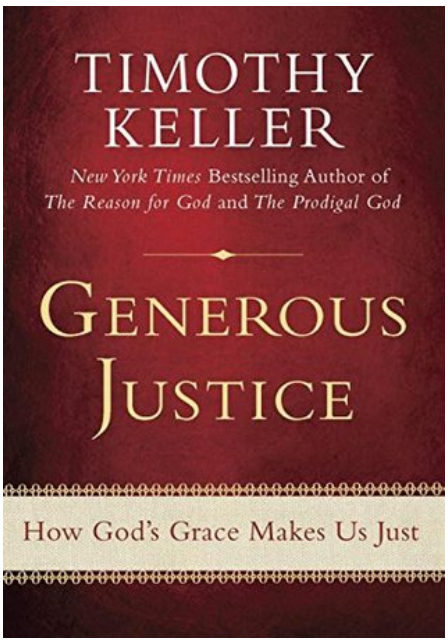

Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just

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Author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Reason for God* and nationally renowned pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church Timothy Keller with his most provocative and illuminating message yet.

It is commonly thought in secular society that the Bible is one of the greatest hindrances to doing justice. Isn't it full of regressive views? Didn't it condone slavery? Why look to the Bible for guidance on how to have a more just society? But Timothy Keller sees it another way. In *Generous Justice,* Keller explores a life of justice empowered by an experience of grace: a generous, gracious justice. Here is a book for believers who find the Bible a trustworthy guide as well as those who suspect that Christianity is a regressive influence in the world.

Keller's church, founded in the eighties with fewer than one hundred congregants, is now exponentially larger. More than five thousand people regularly attend Sunday services, and another twenty-five thousand download Keller's sermons each week. A recent profile in *New York* magazine described his typical sermon as "a mix of biblical scholarship, pop culture, and whatever might have caught his eye in The New York Review of Books or on Salon.com that week." In short, Timothy Keller speaks a language that many thousands of people yearn to comprehend. In *Generous Justice,* he offers them a new understanding of modern justice and human rights.

Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just Details

Date	:	Published November 2nd 2010 by Viking (first published January 1st 2010)
ISBN	:	9780525951902
Author	:	Timothy J. Keller
Format	:	Hardcover 256 pages
Genre	:	Christian, Religion, Theology, Christianity, Nonfiction, Christian Living, Faith, Social Movements, Social Justice

From Reader Review Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just for online ebook

Brian says

Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just by Timothy Keller (author of the best-selling The Reason for God, and senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City) is a clear, convicting, and compelling case for the assertion that "there is a direct relationship between a person's grasp and experience of God's grace, and his or her heart for justice and the poor." (p. xiii). In his Introduction, Keller says that he wrote this book for four groups of people: (1) young Christian believers who are concerned for social justice, but often fail to let social concern affect how they spend money, conduct their careers, and choose which neighborhoods to live in; (2) orthodox Christians who approach the subject of "doing justice" with suspicion; (3) younger evangelicals who embrace social justice but jettison the traditional evangelical doctrines substitutionary atonement and justification by faith alone; and (4) unbelievers who may suspect, along with Christopher Hitchens, that "religion poisons everything" and view Christianity as one of the primary forces promoting injustice and violence. With this variety of target audiences in mind, Keller unfolds his argument for grace-driven justice in eight chapters.

Chapter one asks "what is doing justice?" and answers with an accessible study of the concepts of justice and righteousness in Scripture. While never getting overly technical, Keller shows that the Hebrew word for justice has to do with both the punishment of wrongdoing and giving people their rights (p. 3). Justice is, essentially, "to treat people equitably" - to give them their due. Such justice, which over and again in Scripture is concerned with widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor ("the quartet of the vulnerable"), is rooted in the character of God and wedded to "righteousness." Since the biblical word for "righteous" refers to a life of right relationships, Keller says that "Biblical righteousness is inevitably 'social,' because it is about relationships" (p. 10). In fact, Keller argues that when these two words, justice and righteousness, are tied together in Scripture, "the English expression that best conveys the meaning is 'social justice'" (p. 14). Though this terminology is sometimes nothing more than a slogan used to recruit people to some political ideology or another, Keller says that "if you are trying to live a life in accordance with the bible, the concept and call to justice are inescapable" (p. 18).

Chapters two and three build the case for doing justice from the Old and New Testaments respectively. Keller carefully nuances his arguments from the Old Testament, showing that commands in the Old Testament reflect clear principles that are binding on Christians today, while granting that Scripture does not tell us exactly how to carry these principles out today. Especially helpful in this second chapter is how Keller deals with the causes of poverty, showing that Scripture doesn't neatly fit into the schemas of either liberal or conservative theorists. Rather, "the causes of poverty as put forth in the Bible are remarkably balanced" (p. 33) including oppression, natural disaster, and personal moral failures. However, Keller says, "having surveyed the Bible on these texts numerous times, I have concluded that the emphasis is usually on the larger structural factors" (p. 38). Chapter three focuses on the teaching of Jesus about justice and tackles some of the lesser known (and lesser obeyed) words of Jesus, such as those found in Luke 14:12-13 (pgs. 46-49) and Matthew 25:31-46 (pgs. 52-54).

Chapter four uses the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) to build the case that Christians have the responsibility to show mercy and do justice not only for those inside the church, but for anyone in need, "regardless of race, politics, class, and religion" - that is, for anyone who is your "neighbor" (see p. 67). This chapter, drawing heavily on the work of eighteenth-century theologian Jonathan Edwards, includes a very helpful series of answers to common objections that religious people often make when faced with the call of

justice and mercy.

Chapters five asks "Why should we do justice?" "Our problem in society today" Keller says, "is not that people don't know they should share with others and help the poor. Most people do know and believe this. The real problem is that, while knowing, they are insufficiently motivated to actually do it" (p. 79). So how does the Bible motivate us? First, with "joyful awe before the goodness of God's creation" and, second, with "the experience of God's grace in redemption" (p. 82). Keller's discussion of creation focuses mainly on how human dignity (and therefore human rights) is actually rooted in the Scripture's teaching that human beings are created in the image of God. In an excellent discussion of civil rights on pages 85-88, Keller illustrates the point through interaction with the writings of Aristotle, Martin Luther King, Jr., and C. S. Lewis.

But "as important as the doctrine of creation is, the most frequently cited Biblical motivation for doing justice is the grace of God in redemption" (p. 92), a point Keller makes from both the Old and New Testaments. This is really the heart of the book, out of which everything else flows. With eloquent reason, Keller drives this truth home: "If a person has grasped the meaning of Gods' grace in his heart, he will do justice" (p. 93); "People changed by grace should go, as it were, on a permanent fast. Self-indulgence and materialism should be given up and replaced by a sacrificial lifestyle of giving to those in need" (p. 95-96); "A life poured out in deeds of service to the poor is the inevitable sign of any real, true, justifying, gospel-faith. Grace makes you just. If you are not just, you've not truly been justified by faith" (p. 99).

If chapter five addresses motivation, chapter six takes on the practical question of "how should we do justice?" In this wise and practical chapter, Keller is simple, but not simplistic, discussing how "vulnerable people need multiple levels of help" including "relief, development, and social reform" (p. 113) then providing examples of and principles for doing each. This chapter delves into issues such as the needs of poor communities, racial reconciliation, and reforming unjust social structures. Drawing on Abraham Kuyper's concepts of "sphere sovereignty," he discusses both the responsibilities of Christians in the institutional church and as the organic church. And he tackles the relationship between social justice and evangelism, arguing that "they should exist in an asymmetrical, inseparable relationship" with evangelism being "the most basic and radical ministry possible to a human being . . . not because the spiritual is more important than the physical, but because the eternal is more important than the temporal" (p. 139). But Keller will not agree that justice is simply a means to the end of evangelism OR that doing justice IS evangelism. There is a distinction between the two. Deeds of justice and mercy are not identical to gospel proclamation. To say so, is "fatal confusion." Yet BOTH are necessary. Chapter seven carries the practical questions a step further, with a judicious exploration of "Doing Justice in the Public Square."

The final chapter, "Peace, Beauty, and Justice", relates the concerns of this book to "shalom" or the reweaving the fabric of human relationships into "harmonious peace." This is God's overall intention for human beings and doing justice means "to live in a way that generates a strong community where human beings can flourish" (p. 177). But how do we do that? In one of my favorite paragraphs in the book, Keller answers: "The only way to reweave and strengthen the fabric is by weaving yourself into it. Human beings are like those threads thrown together onto a table. If we keep our money, time, and power to ourselves, instead of sending them out into our neighbors' lives, then we may be literally on top of one another, but we are not interwoven socially, relationally, financially, and emotionally. Reweaving shalom means to sacrificially thread, lace, and press your time, goods, power, and resources into the lives and needs of others" (p. 177).

The length of my review shows my enthusiasm for this book, which is a significant contribution to Christian theology and ethics. Keller's clear and accessible style makes this book appropriate for any thoughtful believer, seeker, or skeptic. I wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone who is concerned with issues of justice

in society, faithfulness to the teaching of Scripture on justice, and/or the implications of the Christian gospel for living a life of justice in our world today.

Mike E. says

In this book Keller calls Christians, but especially Christ-centered, Bible-saturated evangelicals, to care for the "quartet of the vulnerable"--widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor. The biblical foundation for caring for the poor is Genesis 1:27--every human being is created in and a shareholder of the image of God. We help the poor not because they are deserving but because humans are made in a unique way like God. We help to glorify Him by helping them.

The call that Keller puts forth is biblical, provocative, uncommon, radical--and almost universally NOT lived out in the lives of American Christians. Since coming to Christ in 1987, I have never seen a family that lives out the vision of this book, including myself. Keller points the reader to Luke 14:12-14 and ends up saying this:

"To put this in a more modern context--he is saying that we should spend _far_ more of our own money and wealth on the poor than we do on our own entertainment, or on vacations, or on eating out and socializing with important peers (47-48)."

Keller argues that Christians should live in such a way that our relationships and care for the poor should eclipse our investment in relating to friends of our own socio-economic status. I can honestly say that I have never seen a family that invests more of its resources toward the lives of the poor than toward themselves and friends. If one really thinks through the implications of what Keller says then a family vacation to Hawaii or Disneyland should pale in comparison to that family's personal and financial investment to the lives of the poor. Has anyone ever seen a family live like this? I am sure Mother Theresa lived this kind of life as well as others who have been called to celibacy. But how does an American family live out Luke 12:12-14? I would have liked more specific application from Keller on this.

Another minor weakness of the book is the use of endnotes rather than footnotes. Keller masterfully and seamlessly interweaves a breadth and depth of research and works cited into this little book. It is important to cumbersomely flip to the endnotes to understand nuance, historical influences, and theological foundations. The reader is pointed to many excellent resources in his endnotes.

In short, Keller claims that those who are touched by God's grace, will not merely have a heart for the poor

but will be making regular sacrifices on a personal and financial level to love them and care for them. Unlike many who write prophetically about caring for the poor, Keller does not diminish the priority and centrality of the gospel message. Evangelism is central for Keller. He also goes out of his way to show that the believer is accountable--not only to care for the poor in his/her church--but the poor in the community without Christ as well.

Keller quotes:

If believers in God don't honor the cries and claims of the poor, we don't honor him, whatever we profess, because we hide his beauty from the eyes of the world (9).

So this is a call to create a believing community in which the well-off and middle class are sacrificially giving their resources away and deeply, personally involved in the lives of the many weak and vulnerable in their midst (201).

Anyone who has truly been touched by the grace of God will be vigorous in helping the poor (54).

If you had been born on a mountaintop in Tibet in the thirteenth century, instead of a Western country in the twentieth century, then no matter how hard you worked, you wouldn't have had much to show for it. If you have money, power, and status today, it is due to the century and place in which you were born, not to your talents and capacities and health, none of which you earned (89).

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Notable quote:

One would almost think that Luke 14:12-14 was not considered part of God's Word, nor has any part of Jesus' teaching been more neglected by His own people. I do not think it is unlawful to entertain our friends; but if these words do not teach us that it is in some respects our duty to give a preference to the poor, I am at a loss to understand them.

John Newton

The Works of John Newton

By depicting a Samaritan helping a Jew, Jesus could not have found more forceful way to say that anyone at all in need – – regardless of race, politics, class, and religion – – is your neighbor. (67)

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Study Guide

Introduction:

1. Does the Bible teach that a genuine Christian will seek justice in the world? If yes, where does the Bible teach this? If yes, what does this look like in your life?

2. What is your gut response to “doing justice” for the poor, oppressed, disadvantaged?

3. For what reasons might white church-folk have thought MLK Jr. was “a threat to society?”

4. What is the relationship between a person’s grasp and experience of God’s grace and his heart for justice and the poor? Can a person have a deep understanding and experience of grace and little concern for the poor and marginalized?

5. In what way is the typical Wheaton College student similar to the newest generation of evangelicals? (Cf. note 6, p. 192)

6. Have you known “Jeffreys” in your life? (Cf. note 9, p. 192) If so, who? When?

7. What biblical doctrine was foundational to MLK Jr. as well as to Keller’s thesis in GJ? (Cf. note 11, p. 193) How does this doctrine have relevance to your life?

Chapter 4

1. What question does Jesus answer with a question in Luke 10:25-37? Why?

2. In Mark Valeri’s introduction to Edwards’ sermon “The Duty of Charity to the Poor” he writes, "Giving to the poor is a duty, as necessary to religious practice as worship, and as important for salvation as prayer." (369) A) Do you agree? B) What is the relationship between justification by faith alone and the necessity of loving one’s neighbor?

To read this introduction and/or “The Duty of Charity to the Poor” go to:

http://edwards.yale.edu/archive

3. Do you love God with every fiber of your being every minute of the day? In light of this reality, where does a person find comfort and peace?

4. How does Keller answer the question, “What does it mean to love your neighbor?” Do you agree? Explain.

5. What is the problem with looking for poor people to help who came into poverty through no fault of their own?

6. Does Luke 10:25-37 teach that a Christian should sacrifice to love his neighbor? To what degree? What is an example of your own sacrifice in loving a neighbor?

7. Where does God want you to go from here in loving your neighbor?

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CHAPTER 8
1. Is the biblical creation account similar to other ancient accounts? In what way does the OT creation account differ (171)?

2. Define shalom.

3. What did George Bailey bring to his community, Bedford Falls? What is/are your community/communities? What do you bring to it/them?

4. For many, the concepts of beauty and justice are disparate. How would you explain the importance of “beauty” as it relates to justice?

5. What common theme runs through Jesus’ donkey, bedroom, and tomb? Why does Keller point this out?

6. Many find it implausible that God suffered and died as an executed criminal. John Stott, however, says he could never believe in God without Christ’s execution on the cross. Why? How might this help in overcoming the problem of evil as an obstacle to faith?

7. In summary, do you agree with the theology and applications set forth in the book? If not, why not? If so, now what?

Marie says

The opening to the synopsis on Goodreads is "Author... Timothy Keller with his most provocative and illuminating message yet."

Hmm.

Maybe it's just me and the church I attend... but I didn't find this message to be provocative or illuminating. Not that's it's a bad message or anything... but none of it felt "new" or illuminating to me. In fact, the book itself felt a tad repetitive.

An upside: this book would be good to hand to someone who thinks that all Christians are uber Conservatives who hate all charity. Just because someone is politically Conservative and doesn't support welfare for everyone indefinitely doesn't mean that they think charity is bad; just that it should be discerning.

Another upside: this book has all the Biblical proofs that justice is good and should be pursued, in case you ever needed to make this argument. All the Christians that I interact with on the regular are already doing lots of justice and/or charity in the world though, so I'm confused as to why this argument needed to be explored. Maybe things are different in NY, NY (where Tim Keller preaches).

The best upside: It's repeated a few times throughout the book that we (Christians) shouldn't perform justice because we pity someone in a harder situation than our own; we should perform justice because God provided justice to us when He allowed Christ to be put on the cross.

Tim Keller's writing is pretty great. The book is definitely accessible to all, even if you don't have a theological degree, which is great. It kind of read like transcripts of sermons. I would definitely consider picking up another Tim Keller book in the future.

Jordan Shirkman says

How does Tim Keller write the most well researched, enjoyable, biblical, challenging book on every topic he addresses?

I appreciate his examples and his paradigms. Doing justice means becoming disadvantaged for the sake of those who are disadvantaged. Tons of practical steps, questions to ask, and scriptural basis for everything he shares. I feel convicted and empowered to be a better contributor of doing justice. (The stuff about personal salvation not being the final solution for systemic injustice was particularly compelling while not undermining biblical orthodoxy.)

Keller casts a beautiful, compelling vision of what it looks like as individuals and the Church to do justice.

Alan Alexandrino says

Destaque para a interpretação da parábola do Bom Samaritano, no capítulo 4.

Keren Threlfall says

Keller draws from a broad overview of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, teachings of church history (most frequently referring to Jonathan Edwards' teachings), and specific teachings of Jesus as he lays out the beautiful picture of the righteousness/justice of God, showing God's heart and identification (particularly through Christ's incarnation) with the vulnerable and helpless of society. Throughout the book, he also draws out the beauty of the Gospel, and the amazing grace that God has shown us through His love for us.

A particularly helpful aspect of the book (at least from the background I am coming from, where specific objections were actually taught as reason to avoid helping the poor) is that he addresses several common objections people may have to assisting those in need. Some of them are: 1)Though they are need, they are not in extremity, 2)Those assisting will not have enough for themselves, 3) the poor are poor by their own fault, 4)they will act irresponsibly with what they are given. There are others, as well, and Keller walks through each one, deconstructing the objections with Scriptural examples and directives.

In my reading of the book, Chapter Eight seemed somewhat disconnected from the rest of the book. Further into the chapter, it began to make more sense. I am not sure if this was just me and my foggy state of mind or if others may feel the same. However, it did not affect my appreciation for this work. This is a book that now has a good deal of highlighting and notes, and one that I will have on a list to read again and refer to often. Highly, highly recommend.

In the introduction to Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just, Tim Keller notes that there are four types of people who he hopes will read his book:
1. People who have a concern for social justice and have been involved in the volunteerism movement, but who do not let their social concern affect their personal lives.

"[This concern] does not influence how they spend money on themselves, how they conduct their careers, the way they choose and live in neighbhorhoods, or whom they seek as friends. Also, many lose enthusiasm for volunteering over time.
From their youth culture they have imbibed not only an emotional resonance for social justice but also a consumerism that undermines self-denial and delayed gratification. Popular youth culture in Western countries cannot bring about the broad change of life in us that is required if we are to make a difference for the poor and marginalized. While many young adults have a Christian faith, and also desire to help people in need, these two things are not actually connected to each other in their lives. They have not thought out the implications of Jesus's gospel for doing justice in all aspects of life. That connection I will attempt to make in this book. (xi)"

2. The person who approaches the subject of "doing justice" with suspicion.

"In the twentieth century the American church divided between the liberal mainline that stressed social justice and the fundamentalist churches that emphasized personal salvation. One of the founders of the Social Gospel movement was Walter Rauschenbusch, a German Baptist minister whose first pastorate was on the edge of New York City's Hell's Kitchen in the 1880s. His firsthand acquaintance with the terrible poverty of his neighborhood led him to question traditional evangelism, which took pains to save people's souls but did nothing about the social systems locking them into poverty. Rauschenbusch began to minister to "both soul and body," but in tandem with this shift in method came a shift in theology. He rejected the traditional doctrines of Scripture and atonement. He taught that Jesus did not need to satisfy the justice of God, and therefore he died only to be an example of unselfishness.

In the mind of many orthodox Christians, therefore, "doing justice" is inextricably linked with the loss of sound doctrine and spiritual dynamism. However, Jonathan Edwards, the eighteenth-century author of the sermons "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," was a staunch Calvinist and hardly anyone's idea of a "liberal." Yet in his discourse on "The Duty of Charity to the Poor," he concluded, "Where have we any command in the Bible laid down in stronger terms, and in a more peremptory urgent manner, than the command of giving to the poor?" (xi-xii)"

3. The younger evangelicals who have "expanded their missions" to include social justice along with evangelism, but who may have dropped attention to important theology.
"Many of them have not only turned away from older forms of ministry, but also from traditional evangelical doctrines of Jesus's substitutionary atonement and of justification by faith alone, which are seem as too "individualistic." These authors usually argue that changes in theological emphasis–or perhaps outright changes in theological doctrine–are necessary if the church is going to be more engaged in the pursuit of social justice. The scope of the present volume prevents us from looking at these debates about atonement and justification. However, one of its main purposes is to show that such reengineering of doctrine is not

only mistaken in itself, but also unnecessary. The most traditional formulation of evangelical doctrine, rightly understood, should lead its proponents to a life of doing justice in the world. (xiii-xiv)"

4. Those who charge that religion “poisons everything” and see Christianity in opposition to social justice.
"Recently there has been a rise in books and blogs charging that religion, to quote Christiopher Hitchens, “poisons everything.”
To such people the idea that belief in the Biblical God necessarily entails commitment to justice is absurd. But as we will see, the Bible is a book devoted to justice in the world from first to last. And the Bible gives us not just a naked call to care about justice, but gives us everything we need–motivation, guidance, inner joy, and power–to live a just life. (xiv)"
Keller connects these four seemingly different groups as he concludes this portion of his introduction (emphasis mine):

"I have identified four groups of readers who seem at first glance to be very different, but they are not. They all fail at some level to see that the Biblical gospel of Jesus necessarily and powerfully leads to a passion for justice in the world. A concern for justice in all aspects of life is neither an artificial add-on nor a contradiction to the message of the Bible. (xiv)"

Rachel says

Loved this book. 100% recommend for any follower of Jesus who already has a heart for justice, or even just wants to see more of God’s heart for justice. Tim Keller does a great job of unpacking not just what the Bible says about justice, but how that applies to us in the current day. He includes real world examples of people who are obediently following the Lord by seeking justice in different ways. He also does a really good job of not taking one “political” side in this book and explaining the Biblical values of justice that are found in many different parts of today’s world. Suuuuper good read! Would also recommend for anyone who is not a currently a follower of Christ but who has been curious about what the Bible/Christianity ACTUALLY say about social justice, not just what we see has been twisted by people for their agendas

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Emilee says

This book is amazing. So powerful and eye-opening to the purpose of the church and what we are to do about the social/poverty issues surrounding us in a Biblical manner.

Tom Bazan says

Generous Justice, as the title would imply, is about justice. Keller argues that Christians must be just--it is ingrained in the grace that God gives; it is the response to the person of Christ. He does not argue that justice and a passion for helping those who need it is solely a Christian endeavor, but he does argue that all of that passion is from God (through grace common to everyone). Further, he says that if we are going to follow God for who he is--not as some manifestation or some image that we create--we must do justice out of merciful love. (3)

The question, then, is what constitutes justice. He uses two Hebrew words to point to different aspects of

justice; both can be translated justice, but one is also translated righteousness. Through them, he points to the ideas of primary justice and rectifying justice. Rectifying justice is the more traditional idea of punishing wrongdoers and putting things back as best we can. Primary justice, on the other hand, is behavior that, if it were prevalent in the world, would render rectifying justice unnecessary. (10-11) In other words, making things right in the first place. Thus, he argues, justice must include charity; it is not just a negative response, but a positive action to improve our community or society.

But if we were really going to get at the cause of injustice and all of its effects, it would be important to know what the cause was, right? Well, Keller wades into that, but not too deeply. He says that your opinions on the causes of injustice, poverty, etc. will be based on your perspective. And, he points out, scripture can support many different perspectives. Poverty can be caused by (a) oppression; (b) calamity; and (c) personal moral failures. (38) But he goes back to the source of the problem, a social disconnect with God. And that does not mean American society, but humanity.

Our response, then, is clear:

> [O]ur problem in society today is not that people don't know they should share with others and help the poor. Most people do know and believe this. The real problem is that, while knowing it, they are insufficiently motivated to actually do it. (79)

The answer is that we should be motivated to do it out of (a) joyful awe before the goodness of God's creation and (b) the experience of God's grace in redemption. In other words, we do it out of a love for God, rather than as a requirement that we must or should obey. When we keep everything in perspective--and see God as closely as we can to who he truly is--then we can't help but be merciful, gracious, loving, etc. In other words, just.

The final question, then, is how we do this. He has three layers of help: relief, redevelopment, and social reform. In this, we see both rectifying (immediate relief) and primary (redevelopment and social reform) justice. He goes into some detail about aspects of each of these, and has some examples of how others have pursued this; but he notes that there are no straightforward answers. Different people are called to different places; we have different means and abilities, and will therefore have different missions. The key, he says, is to keep the mission of the church as a church: to preach the gospel. But the people of the church have no choice but to pursue justice in response to God, but not as a means of forcing the gospel on someone.

His position on the role of the church seems to waffle at times. But I find myself not disagreeing with him. He notes that social justice is not the mission of the church; rather, the mission of the church is evangelism and bringing the message that God is reconciling the world to himself through God the Son. But, Christians cannot ignore the plight of those in need of justice. So, while it is not the mission of the church, it is at least part of the mission of Christians (and will therefore spill over into activities of the church).

And how do Christians interact with a world that has common grace but no willingness to hear the morality of Christians? He makes the point that it is impossible to talk about social justice without talking about morals. Regardless of how secular an idea becomes, it all has to revolve around the value of a human life, which comes from some moral framework. It is all about what religious or moral framework we use. So, while having discussions about justice and not talking about morality and religion and partnering with groups that have the same surface goals as we have might get things accomplished, we will never get at the root of the problem. Instead, he recommends a strategy of humble cooperation and respectful provocation.

It's a good primer on biblical social justice. The reader has to engage to follow what he is saying, but it doesn't feel like it has to go over everyone's heads. In other words, it can be useful. And, if nothing else, it is a good reminder--like a prod--that we can't be inactive; we have to live out the grace that we have been given.

Tina says

I found this short book about caring for the poor and fighting for justice profound. Being interested in social justice, I thought the book was sort of preaching to the choir at first, but then Keller, a minister in NYC, began to make me a little uneasy with my own comfortable views of social justice. For instance, he questions whether most Americans are "middle class in spirit" rather than "poor in spirit." Do I somehow feel that I have earned my place in society? Do I think my own hard work has gotten me to where I am? If so, then I'm more middle class than poor. Yikes!

I think Keller does a good job staying politically neutral, explaining the views of both the right and the left, and then explaining how real life is more complicated than either view. Keller points out in chapter two that while the Bible itself gives us reasons for poverty, "Ultimately... the prophets blame the rich when extremes of wealth and poverty in society appear." He has great insights into the stories of the rich young ruler and the good Samaritan. He even cites a sermon from the early American minister, Jonathan Edwards, and makes it relevant. He does the same with an early 19th century Scottish sermon. Towards the end of the book, Keller gets more philosophical about world views and human nature and how that affects our views of justice.

I underlined many things, but I'll just include one here. "Like Isaiah, Jesus taught that a lack of concern for the poor is not a minor lapse, but reveals that something is seriously wrong with one's spiritual compass, the heart" (p.51)

Much to ponder and then act upon.

Kurt says

A few months ago, I was invited to preach at my church, and I decided to talk about social justice because I was a Christian who worked as a public defender. I tried awkwardly to highlight the problems with the "we should help poor people with material goods but never talk about Jesus" extreme and the "poor people are kind of scary - we should pray for them to meet Jesus, maybe preach from a safe distance, but not get physically involved" extreme, and I hoped to describe a view of social justice that is more faithful to the Bible, in which Christians both meet the physical needs of the poor as well as being bold in speaking the truth about who God is. I received Tim Keller's book recently and was overwhelmed with the sense that it was closely related to my sermon, but a million times better. Keller patiently walks the reader through the dangers of non-Biblical extreme views that Christians hold, and he describes the complexities of justice issues in both the Old and New Testaments. He gives examples from his own life and the lives of others (especially a humble and faithful Christian who moved to the Sandtown neighborhood of Baltimore), and he fairly represents the views of people who disagree with him, using plenty of endnotes to reference works by secular philosophers. This book isn't perfect - I found the penultimate chapter to be a little less specific and practical than I wanted - but it's awfully close. This book is a beautiful encouragement to Christians to

respond to the grace given to them by pursuing justice for their neighbors, and I think every Christian should read it.

Chuck says

Among the most helpful books I've read. A great balance between the priority ministry of the church to introduce Christ and the role of believers in the search for social justice. Philosophical and practical, in addition to being strongly Biblical. Lots of helpful direction, textual reflection, and personal illustration.

A must read for those whose eyes and heart are ready to see a broken world and do something about it.

Aharon says

Challenging and convicting. How we are to love our neighbor (the city, the lost and the poor) and die to self.

Ryan says

Keller's book on how the Bible explains justice and how we should approach justice-related issues in our Christian life.

***"In Western society these sets of concerns have often been split off from one another. In fact, each of America's two main political parties has built its platform on one of these sets of ethical prescriptions to the near exclusion of the other. Conservatism stresses the importance of personal morality, especially the importance of traditional sexual mores and hard work, and feels that liberal charges of racism and social injustice are overblown. On the other hand, liberalism stresses social justice, and considers conservative emphases on moral virtue to be prudish and psychologically harmful. Each side, of course, thinks the other side is smug and self-righteous.
It is not only the political parties that fail to reflect this "whole cloth" Biblical agenda. The churches of America are often more controlled by the surrounding political culture than by the spirit of Jesus and the prophets. Conservative churches tend to concentrate on one set of sins, while liberal ones concentrate on another set. Jesus, like the Old Testament prophets, does not see two categories of morality. In Amos 2:37, we read, "they trample the heads of the poor; father and son go in to the same girl." The prophet condemns social injustice and sexual licentiousness in virtually the same breath (cf. Isaiah 5:8ff). Such denunciations cut across all current conventional political agendas. The Biblical perspectives sees sexual immorality and material selfishness as both flowing from self-centeredness rather than God-centeredness." p.54-55.

*** "Many people who are evidently genuine Christians do not demonstrate much concern for the poor. How do we account for that? I would like to believe that a heart for the poor "sleeps" down in a Christian's soul until it is awakened. I think the reason that this sensibility has not been more aroused in the Christian world is due to the failure of my own class - pastors and Christian leaders. We tend to try to develop a social conscience in Christians the same way the world does - through guilt. We tell them that they have so much and don't they see that they need to share with those who have so little. That doesn't work, because we have built-in defense mechanisms against such appeals. Almost no one really feels all that wealthy. Even the well-off don't feel rich compared to the others with whom they live and work. I believe, however, when justice for

the poor is connected not to guilt but to grace and to the gospel, this “pushes the button” down deep in believers’ souls, and they begin to wake up. Here is an example of the kind of argument that accomplishes this. It comes from a sermon by a young Scottish minister early in the nineteenth century, preaching on the text “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35): Now, dear Christians, some of you pray night and day to be branches of the true Vine; you pray to be made all over in the image of Christ. If so, you must be like him in giving … “Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor”… Objection 1. “My money is my own.” Answer: Christ might have said, “My blood is my own, my life is my own” … then where should be have been? Objection 2. “the poor are undeserving.” Answer: Christ might have said, “they are wicked rebels … shall I lay down my life for these? I will give to the good angels.” But no, he left the ninety-nine, and came after the lost. He gave his blood for the undeserving. Objection 3. “the poor may abuse it.” Answer: Christ might have said the same; yea, with far greater truth. Christ knew that thousands would trample his blood under their feet; that most would despise it; that many would make it an excuse for sinning more; yet he gave his own blood. Oh my dear Christians! If you would be like Christ, give much, give often, given freely, to the vile and poor, the thankless and the undeserving. Christ is glorious and happy and so will you be. It is not your money I want, but your happiness. Remember his own word, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” P.107-108.

On p119 Keller references a Mark Gornik who writes about how important it is for the leaders and people making the change in a community to be from the community. If they are not the primary agents of action it is unlikely for any positive changes to remain in effect.

*** One of the problems Keller cautions against is issue of churches trying to do to much by themselves. He cites Kuyper when he mentions that community development organizations can be used to serve the community so that pastors and leaders in the church can concentrate on building up the church through evangelism. If churches take on too much themselves, it can lead to the compromise of the true purpose of the church - preaching the gospel.

Jeff says

In the introduction to this book, Keller identifies the his audience: young people interested in social concern but live lives separated from their Ã¢â‚¬Å“volunteerÃ¢â‚¬Â• interest, those who see the churchÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s involvement I social justice as being in conflict with the gospel message, those involved in social justice and see it as separated from the churchÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s message of salvation, and those critical of Christianity in general and see it as a poison. In a good Reformed theological perspective, Keller links our Christian call to justice with salvation. God doesnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t just want to save us for heaven; God expects that weÃ¢â‚¬â„¢ll be making a difference in lives here on earth. The gospel is not just to be proclaimed, Keller argues, Ã¢â‚¬Å“but embodied in the communityÃ¢â‚¬Â• (106).

Keller strives to walk a balance between many issues that divide those who call themselves conservative and those who call themselves liberal in America today. For him, helping the poor doesnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t just include deeds of charity, but also involves the removal of structural barriers that keep people poor. This necessitates political involvement. He notes that in our society, where you are born and which schools are available often determines oneÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s destiny in life and whether or not a person will remain in poverty. Instead of falling back on that quote from Jesus that is so overused itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s become a clichÃƒÂ© (the poor will always be with you), he notes that God doesnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t want people to suffer and to be poor but to enjoy the fruits of the earth, and because it is GodÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s intention, it should also be oursÃ¢â‚¬Â¦ Using the Reformed Theological concept of Common Grace, he makes the case for Christians working with non-

Christians in areas of common concern to strive for justice in the world.

I found this book refreshing for a personal reason. Keller is a pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America. My general view of those in the Presbyterian Church in America (a conservative denomination) has been colored by my experiences in the South. I always felt that many who went into the PCA had racist agendas and were strong supporters of a doctrine known as the Ã¢â‚¬Å“Spirituality of the Church.Ã¢â‚¬Â• This doctrine, developed in the 19th Century, strove to keep the church from involving itself in political issues (slavery in the 19th Century and Civil Rights in the 20th). From my reading of his book, I canÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t see Keller espousing such a doctrine. He calls for Christians to get involved, and not just on social issues, but on issues that affect the vulnerable in society.

Keller doesnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t give us pat answers for how a Christian or a church should be helping the poor. Instead, he calls for us to wrestle the need to be involved. For congregations, he presents five questions to be considered: 1. How much should we help? 2. Whom should we help? 3. Under what conditions does your help proceed or end? 4. In what way to do we help? 5. From where should we help? (136-8)

This book should be read by Christians. It would make a good study for a small group.

A few quotes:

Ã¢â‚¬Å“In the Scripture, gifts to the poor are called Ã¢â‚¬Ëœacts of righteousness.Ã¢â‚¬â„¢ Not giving generously then, is not stinginess, but unrighteousness, a violation of GodÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s law.Ã¢â‚¬Â• (15)

Ã¢â‚¬Å“At first glance, no two things can seem more opposed than grace and justice.
Grace is giving benefits that are not deserved, while justice is giving people exactly what they deserve. In Christ we receive grace, unmerited favor. Nevertheless, in the mind of the Old Testament prophets as well as the teaching of Jesus, an encounter of grace inevitably leads to a life of justice.Ã¢â‚¬Â• (49)

Ã¢â‚¬Å“If you have money, power, and status today, it is due to the century and place in which you were born, to your talents and capacities and health, none of which you earned. In short, all your resources are in the end the gift of God.Ã¢â‚¬Â• (89)

Ã¢â‚¬Å“But in the New Testament this is changed. Christians now do not constitute a theocratic kingdom-state, but exist as an international community of local assemblies living in every nation and culture, under many different governments to whom they give great respect but never absolute allegiance.Ã¢â‚¬Â• (21)

Jewish Mishnah: Ã¢â‚¬Å“Why did God create only one human being? So no one can say to a fellow human being: My father was better than yours.Ã¢â‚¬Â• (121)

Ã¢â‚¬Å“At Pentecost the first gospel preaching was in every language, showing that no one culture is the Ã¢â‚¬Ëœright Ã¢â‚¬â„¢ culture, and that in the Spirit we can have a unity that transcends all national, linguistic, and cultural barriers.Ã¢â‚¬Â• (122)