

March 10/11, 2012

Let Justice Flow: What Can I Do?

Let Justice Flow

Micah 6:8

Pastor Mark Kremer

Over the past six weeks we've been in the crosshairs of God's truth, through the pen of the prophet Amos. The question is, "How will we respond to the message of Amos, to God's passion for justice and righteousness?" The rest of the service this morning will be dedicated to trying to answer that question. Therefore, it's going to be just a little bit different, not your typical service, but I think it will be very challenging and powerful if we'll just take the time to listen to what God may want to say to us. Here's one thing I know for certain: When James says, "*God does not want us to be just simply hearers of the word, but doers of the word,*" that compels us to take what we've heard and figure out what we need to do with it, and put it into action. That's our responsibility together—to move from *known* truth, to truth that is *active*. Now let's just remind ourselves a little bit from Amos, sort of the big picture of Amos. I invite you to read along some of the key Scriptures that we've put together from the book of Amos—just to remind us of the themes here and ask ourselves: "What did we hear as we went through Amos?" Read aloud together with me:

He said:

**"The LORD roars from Zion
And thunders from Jerusalem;
The pastures of the shepherds dry up,
And the top of Carmel withers."** (*NIV, Amos 1:2)

This is what the LORD says:

**"For three sins of Israel,
Even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.
They sell the righteous for silver,
And the needy for a pair of sandals.
They trample on the heads of the poor
As upon the dust of the ground
And deny justice to the oppressed.
Father and son use the same girl
And so profane my Holy Name."** (*NIV, Amos 2:6-7)

The Sovereign LORD has sworn by Himself—the LORD God Almighty declares:

**"I abhor the pride of Jacob
And detest his fortresses;
I will deliver up the city
And everything in it."** (*NIV, Amos 6:8)

**Seek good, not evil,
That you may live.
Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you,
Just as you say He is.
Hate evil, love good;**

**Maintain justice in the courts.
Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy
On the remnant of Joseph.** (*NIV, Amos 5:14-15)

**But let justice roll on like a river,
Righteousness like a never-failing stream!** (*NIV, Amos 5:24)

Here are three things that I heard from our study in Amos. First of all, that there is injustice and unrighteousness in the world. The world is not as God intended it to be. God is brokenhearted; He's offended. It's unacceptable to God that there are people who are oppressed and beaten down and, if it's unacceptable to God, it should be unacceptable to His people. Secondly, I heard that God said He would judge the oppressor; He would bring justice. He would say, "Enough is enough." He will step in and bring judgment and He will come to the defense of the poor, the oppressed, the widow and the orphan. The third thing I heard is that God has called His people to join Him in giving the world a taste of the kingdom of God. He's called us to disadvantage ourselves to advantage others, to give them a taste of King Jesus and His kingdom. We also realize that we've not just been given a ticket to heaven to escape the world, but we have been called *into* this kingdom, into the *here and now* to give people a taste of that kingdom. We are ambassadors—representatives of the King and His kingdom and everything we do matters every day. It all is a part of either creating justice or destroying justice. Now if you think these themes are simply found in the Book of Amos, they are all over the place in Scripture. You'll find Jesus talking about it in the Gospels. You'll find it throughout the Old Testament. I think one of the best summation verses really is in the prophet Micah, Chapter 6 and Verse 8. It says:

**He has shown you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
But to act justly and to love mercy
And to walk humbly with your God.** (*NIV, Micah 6:8)

That describes the righteous, the *tzadeqah*, of the Old Testament. If we are going to be the righteous, those who *act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God*, then I think it has to all start with evaluating our own views, practices and habits, and ask ourselves whether or not we actually are contributing to the injustice of the world, or whether or not we are actually making it a more just and righteous place. We need to wrestle with the question: "Do I advantage myself to the disadvantage of others?" Have I bought into the, "If it's legal, it's okay" mentality? Am I *just* in my business practices, the way I treat other people, the way I do my work? Are people getting from me a taste of Jesus and His kingdom or do they get from me more of the same that they get from the rest of the culture?

Over the weeks and months to come, we are going to invite you again and again to get into conversations *about* and *around* those very questions because we simply cannot let this moment pass without looking in the mirror at ourselves and asking whether there are things that need to change and how we conduct ourselves day in and day out.

This week I gathered a small group of business and professional people to just have that conversation and, as you listen in to the things that we talked about and things that they identified in their own life and their own work, their own industry, hopefully you can envision yourself having conversations like this. Maybe it will spark some thoughts about your own work life, your own world and daily life, and how justice might look there. Take a look.

(Video 1)

Mark: As you've heard the series on Amos, what are the thoughts that have come to your own mind about how that relates particularly to your work, to your life in general? How has it impacted you? Where have you felt like there was good application to your own life?

Brian: You know, you go through life everyday and you kind of just go through the motions. You need to take the time out and just take a look at yourself in the mirror, because I really think that's where everything starts—with yourself. Do it on an ongoing basis. So for me, I think I needed to maybe heed some of the warnings that Amos has thrown out there and say, "Wow..." You know, not like, "I know someone like that." It's more like, "Wow, maybe I'd better take a look at myself and make sure I'm heading down the exact right path."

Donn: Maybe one of the things I thought about recently has been that there're different approaches to sales and there's an opportunity to be different in that. People would expect it to be a certain way and they would expect to be taken or ripped off, or whatever that might be. As believers in the marketplace, we have opportunities to be other than that, to have a contrast that's there.

Deb: We are in an industry where people are commonly treated differently based on how they look, and what they know or they don't know. Sometimes they are taken advantage of. Sometimes we are asked to do some things that aren't legal or structure transactions to avoid sales tax or federal reporting, or whatever it is. We've lost some lucrative deals because we aren't willing to do that.

Alison: I think one thing that comes to mind as far as advantaging yourself at the disadvantage of others is just workplace gossip. I think it happens in varying degrees but it's kind of universal. It happened at every job that I've ever had. I guess it's convicting again, going through this Amos series, to say that there are a lot of conversations that I need to change.

Donn: One way that people are disadvantaged in the market place can be the opportunity to grow in their role or expand. I think particularly that managers have an opportunity to not put a lid on people. Sometimes, managers disadvantage others because they are insecure in their own role and so they put a lid on other people's abilities. Instead of helping them to develop, they position themselves and they keep others from developing.

Brian: I would say it was always our philosophy to pay as much as we possibly could in terms of wages instead of having a business mentality of, "Let's pay as little as we can and maximize profits." It was: Let's pay the most we can and get enough profit to sustain the organization for the long term. I think, as a business owner, you have a responsibility to pay the best wages you can pay, that the business will allow you to pay. You know what? The thing about that is, I think when you do that, I think your business thrives because the people are working very hard for your business.

Deb: I think as business professionals, one thing we could do is be mentors to those people. If it weren't for some people who took me under their wing, I wouldn't have been able to succeed in business the way I did—and I didn't even know that word at the time.

Alison: From a practical standpoint, one thing we can do, I mean, we go to a huge church, and we have a lot of people. We have a lot of business owners and a lot of people who are in charge of hiring. I think a lot of it might be connecting those people that are in the position to hire with the

people that are in the position to be mentored or need jobs. It's not a blanket solution but even if we can plug a few people in, kind of serve those people both from the mentor/mentee, I guess.

Donn: I think sometimes people feel like we have to do something big and grandiose as far as a dream and make a huge impact. But little by little, investment by investment in the lives of people day by day, I believe is what God will have us do, not try to do something or be something we are not, but just do what we see He has shown us.

Hopefully that will stir some conversation with you and your friends about what this looks like. Here's one thing that is clear to me. We are going to talk about opportunities to get involved in helping to right some of the wrongs in our community and to bring justice to the oppressed. But it doesn't make any sense to me to spend our spare time trying to correct injustices if while, in the rest of our time, we actually contribute to those injustices. That doesn't make any sense at all. So the importance of us evaluating our own life is to determine what needs to change—what's in alignment with righteousness and justice is critical.

Now this morning we are going to highlight two initiatives, two opportunities. There are just two. We have invited several dozen organizations that serve the poor and the oppressed in our community to the church this weekend and the following two weekends. They are great organizations and many of them have significant initiatives and things that we are very excited about, but we can only highlight a couple of things this morning. But I want you to know that it's important that we consider what God wants *us* to do to solve some of the problems in our community. Now if we are going to really help the poor and the oppressed, I think one of the critical things is that we have a holistic ministry strategy that is based on God's truth.

Lincoln Berean helped launch such a ministry fifteen years ago when Brad and Carma Bryan started *City Impact*. Shortly thereafter they moved their family into a very urban poor neighborhood of Lincoln where they were seeking to have an impact. From that earliest Bible club with a couple dozen students, *City Impact* has grown into a multi-faceted, strength-based ministry that includes reading, mentoring, leadership development, community development that's carried out by hundreds of volunteers who work alongside an outstanding staff. Literally people are being transformed from the inside out in the very poorest of Lincoln's neighborhoods.

We are going to talk about two ways we can get involved, where lots of people can be involved. But I need you to know that, in addition to these great things that are happening in terms of personal transformation through *City Impact*, literally a neighborhood is being transformed in these coming months, because of what God's doing through *City Impact*. On the screen you'll see a map of the neighborhoods where *City Impact* works. These are the neighborhood names: Clinton, Hartley, Malone, Everett, and the Near South. These are the poorest neighborhoods in the city of Lincoln. The majority of underprivileged people live in these areas and this is where *City Impact* focuses its ministry. Now *City Impact*, for fifteen years, has borrowed and rented facilities—never had a permanent home of their own and has been limited in terms of opportunities because of that. But God has changed that in the last month. *City Impact* just purchased a building right next to Peter Pan Park on 33rd and X. It's the building at the very top of the screen right there. It's right now a warehouse, but this seven-acre park basically is going to be the front yard for *City Impact*. As part of our 50th anniversary as a church—which comes on June 2nd and 3rd—we are going to, as a gift to the city of Lincoln and as a help to *City Impact*, we are going to be involved over the next year as a church in completely renovating that park as a gift. We will get a chance to be a part of that. There will be multiple opportunities to do things but this is going to be a wonderful tool for *City Impact* to

have. In addition, it's located in an area where there're a lot of old construction sites, an industrial area; the railroad used to run through there. This is what that building looks like today that we just bought—an old warehouse basically. This is what it's going to look like when it's completely renovated and added on to. Rather than abandon a construction area in the heart of the city, across the street from this building, in conjunction with City Impact, will be sixteen new homes for low and moderate income folks that will look something like this, where they'll have an opportunity to rent, to own. This neighborhood is literally going to be transformed and we, as God's people, get to be a part of that, which is very exciting. [Applause]

Now we all understand that reading is essential to academic success. But reading is essential in many ways for spiritual success. You know, if the Bible is a book that demands to be read and understood in order for seekers and believers to embrace the gospel and follow Christ, you need to be able to read it and understand it. Christians through the centuries have been involved in literacy and linguistics translation. Many cultures today have a written language because Christians understood the need for people to be able to read God's word in their own language. There's also strong evidence that social and economic success depend on one's ability to read. There are shocking correlations between your failure to read or struggling to read and the rates of incarceration. Most people who fall behind in reading or can't read, end up being in juvenile detention or adult prison, or one and then the other.

City Impact got into reading when they opened up a Bible club and realized that many of the 1st through 5th graders could not read the Bible lesson and understand it. Over the course of the next year or so, they developed an informal reading program that volunteers could do. Within one year, every single student in Bible club was reading at or above grade level. That led to a partnership with Lincoln Public Schools. *City Impact* today is at Elliot Elementary School with two hundred kids in the reading program, both during the day and after school. With a very simple but direct process of a tutor working alongside a child for just a short period of time each week, these kids are learning to read and expanding and going from grade level to grade level and improving in reading rapidly. The results are very dramatic. But there are at least five additional schools where that program is needed right now. Probably eleven schools in Lincoln, in the poorest neighborhoods, could use this help. So our dream—our vision as a church—is that by next fall we would have enough volunteers and resources put into that, that we could open at least one, if not two more schools. We already have a number of people that work at McPhee elementary school. That's one of the two that we'd love to see this reading program in because these kids, with a little bit of help from volunteers like you and I, could literally see their lives transformed for the future by learning how to read with some one-on-one help.

In addition to that reading program, *City Impact* has a mentoring program for middle school and high school students, where they get a chance to explore their interests, educational opportunities, and careers with a Christian adult. I'm here to tell you this morning there are ninety-six urban kids in Lincoln who are signed up, who want to have a mentor, who don't have one. They are waiting. Frankly, I don't think any young person ought to be on a waiting list for a mentor that would help them explore their interests, educational opportunities and careers. It's a simple way for us to be involved side by side. Not only that, there's actually a waiting list for kids to be able to go to Bible club. So when this new facility opens up a year from now, there will be opportunity to have several Bible clubs on several nights of the week, and hundreds of additional children will be able to come and learn about Jesus and experience His love through relationships. If I haven't been very convincing about what an opportunity this is, watch and listen to a couple of stories about how this is impacting people right here in Lincoln.

Video 2

Todd: Our most vulnerable children—youth who grew up in poverty—the majority of them start school already behind in reading. Each year they fall further and further behind. They get more discouraged. They dislike school and many of them, if not the majority of them, are unlikely to graduate from high school.

Journey's mother: When Journey was younger she fell behind her age group. When Journey was about eight years old she was a part of City Impact reading program.

Ashley: I think what I remembered is she... because it was a little bit difficult working on those stories we had in the binders, her even getting a little bit frustrated sometimes with the stories and not really wanting to come and read them to me.

Michaela: What I've seen in her growing is just the loving, the excitement of reading.

Ashley: It took her and I working together, encouraging each other, keep promising her that she was going to get through this and she was going to become a better reader. As soon as she started to see a result for herself, that's when I think she got really sold on reading. Do you think so?

Journey: Yeah.

Journey's mother: She loves the library. Every time I say I'm going, she wants to go too.

Journey: When I go to the library, I like having a lot of books.

Journey's mother: One time, she tried to check out thirteen books, but you can only take out ten.

Michaela: The more she was reading, the more books, the higher the pile became, the better her vocabulary was. So as she became a writer, she is one of my best writers in class.

Journey: I love to read.

Todd: One of City Impact's core values is relationship. We believe that relationships provide the most meaningful vehicle through which you can teach a child how to read.

Journey: This is really cool because I've known her since 3rd grade.

Ashley: And we not only worked on the reading skills in the classroom, but Journey was able to come to my house. We did Saturday morning book club.

Journey: She's fun and creative.

Journey's mother: Ashley comes to pick her up for lunch, or let Journey hang out at her house for a couple of hours, spend extra time with her. She is a wonderful lady.

Michaela: City Impact gives her that fuel that says, "You are awesome, Journey!" building up her confidence in herself and getting a lot of that attention that she needs and just feeling loved for who she is.

Journey's mother: I personally believe that is what City Impact stands for, the compassion and love they have for the community. It doesn't matter about the need, ethnicity or anything like that, they just love people. And that...yeah...(Smile)

(Video 3)

Amelia's mother: Amelia doesn't have her father in her life all the time and he is a meth drug user.

Amelia: My dad had overdose on drugs. I felt like it was okay for me to do bad things just because my dad did.

Amelia's mother: Jen coming into her life was just perfect. It was perfect time, perfect opportunity.

Natalie: Their interests match. Jen played volleyball in high school and still does recreationally now. And Amelia was just starting into playing volleyball in high school.

Amelia's mother: The first time Amelia met with Jen, it was just instant connection.

Jen: When we first started playing, I could just tell, like in Amelia's eyes, that she really did love volleyball. Even in the rain she would play volleyball. So it was a really fun time and Yahztee was great too.

Natalie: So many mentors have been really excited about the opportunity that they can share about their faith. They can share about how God transformed their lives. They can share why they choose to do things that they do, why they choose to be the way that they are. It's a great opportunity for the youth to see an adult living out their faith and know that they can too do that as well.

Amelia: Jennifer has helped me a lot, like just telling me like God made me just the way I am. I'm perfect just the way I am. No one should bring me down because God made you perfect in your own way.

Jen: My hopes and dreams for Amelia as she just said is that she has that confidence in who she is, that God created her exactly how He wants her, just to live that out and not to try to be anyone else. She's just beautiful inside and out.

Natalie: When a mentor makes an impact into the life of a student, that ripples out, not only into their family, into their neighborhood, but into the entire community of Lincoln.

Amelia's mother: So my faith has been growing just right along with them.

Amelia: No matter what, God is going to find a way to help you through it.

The Nebraska child welfare system is in the news almost every single day and there're a lot of things that are going on and it's hard to grasp sometimes all of even what's being talked about. But we can understand this much—that things are not the way they are supposed to be. No doubt last night, like every night, some desperate child—abused, neglected or abandoned—uttered some cry to God that somebody might hear and bring some hope, some relief into their life. The question this morning is, “Will we be the answer to that prayer?”

For many years there are a number of people here at Lincoln Berean who have been involved as foster parents, who've adopted children. Some work as social workers in the system, or work for agencies and organizations that seek to advocate for kids and work alongside kids. Some have helped at camps for abused and neglected kids. We need to express our thanks and appreciation to those people who have been passionate about this and done this for years. Our thanks to you! [Applause] But I think God is calling us to something more. A few months ago, someone came to my office and challenged me with this thought: Is it not possible that the Church, capital "C", in Nebraska, could literally provide a Christian home for every single foster child in the state of Nebraska? Somewhere between 5,000 and 6,000 children are in that system. That seems absolutely do-able with people across the state—the people of God—stepping up to help the orphans among us experiencing a safe and loving home. About the same time as that thought was being stirred and brought to me, God began to work as He's done over and over again here, speaking to people, and several people came in different times and said, "Hey, I think God wants me to help lead a new initiative." "I'm really passionate about this. What do you think we ought to do?" Somebody else came—pretty soon they formed a team. And today we are launching a new initiative out of our church—out of Lincoln Berean—called *Orphans Among Us*. And our dream and hope is that God will use us as a congregation, that we would take our rightful place as a leader of the church of Christ in the state; we're one of the largest evangelical congregations in Nebraska. We need to create a model and to lead the way for God's people stepping into this need and solving this problem, like churches have been doing in other states—in Colorado, in Oklahoma and other places. Literally the system has been transformed by churches who are engaging their people into the system to work with children, to love on children, and provide the foster care and support that's needed.

In a month, since all of these have been stirring, not a week goes by that I don't hear story after story about tragic situations where children are in multiple homes and unsafe situations. One young woman has worked through all the consequences in her life of being in twenty-two different homes throughout her childhood. Just this week, while some of our team members were meeting at a coffee shop to talk about this weekend and next weekend and some plans on launching this initiative, a grandmother overheard the conversation from a neighboring table and, with tears, came to the table and said her drug-abusing son had his three children taken away from him. They, because of their age and health, were not able to take those children into their home. Would there somehow be some way that her three grandchildren could be in a Christian family and experience the love and grace that she so desperately wants them to experience?

Our prayer is that over the coming months and years that hundreds of us would step forward to get involved in some way in the foster care system. We are praying for the immediate goal, that in the next year that we would have a hundred new foster care families, trained from Lincoln Berean, who would step in. Now, for some, foster care has a very negative connotation; you know we picture six, seven, eight kids and just sort of a mess. We picture people coming in the middle of the night and dumping off a bunch of children that we can't really take, but we have no choice. We have all of these images but most of those are far from true. And literally, if hundreds of people would step up and take one or two, those scenarios would never have to be the case.

We not only need people to be foster parents, we need people to take the training, to provide respite care for a foster family so a couple can get away for a weekend and know that the little ones are safe. We need serious grandmas and grandpas, uncles and aunts. We need people to come alongside as advocates. We need people to help and surround those who are doing this work and understand that we have a part to play in supporting and encouraging them. We need to see God

raise up people who would actually be willing to enter into the vocation of social work in some way, as a calling from God—because you know the average length of tenure for most social workers is less than two years. It's a difficult challenge.

But we believe God is calling us to be the answer to the desperate cry for help from abused and neglected and abandoned children in this state. We think God's calling us to launch this *Orphans Among Us* initiative that, in the years to come, we would literally transform the life trajectory of thousands of abused, neglected and abandoned children in our state—that literally our prison could be far less crowded, maybe even empty. The system could be completely changed if all of these children got to experience the love and grace of God in a loving home. Need more evidence? Listen to these folks who not only do foster care, but one young woman who's been adopted into a family through foster care here from our church.

(Video 4)

Amber: Scott and I always have a heart for hurting kids. A few years ago we had an opportunity to help with a camp for abused and neglected kids. We had an opportunity just get to know them a little bit and have some hands-on experience with this type of kids—and really had a heart for them. Since that time, we've always talked about doing foster care, but it never seemed like the right time.

Scott: We actually had a friend kind of recommend that we look into foster care at this season of life. He's kind of a mentor in both of our lives. So we had a friend kind of recommend that and we obviously had always wondered about the time. We always knew we would probably do foster care but we wondered about the timing. So we're getting to a place where my kids, being 6 and 7, and we're feeling like they need to be "on mission". They really need to see the Bible at work and to be a part of doing the things that God's about doing. That would be very marking for them.

Amber: I think, for me, as we were processing through foster care and thinking about our own two girls—I home school—I was just a little concerned about, would I be able to handle more kids in our home? Would I be able to pay attention to my girls like I want to, be able to give them the time and investment that they really need? But as I was thinking about that again, God put a thought into my mind: you know, if you are going to be where I'm at, am I not going to be able to give you what you need to be able to take care of the kids I really care about? I'm really behind that type of thing. So that's probably a big step for me, saying, "Okay, I think we really need to do this."

Our first two girls we got, their caseworker came with a carload of all their stuff and left it on our living room floor. To be honest with you, I got kind of emotional just witnessing that, because I had heard that these girls have been moved from place to place. You know, you hear about kids in foster care. We've heard that there are kids being turned away but, not until I actually got into foster care and we got our own kids, did I realize, literally, they don't have a place to go. They ended up coming into our home the day before Christmas Eve.

Scott: But I mean the reality of what they said to me is, "These kids are probably going to be in a shelter for Christmas if you don't take them in." You know, and I mean when you realize as we're taking these kids into our home, you have to picture this: they are first-time-away from their family on Christmas, and we are bringing them into our home. Just in the midst of it, Jesus, God is kind of speaking to me that, "You know, you are giving Me the best gift for my birthday that I could ever get because ...whatever you've done to the least of these, you've done for Me." It's kind of like this special kind of love that God has for people who have been through really, really tough stuff. I tell

both of our foster daughters, “I want to be at your wedding. I want to be—when you are twenty-five and life really gets hard—I want me to be on your speed-dial. I want to be one of the people that you call.” Just last night she said, “You know, I want you to be my kids’ godparents someday.” For me, that’s why I’m “in”. I want to believe in God taking someone from the miry clay and setting their feet on the rock. It doesn’t happen overnight and so we are trying to foster in a way that they like us and they want to be friends with us for life.

(Video 5)

Brianna: I knew when I lived with my parents that my dad was using drugs and my mom had kicked him out. My parents were not divorced and my mom had a boyfriend. It made my dad really mad so he was the one that kept calling CPS and stuff like that. I think that’s some of the reason that we got taken away, just because it wasn’t a safe environment and stuff.

I was eleven years old when we were taken away and put in foster care. When I first entered it, I was really resentful towards everyone. We were in six different houses in one year. We lost a lot of stuff and then we lost all our visits from our parents—and we didn’t get to say goodbye. Just not being able to say goodbye and stuff, that was really hard.

Showing up at Brian and Amanda’s doorstep, I was thinking, “Here we go again.” It’s the same thing—like just don’t get too adapted to the place because we are going to leave again—that kind of thing. I was really mean to them. Every time she tried to say something, I’d always try to argue with her about it, like there’s no question to ask. I just never wanted to listen. They couldn’t talk to me about my parents, but I was always wanting to talk about them because I thought that they were fine. I didn’t know why we couldn’t go back to them.

But then I realized that they were different from everyone else. They were going to love us like real parents. So that’s when I knew that we are going to have a family again. I started to respect them and call them mom and dad. I just realized that that was a good thing for me because, before that, I didn’t really have a good mom and dad. So to know what a real mom and dad was like—it feels like I’m worth something. You look around all the time and you see your friends that only have a mom, or only have a dad, or all their parents are divorced, and I’m really lucky to have a family that’s all together. We spend so much time together.

Being a part of this family is like being accepted into God’s family, because there’s someone always there that you can talk to, just like when you want to talk to God. You can pray to Him and you always have someone to love you—and that’s a great feeling to have—to feel like you are worth something from your family. God is amazing.

Wouldn’t you just like to see 5000 of those stories across the state? God’s put before us an opportunity to consider making that a reality for thousands of kids here in our state, in our community. For the last few years we have made it clear that we were not going to settle, as a leadership in this church, for people sitting in the balcony as passive observers of the work that God has called His people to be about. We believed that *everyone, everyday* needs to have a sense of mission and purpose for this decade and for all of life. We are going to do everything we can to help people understand what God is calling them to do. This morning has been a part of that journey of trying to expose you to opportunities where God may be speaking to you about places that He wants you to invest your time, your talents, your treasure—to make a difference for eternity.

There are three things that I'm going to ask you to do as we close. The *first* is: Learn all you can about these opportunities. This weekend and the next two weekends these organizations will be out here. I encourage you to go and, if you want to learn more, sign up at these organizations at their booths. They'll teach you and invite you to conversations so you can learn more. You can go to *City Impact*. I know both *City Impact* and the *Orphans Among Us* initiatives have already scheduled meetings over the coming weeks so you can learn more information; you can discover what it really takes—all the different opportunities and ways that you can be involved. I encourage you to stop and at least get more information, at least explore it, take a step to consider whether or not God wants you to do that. I'm also going to ask everybody who already is a foster parent or involved as a social worker or in some way involved in child advocacy or in the system, to stop at the *Orphans Among Us* booth and just sign up so we know, because we want to create a support network as a church, to surround all of you who are involved, to be provided for and taken care of as you go through this. So learn all you can.

The *second* thing that I'm going to ask you to do is: Pray. Listen to God; seek His face. "God, what do you want me to do?" Many of you already are *on mission*; you are already doing something. We are not asking you to do something more. I can just see the people here that are already so involved thinking, "Hey, I can do one more thing." That's not what we are talking about. We are talking about all of you who are *not* involved, who don't have a clear passion and calling. What is God saying to you? That is what I'm asking you to pray about. Do as the Spirit prompts you to do. We believe He will speak if we will listen.

The *third* thing that I'm going to ask you to do is that, when you have a sense of what it is that God's calling you to do, you: Commit to it, because none of these—the disadvantaged, the orphans, the widows, the poor, the immigrant, the prisoner—none of these folks need one more person who says they are going to be there for them and then leaves. I'm not saying there are not stopping points and starting points, because there are. But when we decide that God is calling us to do something, we need to make a commitment, because transformation will not take place unless we are there for the long haul. We are not going to measure the success of these initiatives by how many people sign sheets over the next few weeks. No, the measure of this would be how many people are involved in making a difference one year, two years, three years, five years from now. That's how we are going to measure the activity of God among us.

I pray that each of us will pray the prayer: Lord, let Your justice flow through us like a river, Your righteousness like a never-failing stream.

Father, may it be so. May You reveal Your will to each and every one of us with clarity. Give us a sense of mission and purpose into how You want us to invest our lives for the least of these who are on Your heart this very morning. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
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