

LEADER AS ADVOCATE | Leader's Guide

How leadership requires intentional justice-seeking

Note

This sketch uses the image of an advocate to help students see how building a community that is accessible and welcoming to all is essential. Part of their role as a community builder may be to stand in the gap for others. We will explore the fact that God has a heart for justice and has had it from the beginning! We will also discuss how not only is being an advocate a vital role for community builders, but that the tough work of advocacy is most effective when done IN community. More importantly, the commitment to advocacy does not conclude upon graduation; it continues into their roles within communities, cities, and organizations they join after leaving college. These sorts of discipleship meetings, like the one you are having now, help students internalize these Scriptural values and principles in ways that have a significant influence on their character and lifestyle for years to come.

Opening Prayer and Reflection

- Pray for the time together.
- Invite students to share how the past few weeks of leadership have been for them.
- If they have gone through other sketches, what aspects of a leader have been the most challenging/comforting?
- Do you feel God revealing anything to you as you lead on campus?
- Any other reflections before we begin?

Opening Thoughts to Share

This week we will be talking about leaders as Advocate. Through this discussion we hope to see how as believers we are called to seek justice and be advocates for others in order to build healthy community, but also how it is vital to seek justice with the support of community as well. Before jumping into the passage, I would love to hear from you what comes to mind when words like justice and advocacy are presented? Any hesitations? Is it for everyone to pursue or only those specifically called?

Today we will discuss how God defines justice and what we can do as leaders to partner with God in seeking justice. Like the quote shared, we were created to do good work.

Scripture Context

Today we will look at two different Scripture passages. We will start by studying Isaiah 58 together. In this passage, God is speaking directly to His people through Isaiah. He is confronting them about their sins. This chapter highlights the people's ignorance of what a true fast is all about and their ignorance of what really pleases God. The people were clueless about what God wanted from them. They were going through the motions of fasting, but their relationship with God was unchanged. This is evidenced by the way they were treating people. They expected God's favor/blessing in their own lives without submitting themselves to Him.

Read Together: Isaiah 58:1-14

Discussion Questions

1. Take some time to make observations and ask questions about this passage.
2. Why were the people confused?
 - *The people have not understood that our personal relationship with God (our prayers, piety, earnestness etc...) are connected with how we treat others around us. God isn't looking for correct "religious" actions, but for an alignment in the ways we seek God and treat others.*
3. What does God desire of His people?
 - *God desires that his people treat others with love, respect, justice and dignity. He wants us to understand the relationship between our actions on earth and our relationship with the Father in heaven.*
4. Compare/contrast between what the people are doing vs what is true fasting.
 - *The people are:*
 - *Doing as they please*
 - *Exploiting workers*
 - *Ending the day in quarrels*
 - *Getting into fist fights with each other*
 - *God desires true fasting that includes:*
 - *Loosing the chains of injustice*
 - *Untying the cords of the yoke*
 - *Setting the oppressed free*
 - *Sharing food with the hungry*
 - *Providing the poor with shelter*
 - *Clothing people*
 - *Accepting family members*
5. How is God's heart for justice shown here?
 - *God is demonstrating his care and concern for how we act as a community. Pious prayers and fasting are not effective when the needs of others are overlooked. God desires for us to be part of and build communities that meet the needs of everyone and seek for all to live as free, peaceful people who, at minimum, have our basic needs met.*

Isaiah 58 Summary

Fasting is meant to be an external symbol of an internal reality. But it is too easy to merely go through the motions of fasting without letting our hearts be changed. In this passage, God is disappointed in His people for going through the motions. They were performing the rituals without any intention of changing their selfish behaviors. Isaiah does not just call out their sin. He gives them the good news of hope. When God's people are truly humbled before God, our lives cannot help but be transformed. We will begin to love the things that God loves and the people that God loves. We will begin to care for all people truly and practically, especially the people in need around us. We will show mercy and compassion. And this will flow out of a deep gratitude for all that God has done for us. We will begin to love doing God's will over and above our own will. When Christians truly humble themselves before God, we will be transformed and filled with joy. And, as a direct result of our transformation, our communities and our world will be transformed through us. Our transformation transforms the world.

Advocacy Building Community

Now that we have discussed God's desire for us to worship Him by allowing our personal relationship with Him to overflow into service and love of those around us, let's look at another passage of scripture that gives an example of what advocacy looks like in a community. We will be looking at Acts 6 as the early church was growing rapidly. This passage includes two different groups of Jews—the Hellenistic Jews whose primary language was Greek (they would have been about 10-20% of the population in the city) and the Hebraic Jews who were native to Israel, Palestinian Jews (from Galilee or Judea), whose first language was Aramaic. This passage represents one of the first major conflicts within the early church.

Read Together: Acts 6:1-7

Discussion Questions

1. What is the issue? How is it addressed?
 - o *Widows in the community are being overlooked in the distribution of food. Their basic needs aren't being met.*
2. What do you notice in this passage about advocacy/justice?
 - o *The disciples take note of this and decide that instead of abandoning their calling, they should appoint others who can take leadership to ensure that the widows are getting the food they need.*
3. What steps are taken, what are the effects/reactions?
 - o *Note: Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas are all Greek speaking, Hellenistic Jews. The disciples decide to appoint minority leaders to meet the needs of the community/widows.*
4. How do you see God glorified in this community?
 - o *Everyone was pleased with the choice of these new leaders. God was glorified in the unity that the community experienced. God was also glorified in the raising up of new leaders to meet the unmet needs of marginalized people (the widows). Instead of taking on more responsibilities themselves, the disciples gave leadership to others who had the capacity to meet the needs that weren't being met.*

Application Questions

1. What does it look like for us to truly and practically love/care for the people that God loves?
2. How can we let God's love for us overflow into the lives of the people around us? What are some possible opportunities around your community or circle of friends to act in compassion and mercy?
3. What groups of people have been marginalized in our chapter and on campus? Within Christian community? How can we be proactive in reaching and sharing Jesus's love with these groups?