

## **WILLOW CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH**

### **INDESCRIBABLE: THE GOD WHO ...**

#### **Part 3, Hates Injustice**

**M0516**

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Friends, the other night, my daughter called—she works at a church in Grand Rapids—about one of the young people from their church who was visiting his brother on a tour in Cairo. While the young man from Shauna's church and the brother are walking through a downtown square in Cairo, they happen to walk past where a terrorist is ready to blow himself up. And, as the terrorist does, this young man from my daughter's church is blown up with him and dies in the market square.

And so, Shauna is on the phone and she's like, "Dad, we got thousands of young people in our church. How do we explain this to them? It's like the world is out of control. How does something so unfair happen and how do you explain it in the context of faith? How do we speak to our church about this this weekend?" And that led to quite a conversation.

You see the images that you have just seen and it makes you wonder. Does God see this stuff? Does He feel it as deeply as He should? Does He have a plan for turning this around? As I had mentioned moments ago, we're talking about the God who hates injustice. If you knew a seasoned musician with perfect pitch and you wanted to drive that person nutty, get around him, sing really loud some song that you know well and sing it a quarter pitch flat. Someone with perfect pitch would go nutty.

You want to frustrate a gourmet chef? Wait till he or she has prepared like Beef Wellington all day long, seared it just right, smothered it with sautéed mushrooms, has goose liver pate on it, just the works, and he cuts a real nice slice and he puts it on your plate and you say, "Thank you. And by the way, do you have any A-1 sauce or a little Ketchup that I can smother this with?" If the gourmet chef still has the knife that he cut the beef with, take off running – someone is gonna die.

If you want to stir the passions and raise the ire of an indescribably just God, I have a plan for you. Ignore the poor. Neglect widows and orphans. Devalue someone with a different color skin. Turn away from the homeless, snub the hungry, stand by while innocent people are being oppressed or victimized. It really doesn't take too much to inflame the passions of God when it comes to issues pertaining to justice.

He fires up quite quickly and predictably and His sensitivity to injustice is not a sign of some heavenly eccentricity. It's not that God is pretty easy going in most areas of His character and then has a kind of hot button when it comes to matters of injustice. God's hypersensitivity to injustice is inextricably connected to the fact that He inherently is a perfectly just being. And

when you're a perfectly just being, it's like a musician with perfect pitch, anything that's unjust or off pitch drives you crazy. It bothers you inordinately; it's maddening.

And just to set the record straight, all the rest of us human creatures, we are not perfectly just people, which is why a little injustice here and there doesn't bother us all that much. The oppression and bigotry and violence that we see on television or read in the newspaper, well, it might catch our attention, but very rarely does it cut us all the way to the core. Very rarely does it cut us so deeply that it catalyzes us into radical action of kindness or justice.

Truth be told, most of us settle in throughout the course of our lives and we expect injustice this side of heaven. We see injustice and we wonder whose job it is, who ought to be righting these wrongs that we see. We silently wonder, "Shouldn't legislators be doing more? Shouldn't law enforcement be more heads up? Shouldn't educators or social workers step it up a notch or two?" It must be someone's job to confront and resolve the injustice we see all around us. Whose job is it and how come they're not doing it? Well, whose job do you think it is, really?

For the last several weeks, I've been immersed in research and study—reading about this subject matter and having some pretty animated conversations with people who have given their adult lives to trying to right blatant wrongs that exist in our world. And it didn't take me too long to figure out that there are a lot of injustices going on in the world, but two of them are wreaking a level of havoc that's even a step above the others.

The first is economic injustice and the second is racial injustice. Now, there's environmental injustice going on, there's sanctity of life injustices going on, women's and children's injustice going on, war and the rest, but the two: economic injustice and racial injustice are having an inordinate amount of disastrous effect in our society today. And I want to talk about each of them for just a few moments this day and I give you fair warning, this is not for the faint of heart. I felt permission from God to stretch you today, and I think if you're willing to be stretched, you'll do a whole lot of growing.

But first, this economic injustice issue: Most informed scholars who have studied this for a long time are of the opinion that if we, in our generation, don't take some radical action to end the economic injustices that are existent in our culture today, future generations will look back on us like our generation looks at those who watched the Holocaust and didn't do anything about it. Future generations will look at us and say, "I can't believe with all the wealth and the affluence in the western world that you sat idly by and watched hundreds of millions of people die, and die unimaginably horrible deaths." There's a lot of truth in what these folks are saying.

Did you know that in just the last 24 hours, while we were sleeping soundly in our comfortable homes, in the last 24 hours, 30,000 children died because of hunger and easily preventable diseases, mostly due to their living in extreme poverty? They died because their drinking water didn't have purification aspects to it and they got sick from drinking water and died.

They died for lack of a 20¢ pill that's widely available in all the developed countries around the world, just not available in their situation, in their setting. A 20¢ pill. Tonight, another 30,000

children will die, and it goes on 365 days a year. What does that do to the heart of a just God? What does He do when He sees that?

Right here in the US, the wealthiest nation in the history of the world, one of every six children born in this country is born into poverty. Four million families in our country can't feed their children three square meals a day; they don't have the means. Fourteen million families are facing housing crisis; they can't find affordable places to live. Forty-five million Americans can't afford basic health care. The rich can. Most of us can. I can. But forty-five million hard working Americans can't afford even basic health care, which means that if one little thing goes wrong, they're ruined for life economically.

Often, the education systems in the places where there is extreme poverty, often the education systems in those under-resourced communities are in shambles, drop out rates would send shivers up your spine, which just means that there's a heart-wrenching cycle to this poverty issue, generational poverty, one generation to the next. And some of us kind of clench our fists and say, "Hey, how come these people in under-resourced areas don't pull themselves up by their bootstraps and work their way out of it like I had to work hard when I started out?"

Friends, you should know from the research, most people in the under-resourced areas are working very, very hard to get their way out of their situation. I read something that shocked me this past week, this new whole class in the US called the working poor. Did you know in the city of Denver, a person would have to work 144 hours a week at minimum pay and entry level job, 144 out of 168 hours in the week just to obtain affordable housing in that city? Well how does that work? That's not even counting food and clothes and insurance and school-related costs and so 144 hours out of 168 hour week? That math just doesn't work.

I calculated what someone in Hoffman Estates, or how much someone would have to work in Hoffman Estates just for affordable housing in our village area here. At an entry level job pay scale, a person would have to work 73 hours a week – almost 2 full time jobs – just to get a condo, an affordable condo in our area. And that's not counting food, transportation, clothing or other necessities of life. This is a problem.

This week I read how people who live in cycles of poverty rarely have access to capital. It sounded like a very confusing conversation to me until I just realized, wait a minute, if we had a show of hands, and I don't want to embarrass anybody here, if we had a show of hands of how many of us got our start with being able to buy a home because a parent or a grandparent loaned us a down payment, they injected a little capital in our equation so we could make a down payment on a house and start building equity, which is one way that lifts us out of poverty. If I ask for a show of hands, I bet most would go up. Mine would.

In 1974, my father gave Lynne and me \$7,000 as a loan to make a down payment on a little 2 bedroom home. We paid him back over the years. But that got us in the game where we could start building equity and buying and selling homes as our family grew. But in under-resourced areas, there's no one with seven grand showing up; there's no injection of capital available, so some people wind up renting their whole life; they could have paid for a home four times over but they never get the capital that allows them to own one. Often times, they never get an

injection of capital that would give them the wherewithal to start a business that could lift them out of poverty and God sees all this. God sees it. And it inflames His passions.

We've been focusing the last few moments on just the situation in the US. If you look beyond our borders, you just have to fasten your seat belt as you do. Most of you know there's six billion people on our planet; three billion, half of the world's population, lives on less than \$2.00 a day. Half. Of that half, 1.2 billion live on less than one dollar a day. Now let's think about that again. What does that mean to a parent who watches the little jacket of their son or daughter wear out and they're living on a buck a day. How do you replace a jacket? Or you have another child coming and you need a blanket, just a blanket to wrap an infant in. And you can't get a blanket.

And what about bread? Just the basic necessities of life. Friends, the math doesn't work. And, again, this breaks the heart of a just God. And I want to tell you why just as clearly as I can. God knows that He created a world of plenty. God knows this planet does not have a supply problem. It's not like we don't have enough land, we don't have enough tillable soil, we don't have enough water, we don't have enough resources; God created an abundant world. We do not have a supply problem. Experts estimate we have enough food production capability to feed this world 5 times over. We don't have a supply problem; we have a distribution problem that flows out of a justice issue. That's what breaks the heart of God. God knows that the wealthy few control the rules of the economic game, both in this country and around the world, and God knows that the poor often have no connections to the corridors of power to change the economic equation from their standpoint and God sees it all. And when He sees that, He doesn't just see it with a kind of cool, divine detachment. The Scripture reveals to us that the knowledge of ongoing economic injustice has always infuriated God.

One time in the Old Testament, God gave very strict orders to the wealthy in a society as to how they were to lift up the poor that lived amongst them. The first thing He said is, "All of you land owners, carve out just a tiny, little piece of your expansive amount of land, just break off a corner piece and give it, give it to someone in your area who is poor, and don't just give them that little plot of land, give them some starter seed so that they can start growing crops and feed their family with a sense of dignity." That was the first rule. Second rule, he said, "Whenever you loan the poor whatever, don't ever charge them interest." There was an anti-interest policy. God said, "Don't do that. They're already poor. Don't you start profiteering off the poor. You can loan them stuff, just no interest."

The other thing that was interesting is God would tell the rich people, "Whenever you can, cancel loans that the poor owe you. Just write them off, cancel them. I'll bless you if you do." The final thing that God said was, "For the more affluent, when you're planting your long rows of crops and its harvest time, when you come to the end of your row and you're harvesting the crops, don't harvest all the way to the end of the row." This is under the instruction of God. "Just wait till you're 6' or so from the end of the row and then stop harvesting. And when, at the end of the day, you're all done, leave the ends unharvested and go home." You want to know why? You all know, right. 'Cause then, after sundown, the poor would come and they would be able to collect the end of the row crops and they'd be able to go home and feed their families. And God said, "That's just the way I'd like it." Now all of these different sorts of rules of order so that gradually the poor can be lifted.

Well, sometimes God's people didn't even pay attention to those kinds of rules. The rich said, "Hey, you know, we're gonna live whatever way we want." This happened once, read about it in Zechariah 7:11-12, "But they," the rich refused to pay attention to the economic rules that God had just laid down, "stubbornly, they turned their backs on the poor and they stopped their ears." You like that word picture. They put their hands over their ears. They stopped their ears to the cry of the poor. Their hearts became rock hard. And God became very angry. Again, predictably angry. He always has, is today and always will be angry about economic injustice when the rich oppress the poor or when the rich aren't trying to lift the poor out of their plight.

Now, occasionally, God's people would pay attention to the rules that He laid down along these lines and then He would pour out his favor on those who showed compassion for the poor. Listen to Isaiah 58:10-11, this is a beautiful passage, "If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noon day. The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." God said, "I will open the windows of heaven and pour out blessing on people who have economic means if they're trying to use some of their means to lift people who are impoverished." He said, "I will just bless your life."

Perhaps the key justice verse in the Old Testament would be Micah 6:8, many of you know it, many of you have memorized it, "Do justly," it says. Let's read this together, "Do justly, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." I've studied this text many times and I don't think you do any violence to the text if you mix up the phrases a little bit. It could just as easily be said this way, "As you walk humbly with your God, you will learn to love kindness. As you walk with God, His kindness will take up residency in your heart and you will become increasingly kind." And over time, as you walk humbly with God, His sense of inherent justice will take up residency in your life and you will look for ways to right the wrongs in the world around you. You'll love mercy and you'll do justice. You'll do it reflexively. It'll be in you to do it. You won't feel noble and self-righteous about it, you couldn't imagine not doing it. That's what the text is kind of teaching.

I've seen this happen in our church, and I want to just take a moment and talk to you about this. In the early days of Willow, when we were just a collection of brand new Christians running around in the Willow Creek Theatre in Palatine, well, we hadn't had time to walk with God over enough years for all that kindness and justice to take root in our lives. My humble opinion is, after many of us walked with God for 10 or 15 years, His compassion and His justice started taking increasing root in our lives. And in the last, I don't know, 5 years or so, I have seen, and the elders and other leaders in the church comment on this all the time, we have seen this surge in compassion reflected in our congregation and an increasing sense of anticipation for doing justice in our world. I think it's the result of more of us walking with God humbly over a longer period of time.

I asked our financial folks, I said, "Just out of curiosity, last year, the year 2004, how much money did this church give to the alleviation of economic injustice in our community, in our nation and in our world?" I was shocked when they gave me the figures, asked them to check

them and list them out for me and I have all the supportive data for this, over 5 million dollars was collected in this congregation and routed to ministries that alleviate economic injustice. It blew my mind. That's including the \$600,000 at Christmas time we gave to the AIDS crisis in South African and the \$300,000 to the tsunami victims and the money we sent to the Dominican Republic and the money we sent to Haiti after the hurricanes went through. And so, five million dollars. That never would have happened 10 or 15 years ago. But more of us are walking with God and His compassion and His justice is rooting itself in us and we find ourselves doing this naturally now; we can't think of ourselves closing our eyes to the poor anymore.

And I commend you for this. And most of you, I think, are at a situation or at a place in your life, you just like to do more. But sometimes you don't know how in your everyday life you can even do more to end economic injustice. So, before I switch over and talk to you about racial injustice for a moment, let me give you a few practical ideas of what you can do every day in your life to address the issues of economic injustice.

Here's the first one; you probably don't think about this much. I challenge you today: Leverage your regular purchasing power. Leverage your regular purchasing power. Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. Most of us got up this morning and we had at least one cup of coffee. If we were, you know, doing the truth or dare thing, many of us had more than one cup of coffee; most of us start our day with a few cups of coffee. Did you know that for about the same price, you can drink fair trade coffee that tastes every bit as good as the coffee you're drinking now? But what it does is it pays the coffee growers in developing countries a fair wage. And thereby, these families can slowly educate their children and feed and clothe them and lift themselves out of poverty, and when they get a fair wage, instead of just middle men getting some inflated bonuses, middle men who mainly come from the United States and Europe and don't need the resources that much anyway, well, this fair trade coffee rights that kind of wrong. It turns around that kind of injustice.

I first started hearing about this a couple of years back when I learned that two Harvard guys, who are Christians, started a coffee company called Pura Vida, and it is faith based and it's Fair Trade and it's well run. My wife got hold of this information and she and a friend studied it thoroughly and actually met with our food service leaders and then they studied it, and we decided, as a church, that all the coffee we sell around service times and so, all that coffee should be Fair Trade Coffee. It should be this Pura Vida Company that we decided upon.

And so, for the last 21 months, tens of thousands of dollars, every time you go to Dr. B's or anywhere in food service and you have a cup of coffee, the tens of thousands of dollars of profit goes into the families of Latin American coffee growers who are lifting their families out of poverty. Now, how do you feel about that? I feel great about that. Everybody wins! Everybody wins! You get great coffee, about the same price, living wages for those who are growing it; everybody wins. That's just leveraging your purchasing power.

Did you know that you can go to the internet and just click on Fair Trade, you can buy tea and soap and chocolate and olive oil and all kind of products that meet the criteria of Fair Trade, which means leveraging your normal purchasing power, you can lift families out of poverty in developing countries spending the exact same money you would have if you would have just

done it sort of absent mindedly. And, friends, I challenge you to think about this. We've even made one pound of this Fair Trade Coffee available at Dr. B's now, so that you can brew Fair Trade coffee at home and thereby leverage your purchasing power to assist the poor.

Some of you know that U2 rock star, Bono, and his wife, Allie, just started a clothing line that fits this Fair Trade definition, so when you buy that particular clothing line, you create jobs in developing countries where they're desperately needed and you get stylish, high quality clothes at a fair price. And I just ask you, friends, just challenge yourself to try to leverage your purchasing power on behalf of the poor.

Second: Make sure your voice and vote are heard. As we speak, right now, there are several pieces of legislation being considered in the senate and the house pertaining to issues of economic justice. Justice that would provide debt relief to impoverished nations that will never be able to pay that debt back anyway and the crushing debt load keeps them from building schools or clinics or roads or digging wells for their impoverished people. There are bills in the senate right now that would increase our country's commitment to the AIDS crisis, which is just wiping out tens of millions of people. There is some fantastic legislation being floated right now; we have to read about it, we have to be the ones who rise up and let our voice and our vote be heard.

I was just in the UK a couple of weeks back and met with a whole group of Christian leaders who started a kind of grass roots movement to get the parliament in the UK to get on the right side of the economic injustice kind of balance scale and address some of these issues in Europe. And they have made incredible progress in putting a plan together that will alleviate poverty in the UK and in other nations in Europe over the next 15 years. But it came as a grass roots movement, mainly from churches, where people said, "We're gonna let our voice and our vote be heard for legislation pertaining to economic justice."

And, friends, when God sees that, and I'm not being political, I'm not telling you what party to align yourself with, that's between you and God, but just vote your conscious with regard to economic justice issues. There's a lot on the line. If you want to read a little more about this, let me put a website up for you, the one campaign, this is kind of happening worldwide, and a lot of information from this website will educate you in the kind of things that I'm talking about. (<http://www.one.org/>)

The third practical step you can take is you can utilize your vocational talents and your networks for the sake of the poor. A few weeks ago, a long-time Willow guy, a guy that became a Christian in our church and had quite a colorful past life that I don't need to describe to you in any vividness, but anyway, he came to our church and came to know Christ and he's a builder. And he builds subdivisions and housing complexes and so he stops into Guest Central a few weeks back and he said, "You know, I'm gonna start a new subdivision and God has spoken to me about something." I said, "Well, what's that?" And he said, "I'm gonna design some affordable housing in the middle of my next subdivision because the poor deserve a place that they can afford." I put my hands on his shoulders and I said, "Way to go! Way to go! Most guys like you would want to fill every acre, every square foot, of a subdivision with high-end product

so that you can make more money. And here you are intentionally leaving some money on the table so that you can help the poor. God's gonna bless this."

Right now, this weekend, there's another Willow family that owns a company that builds buildings and remodels. They're contractors and so they're doing an extreme makeover with one of our ministry partners in the inner city; this is a partner that provides emergency shelter for abused women and abused children. The problem is, the facility that these abused women and children come to is just not in great shape. So this Willow guy gets a heart for this thing, brings his crew down and gets some volunteer friends and they're doing this extreme makeover for this facility that houses abused women and children. How do you feel about that? Oh my goodness.

I've said this to you before and I'm not just blowing smoke about it. But I get to see churches in, what, probably 50 or 60 different countries a year. I see churches all over the world. And to date, friends, I have never seen a local church that has the concentration of intellectual capital, talent, connections, resources, I've never seen a more concentrated group of high-capacity people in a local church in my life anywhere on planet earth. And every once in awhile, I wonder why has God stacked the deck so much at Willow. And I think it's because of this thing that's growing within us as a congregation so that more of us will, as we walk humbly with God, will feel the pulse rate of God with regard to the poor and compassion will flow and we'll start saying, "Hey, wait a minute! At my work, we can leverage this and do something. I have knowledge, I have access to capital, I have this, I have that, and I could leverage it for the poor." I think that's what is going to happen in the future of our church.

I meet with medical people who are now discussing how they can staff clinics one day a week free of charge. I meet with carpenters and electricians who say, "My skills, I'll put them into play for the poor." And I talk to computer wizards who are saying, "Hey, count me in. I'll train some folks who don't have any background in computers. I'll train some folks in this." And the more we do that, friends, you watch what God is going to do and how He's going to bless your life and how He's going to bless our church.

I would encourage you to do some reading on this issue. Can I throw a couple of books up on the screen here for you? This book is newly out, it's on the bestseller list, it's written by a Christian (*FaithWorks: How to Live Your Belief and Ignite Positive Social Change*). Jim Wallis is a fantastic Christian guy; I talked with him a week ago on the phone. This is one of the best books on the alleviation of poverty that I've ever read. And the second one, this book reads like a novel and it, too, is a best seller and it's the single most compelling book on the ending of poverty I've ever read in my life (*The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*). Jeff Sachs wrote it and, oh man, please, it's like taking a grad school course. And these books aren't that expensive and you can read them.

Finally, one more practical thing you can do: Do what Lynne and I are going to do this week. As mentioned in your program, we have that gift in kind thing that's coming. And Lynne and I are going to go through every closet in our house and we're going to find summer clothing, in excellent shape, that we don't have to keep around anymore. We're going to pack it all up and bring it over to where it's going to be collected here at the church. And we're going to look for the other items listed in your program – sewing machines and computers and other things that are

desperately needed in under-resourced areas. We're going to pack all this stuff up and we're going to give it with full hearts filled with compassion and enthusiasm to people who have less. We have so much, friends, and it will be a ball for us to scour our home for high quality items that we can bless folks who have less with. Will you join us with this? If every one of us would go through our homes in the next 10 days and find these items and bring them over to the church, what a blessing that would be. And it would alleviate so much need in places where there is a lot of need. You up for that? I hope you will be.

All right. Now, just a few moments before we end our service, I want to talk to you about racial injustice. This is that other of the twin towers of injustice these days, racial injustice. Some months ago in my reading of the New Testament, I came across the portion of Scripture where Jesus was cleansing the temple. Remember this? There had been a corrupt kind of commercialism that came into the temple. And so, Jesus went in and He overturned the tables and He chased these money changers out and then He said these famous words, and I'd like to put them up on the side screen, Mark 11:17, let's read it together, "Is it not written that my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations?" What are the last, what, four words? Say them with me. For all the nations.

As I was growing up, the only explanation I was ever given for the time when Jesus cleansed the temple was that He wanted the moneychangers thrown out. Recently I went through this passage and looked very deeply at it and learned there was more than one injustice or one wrong that needed righting that day in the temple. Certainly, the corrupt moneychangers, they had to be thrown out and Jesus did that. But, Jesus noticed something else, He said, "Not only is there some economic corruption going on in the temple, but my house is no longer a house of prayer for all the nations." The Jews had squeezed out people of other races and people from other nations. The church, if you will, had become unicultural, uniethnic, and uniracial. Jesus said, "That's not the dream! I want my house to be a house of prayer," say it with me, "for all the nations." For all the nations. For all the races. For all the ethnicities. For all the nations.

Some of you know that a few years back, one of our staff members gave me a book before I went on a vacation, and I read it and it wrecked me. It was a book about racism. And I read that book and scales fell off my eyes; I saw our country, our country's history for what it really is; I saw the oppression of African Americans in way I had never seen it before. It brought light to what an author said recently, I'll quote him, "The United States of America was established as a white society founded on the genocide of one race and then built by the enslavement of yet another."

Now let's be real clear here. I love my country. I love my country. I'd rather live in the US than anywhere in the world, so I think it's the strongest, most noble country in the history of the world. But, I don't like parts of our country's past. And parts of our country's past are a problem and it's time that we all face up to this. We have to realize that this glorified version that many of us whites read when we grew up in grade school, that the British came over and were nice to the Indians and had Thanksgiving dinner with them and all went well. Friends, if you really look at what history teaches, when the British came over, they annihilated hundreds of thousands of Native Americans so that we could take their land.

We introduced smallpox intentionally in certain Indian villages to kill them all! And when there was a genocide proportionate enough to vacate enough land that we could start this country on, then we needed a labor force. So ships were built and sailed over to the Ivory Coast of Africa where entire clans of families: men, women and children, grandparents, were kidnapped, dragged down, loaded on boats and half way across the ocean about a third of the slaves that were transported from Africa to the colonies, about a third of them died en route and when they died they would just be pitched right over the side in full view of their wives and kids and so.

And when those who survived the trip landed on the other side, they were cleaned up, sprayed off, put on auction blocks and sold like cattle. That's the truth of our history. And if that had only lasted for a decade and that wrong had been righted, maybe there would be less shame. But that's not the way it happened. This went on for about 350 years, all totaled. And God watched it the whole time. God watched as white men worked black men into exhaustion on their farms and then that night the whites would rape the wives and the daughters of the guys that they had worked to death. And God watched all that. And it kindled His passions and it's kindling mine more and more these days.

And still, what I'd been learning in my studies in this kind of thing is some of us would like to say, "Well think God, you know, 20, 30 years ago, all the civil rights legislation, it's all okay now. Certainly there's no oppression or anything going on now." Well, friends, there's the result of oppression still going on now. For example, if you take a little black child and a little white child and they're born on the same day in year 2005, the black child is 2 ½ times more likely to die by its first birthday than the white child. Mostly due to the lack of prenatal care and decent hospitals or health care clinics in the places where a lot of black children are born. An infant mortality rate this year of 2 ½ times more in the black community than in the white, you got to be kidding me. This is not just. Seventy five percent of all white Americans own their own home. Seventy five percent. In the African American community, it's 48%. The median income for whites in the US is \$47,800.00. For blacks, it's \$29,600.00. That's not fair.

We have a long way to go before the fields are really level, and this is the kind of passion that should be stirred in us when we take up that Micah 6 creed that we are to walk humbly with God and love mercy and do justly. And when it comes to doing justly about these racial injustices, we are not to just love across racial lines, we have to figure out ways to level the opportunity field once and for all. And it's incumbent upon all of us to do our part in this. And I think in our church, many of you would like to do your part. When I first started talking about racial reconciliation issues about 5 years ago, there was an initial wonderment of where this was all headed and then gradually I think there's been a wide open embrace of the value that all people matter to God. Red, yellow, black, white, all people matter to God. I think you have bought into this hook, line and sinker. Some of you would like to do more in your part of the world to end racial injustice and you just don't know what to do.

I want to close by giving you just a few practical things you can do. Here's the first: Read about racial injustice. Read about it. That's what turned the light on for me. The two books I'm suggesting to you, this is the one that wrecked me, just read it at your own risk. This thing turned my life inside out: *"Divided by Faith,"* by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith. I've since come to know the authors of this book and they've done some tutoring with me that's been

very helpful. The second book is *"United by Faith,"* by Curtiss Paul Deyoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim. They've added a couple of authors. I've been with these authors as well. And this is fantastic reading. This is reading that will open the doors of your mind and hearts in ways that will change you, friends, they're not expensive books and you can all handle them.

Second: I would ask you to risk establishing friendships across racial and ethnic lines. Risk building relationships across racial and ethnic lines. Some of us resist doing this because of old-fashioned fear. We don't know if it'll work. We don't know if we're going to be accepted, we don't know how that's all going to go. We're worried it might get complicated. Friends, it's worth the risk. Put your hand out there. We have multiracial small groups in this church. Some of you ought to join one of those, maybe for 6 months or for a year, and just say, "I would like that experience. Put me in one of those groups for a year." But, risk building relationships across racial lines. My experience is that my life has been immeasurably enriched by that.

Third: Dive into diversity experiences whenever you can. Go to museums, concerts, movies or plays. Choose carefully and intentionally where you can experience some kind of experience of diversity because, again, I think you'll be enriched. I've been taking summer study breaks for probably 15 years now; 6 years ago, I joined an African American church in South Haven, Michigan. I'm the only white guy there. And I have been loved and accepted there and have built rich friendships in that little church and that has blessed my life. And, Lynne and I helped 2 African American families buy a little hand-wash car wash business that has had its ups and downs and it is in a down right now. But, we have gotten a graduate school training of how the underclass in that part of Michigan tries to survive. And it's really been a heart-expanding and eye-opening thing for me and you have to choose the places where you can get involved so that you can learn and grow so that God can do His work of stirring up justice in you as you walk with Him, love mercy and do justice.

Here's another one: Serve across racial lines whenever you can. Serve with people of diversity. Serve in situations of diversity and I'll close with this last one: Pray for the day when racial injustice dies the death it should have died centuries ago. Just pray boldly that racial injustice will die the death it should have died centuries ago. Pray for the day when, as Dr. Martin Luther said so eloquently, "Pray for the day when people will no longer be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Pray for that day. Say, "God, may it come soon." Pray for the day, when as Jesus said, "My house will be a house of prayer for," who? "for all the nations." For all the nations.

Friends, pray for Willow Creek Community Church that the day will come soon when our congregation reflects the full richness of diversity in our community. Pray for that day. And if you really want to pray a bold prayer, pray one that I started praying several years back and it's just a private discipline prayer that I pray. Here's how I say it. I say, "God, give me the courage and the love to be the first person in every social setting to reach a hand over a racial divide."

And in almost every situation I'm in these days, friends, if I'm walking into a cocktail party of some kind, a ministry meeting of some kind, a neighborhood gathering of some kind, a business situation of some kind, if I walk into a room and there's diversity, I say to myself, "God, I know

I'll probably have a half a dozen conversations in the next hour or so. I'd like the first three or four to be with people across a racial or ethnic line." And I walk right in the direction and I stick my hand out and just say, "Hey, my name is Bill, what's your name?" And we start the conversation. And I have had such blessed experiences doing that. And you can all do this. You can say, "God, may I be the first one in every social setting to reach a hand across a racial divide." And that's how bridges get built, that's how racial injustice gets diffused a little bit over time over the years. And this is something that you can do.

So, anyway, these two great injustices, economic injustice, racial injustice, break the heart of God. God speaks into these issues and then He raises up His sons and daughters and He says, "Through my power, through my strength, right these wrongs. Right these wrongs. Build these bridges. Put an end to this stuff. And I'll bless every single effort along the way."

Friends, I have something very exciting that I want to draw your attention to as we close. We have become very committed as a church about this racial injustice issue. And I've become friends over the course of the last year, last year and a half, with James Meeks, who is the pastor of the largest African American church in Chicago, Salem Baptist Church, south side of Chicago. He is a great guy. It's a fantastic church. And our congregation has been sharing resources back and forth; they're in a big building program right now.

Well, we came up with an idea a while back and we said, "What if we took maybe 25 Willow Creek people and we took 25 people from Salem and we put them together and they went on a Justice Journey and visited the great sites in the south where civil rights activities took place? Places like the Selma Bridge or Montgomery, Alabama, where Dr. King's house was fire bombed or Memphis and some of these other great places. Wouldn't it be something if we could take a whole bunch of people from Salem and a whole bunch of people from Willow and put them together on a bus and say, "Let's do a Justice Journey together"? And we got all pumped up about that and that's what we're doing.

Reverend Meeks and I are going to join for just a part of that journey and together we're going to be able to kind of experience all of this. And these are the folks from Willow and from Salem who are going on this Justice Journey together. I'm just going to say kind of a commissioning prayer for them and in future years we'd like to do this more. And if you'd ever be interested in a Justice Journey where you can actually be in some of the places where some history making stuff happened, that I think will impact you the rest of your life, if you'd ever like to do it with some fantastic people across racial and ethnic lines, I'd think it would change your heart forever. I'm going to pray for them.

I remind you that as soon as we're dismissed, I'd like to greet any of you who would like to have a conversation in Guest Central. If there are new folks among us of diversity, in particular, that would like to come in and say hi or others of you who have been touched by the message of the day, please come on into Guest Central and I'd like to greet you. Now let's pray.

Father, for the people who are standing all around me right now, for the people who stand before the congregation of Willow Creek Community Church, we thank you, God, for what you've stirred in their hearts. For them to take time off work, and in many cases,

lose pay and have to arrange childcare, for them to get on a bus together, across racial lines, and move into places in the south where so much pain and so much heartbreak occurred and yet so much progress was made and so many courageous steps by Dr. King and others.

God, we pray that the experience the folks behind me have together on that Justice Journey will change their hearts and lives forever. We pray that there will be friendships formed that will last not only throughout this life but also on into eternity. We pray that there will be bridges of understanding and true love that will break out on that bus. And, God, we pray that this group of people will become an inspiration for our congregation, for the congregation at Salem, for churches all over Chicagoland and maybe all over the country some day, that we could some day end the madness of racial injustice. And, God, make it so we pray in Jesus name. And everyone at Willow agreed and said, Amen.