not withhold good from those who deserve it,
when it is in your power to act.**"

[When you have held something in pledge,
and it is time to return it]

⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, cited in Keller, *Generous Justice*, p. 7.

**“Do not say to your neighbor,
‘Come back later; I’ll give it tomorrow’--
when you now have it with you.”**

And in 11:1—**“The Lord abhors dishonest scales,
but accurate weights are his delight”** (cf. 16:11; 20:10,23).

But giving people what they are due,
goes beyond simply adhering to the strictures of the law.
It means giving people what is their due
as people created in God’s image,
and who are precious in his sight.

And at times this means setting aside self-interest for the public good--
Prov. 11:26—**“People curse the man who hoards grain,
[perhaps to drive the price up, or perhaps to keep it all for himself.]
but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell.”**

But why should a person do that?
The law doesn’t require it.
Why is justice more than just legal rectitude?

And here we come to a rather hazy area in trying to distinguish justice from mercy.
These two are often put alongside one another in the Bible,
most notably in that well-known passage from the prophet Micah—
Mic. 6:8 **“He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.”**

You see, in the Bible, justice is not just a legal term, related to the court.
It is a social term, related to our interactions with people.
In the Bible, justice includes kindness and generosity—sharing with those in need—
what we might call
charity.

Prov. 28:8—**“He who increases his wealth by exorbitant interest
amasses it for another, who will be kind to the poor.”**

22:9--**A generous man will himself be blessed,
for he shares his food with the poor.**

28:27--**He who gives to the poor will lack nothing,
but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses.**

Is this really about justice?

Generosity, kindness, charity—all these seem nice, but they all have to do with mercy.
I owe someone justice, they deserve it—
but no one deserves mercy.

But, according to the Bible,

I can owe someone something, even when they don’t deserve it.

When Job, for example, speaks of what he has done to live a just and righteous life,
he includes his acts of
“charity”--

Job 31:13 “If I have denied justice to any of my servants,
whether male or female,
when they had a grievance against me,
14 what will I do when God confronts me?
What will I answer when called to account?
15 Did not he who made me in the womb make them?
Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?
16 “If I have denied the desires of the poor
or let the eyes of the widow grow weary,
17 if I have kept my bread to myself,
not sharing it with the fatherless — . . .
19 if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing,
or the needy without garments,
20 and their hearts did not bless me
for warming them with the fleece from my sheep,
21 if I have raised my hand against the fatherless,
knowing that I had influence in court,
22 then let my arm fall from the shoulder,
let it be broken off at the joint.
23 For I dreaded destruction from God,
and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things.

Job’s “**fear of the Lord**” compelled him to act with compassion and mercy
toward those who were weak.
This is what it means to live a righteous life,
a life of justice.

It’s true--no one “deserves” mercy,
but that doesn’t mean I am not obligated to show mercy.
My obligation to show mercy does not come from the person to whom it is shown
but from the God who has shown mercy to me.

We see this often in the Old Testament—
Ex. 23:9--“**Do not oppress a foreigner;**
you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners,
because you were foreigners in Egypt.”

The Lord had mercy on the Israelites when they were foreigners in Egypt,
so they had an obligation to show mercy to foreigners in their midst.

Didn’t Jesus use the same logic—
in that parable of the unmerciful servant.
Because that servant had been forgiven a great debt,
wasn’t he obligated to forgive his own servant’s debt?

The mercy he had received bound him to show mercy to others.
Justice required it.

That's why our understanding of the grace of the gospel
should lead us to be champions of justice and mercy,
especially toward those who are poor.

I like what Tim Keller says about this in his book, *Generous Justice*—

“My experience as a pastor has been that those who are middle-class in spirit
tend to be indifferent to the poor,
but people who come to grasp the gospel of grace and become spiritually poor
find their hearts gravitating toward the materially poor.

To the degree that the gospel shapes your self-image,
you will identify with those in need.

You will see their tattered clothes and think:

“All my righteousness is a filthy rag,
but in Christ we can be clothed in his robes of righteousness.”

When you come upon those who are economically poor,
you cannot say to them, “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps!”
because you certainly did not do that spiritually.

Jesus intervened for you.

And you cannot say, “I won't help you because you got yourself into this mess,”
since God came to earth,
moved into your spiritually poor neighborhood, as it were,
and helped you,
even though your spiritual problems were your own fault.

In other words, when Christians who understand the gospel see a poor person,
they realize they are looking into a
mirror.

Their hearts must go out to him or her
without an ounce of superiority or indifference” (pp. 102,103).

We have an obligation to show mercy to others,
not because they deserve it,
but because God has shown mercy to us—

Paul bases his call for the Christians of Corinth to be generous
in helping the poor of Jerusalem on this very truth--

**“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor,
so that you, through his poverty, could become rich.”**

Jesus entered into my spiritual poverty,
when I was undeserving of his grace,
when I had turned my back on him, spurning his love,
living as my own king—
and he acted in mercy toward me,
even as he satisfied God's justice in dying for my sin.

Now, as a recipient of that mercy, I am justly obligated before God
to act with mercy toward others.

How can I not?

That's what justice ultimately entails—
to "do justice" means to bring about human flourishing as God intended it;
it means restoring the right relations that make for God's shalom.

As Keller puts it,
"to 'do justice' means to go to places where the fabric of shalom has broken down,
where the weaker members of societies fall through the fabric and to repair it."⁷

Justice, then, means giving a person what he is due—
as those created in God's image,
as those for whom God cares.
So the just treatment of people can include both penalty and protection,
chastisement and care.

It is about right relations among people—
and in God's world, a right relationship necessarily includes mercy./

This is the good life set before us in the Bible—
**"He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God."**

For Prov. 16:8 **"Better a little with righteousness
than much gain with injustice."**

Prov. 28:5 **"Evil men do not understand justice,
but those who seek the LORD understand it fully."**

Where do you go to understand justice?
Is it from your favorite media outlet
or do you seek it from the Lord and his word?

So if you want to live the good life,
in the way of God's wisdom,
beware how you act,
especially how you act toward those who are poor—

Prov. 21:13—**"If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor,
he too will cry out and not be answered."**

Prov. 29:7 **"The righteous care about justice for the poor,
but the wicked have no such concern."**

⁷ Keller, *Generous Justice*, p. ??.

So do you care about justice—the justice that includes mercy for those in need.

We cannot close without a call to action—
for that's where the Proverbs take us--

Prov. 24:11—"Rescue those being led away to death;
hold back those staggering toward slaughter.

12 If you say, "But we knew nothing about this,"
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?
Does not he who guards your life know it?
Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?"

What does that mean as we think of refugees fleeing danger from the violence of war,
or from the cruelty of drug cartels
or from murderous
gangs?

What about those caught in the horror of human trafficking?
What about those considering abortion?

Prov. 31:8--"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute.
9 Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy."

This is our call.
We are to be advocates.

We are to be like Job—

in chap. 29:12-17, Job sets forth what set him apart—
He was commended by the respected men at the city gates
because of his concern for the vulnerable and the marginal,
his protection of the weak, the disabled and the defenseless.

"I rescued the poor who cried for help,
and the fatherless who had none to assist him.

The man who was dying blessed me;
I made the widow's heart sing.

15 I was eyes to the blind
and feet to the lame.

16 I was a father to the needy;
I took up the case of the stranger.

17 I broke the fangs of the wicked
and snatched the victims from their teeth."

Job was a righteous man—he was a man who acted justly.

Finally this admonition from Psa. 82:2—
"How long will you defend the unjust
and show partiality to the wicked?"

- 3 **Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless;
 maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.**
- 4 **Rescue the weak and needy;
 deliver them from the hand of the wicked.**
-

So what will you do—to pursue justice?
 a justice that necessarily includes mercy and generosity
 to the poor, the widow, the orphan and the foreigner?
Our church provides opportunities to serve in each of those areas.

We are connected to a local network of religious organizations
 that seeks to meet some of needs of the poor in our community—
 It's called ACCA—the Annandale Christian Community for Action.
Seth Gunn oversees a group from the church that helps to deliver furniture
 to those who need it—
 and especially to immigrant

families.
They are always looking for volunteers,
 and we would like to have a representative from our church
 attend the ACCA meetings.
 There's more information on the back table.

We as a church work with the ASSIST pregnancy center—
As well as seeking justice for unborn children
 in offering alternatives to abortion,
ASSIST also does great work in helping the equivalent of widows in our world—
 single
mothers.

ASSIST is always in need of helpers of various sorts—
 whether as counselors or helpers in the office.

Our church supports orphans at the Cornerstone Children's Home
 in northern Uganda—
The Fulaa board, which oversees that work,
 is in need right now of someone to help manage the finances.

And regarding ministry to foreigners,
 you need look no further than our International Friends—
 It provides a wonderful way
 to show hospitality to people from around the world.

Or some of you may be called to the political realm
 to pursue political policies that you believe would be helpful
 to promote justice and mercy toward the poor and powerless.

Our church doesn't involve itself directly in partisan politics.
I confess that I don't think either political party has all the answers
 in addressing the many areas related to social justice in our society,

and I freely admit that I am no expert on these complex matters,
and it's not my role as a pastor to advocate for specific policy measures,
whether they be entitlement programs
or programs for economic development.
We as a church speak only to the larger biblical principles
that ought to apply to our politics.

But I encourage Christian believers to be involved in the political arena—
as they seek to apply these biblical principles
wisely.

And may all of us,
in our own way,
in our own spheres of responsibility,
seek to live the good life set before us—
a life of righteousness and justice and mercy--
that life that is guided by the wisdom of God's word,
and is empowered in our lives by the gospel.

Prayer--

Seek justice—in this fallen world.
We are to treat people according to what is due—
as those who have been created in the image of God-
and as we have received mercy from God.

With the recognition that ultimately,
only God can ultimately bring forth true justice in this unjust world

Prov. 29:26 **Many seek an audience with a ruler,
but it is from the LORD that one gets justice.**

Closing Song: #127 *Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne*

Benediction:

Phil. 1:9-11 [May] your love may abound more and more
in knowledge and depth of insight,
so that you may be able to discern what is best
and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,
filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ --
to the glory and praise of God.

Living Wisely in God's World:
Dec. 9, 2018

Proverbs on Justice

The book of Proverbs presents us with wisdom for living well in God's world. It begins with the "fear of the Lord," which recognizes that "the good life" is a righteous life, and that righteousness includes acting justly. This morning we consider this theme of justice, knowing that these proverbs were given to us so that we might learn to do "what is right and just and fair" (Prov. 1:3).

- **Wisdom, Righteousness, and Justice
and the "Good Life"**

- **What is "justice" in the Bible?**

Giving people what is their due.

**Procedural Justice—
Treating People Equally**

**Distributive Justice—
Fairly Distributing Life's Goods**

- **God's Special Concern
for the Poor and the Vulnerable**

- **Justice, Mercy, and the Gospel—
Justification and Justice**

Sermon Response:

Proverbs on Justice

- What is your conception of “the good life”? Why is the “good life” to which we are called necessarily a righteous life?
 - What comes to mind when you think of injustice in the world?
 - What is “procedural justice”? How is that understood and protected in our society?
 - What is “distributive justice”? On what basis is “fairness” regarding “distributive justice” determined in our society? Where do things go wrong and become unjust?
 - Why does God put himself on the side of the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner? What should that mean for us?
 - What may “seeking justice” look like in your sphere of influence?
 - Pray for our church as we engage these issues through organizations like ACCA, ASSIST, Fulaa Lifeline, and others.
-

Scripture Reading:

Selected Proverbs on Justice

- Prov. 1:1 The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
2 for attaining wisdom and discipline;
for understanding words of insight;
3 for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,
doing what is right and just and fair;
- Prov. 12:5 The plans of the righteous are just,
but the advice of the wicked is deceitful.**
- Prov. 17:23 A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret
to pervert the course of justice.
- Prov. 18:5 It is not good to be partial to the wicked
or to deprive the innocent of justice.**
- Prov. 21:3 To do what is right and just
is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.
- Prov. 29:7 The righteous care about justice for the poor,
but the wicked have no such concern.**
- Prov. 29:26 Many seek an audience with a ruler,
but it is from the LORD that man gets justice.
- Prov. 31:8 "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute.
9 Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy."**
- Prov. 14:31 He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,
but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.
- Prov. 17:5 He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker;
whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.**
- Prov. 22:22 Do not exploit the poor because they are poor
and do not crush the needy in court,
23 for the LORD will take up their case
and will plunder those who plunder them.
- Prov. 19:17 He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,
and he will reward him for what he has done.**
- Prov. 22:2 Rich and poor have this in common:
The LORD is the Maker of them all.