

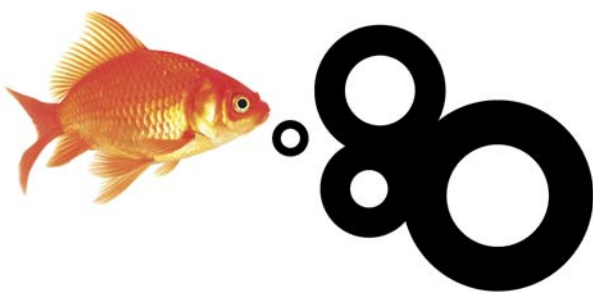
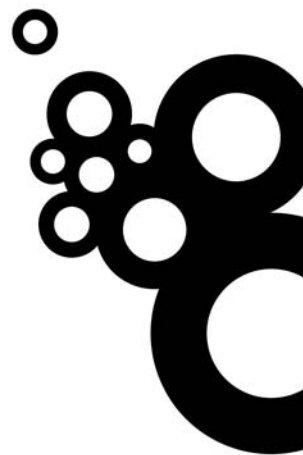
Biblical Foundations for Advocacy

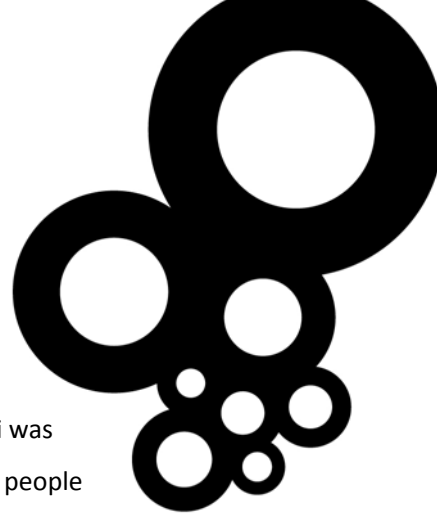
The call to engage in our communities through social action and justice is a directive found throughout the word of God. It is embedded in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the OT law and words of the prophets. Consider the laws outlined in Leviticus 19 – laws about protecting the weakest in society and restraining the powerbrokers of the day against greed, hunger for more power and pretension. Imagine if God’s people lived by these laws today!

“What would the world look like if communities were proactive in remembering the poor in daily life (Lev 19:9-19; Deut 4: 19-22), wages for workers were paid fairly (Lev 19:13; Deut 24:14-15), justice for each person was upheld (Lev 19:15; Deut 16:18-20), care and responsibility was taken in the interest of others (Lev 19:16-18; Deut 19: 15-20, 22:8), all people were treated equally (Lev 19:33-34; Deut 24:17-22), and no-one was cheated (Lev 19:35-36; Deut 25:13-16)?”ⁱ

We see in the bible that God has made an unbreakable link between faith in Him and the outworking of that faith in seeing that justice is demonstrated to the poor and the oppressed. God is the one who defines justice, and we see that He defines it by His immeasurable grace – a grace offered to and needed by all. Justice is defined in the character of God as a God who has a particular concern for the weak, the marginalized, the poor and the oppressed.

In his book ‘What if you got involvedⁱⁱ’, Graham Gordon challenges followers of Jesus to be “calling upon and influencing leaders and decision makers of societies to maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed and rescue the weak and needy”. This is, in essence, Christian advocacy and it is something which we as followers of Jesus, are called to be part of. Advocacy today includes identifying with those on the margins of society, analysing socio-political trends, upholding human rights and criticising unjust policies and abuses of power. It combines prophetic speech with action. For Christians it necessarily combines faith and action. It involves both speaking against injustice and dealing with political authority to seek policies which protect all people.



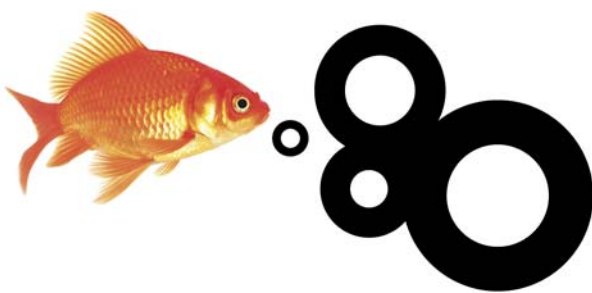


The example of Esther

In the story of Esther we see 2 examples of advocacy. Both Mordecai and Esther act as advocates. Mordecai acts as an advocate when he publicly mourns the edict that meant the annihilation of the Jewish people, his people. Mordecai was not simply responding to his own death sentence, but to the plight of the whole people group. Esther was afraid to speak out in defence of her people until Mordecai reminded her, “Who knows but that you have come to royal position **for such a time as this?**”(Esther 4:14) With this reminder, Esther went to the King and pleaded on behalf of the people. This is **our time** to speak out to save millions of people and to do it in the name of our just and loving God.

Consider the following Bible passages and their teaching on justice.

Job 29: 7-17	We, like Job, are to be clothed in justice. We are to take up the case of the refugees and ‘strangers’.
Isaiah 1: 16b - 17	Our action should be twofold: We are to stop doing wrong and learn to do right. The orphans and widows were the most vulnerable members of the Israelite society. Similarly we are to defend our most vulnerable social members also.
Isaiah 58: 5-10	Providing for those in need and breaking the chains of oppression are acts of worship.
Amos 5 11-15	We are to <u>maintain</u> justice. This requires active involvement in the systems which cause injustice.
Micah 6: 8	It’s important to remember that when Micah spoke out against the injustice in his nation, he was talking to God’s people, not those who knew nothing of God’s values. We are to be continually calling ourselves, our churches, and our world to live under the values of the Kingdom of God. We are to act with justice and humility in our own lives and to also speak out to our nation and to the world about right behaviour in areas of personal ethics, business ethics and political action on poverty
Psalms 82	God will judge those who work unjustly. In contrast we are to live as people who “maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed and rescue the weak and needy.”
Proverbs 31: 8-9	We are to raise our voice for justice and in defence of those who are in need.
Matthew 23: 23-24	We need to be sure we have our priorities in order!
James 5	The oppression of the worker is shown to directly concern the Christian.



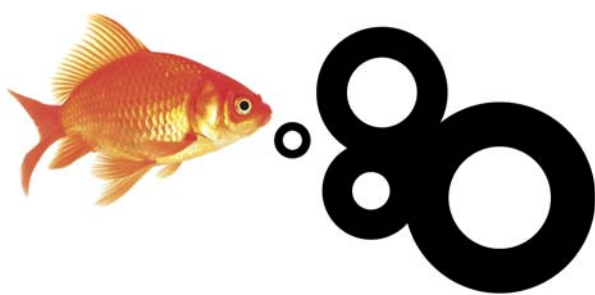
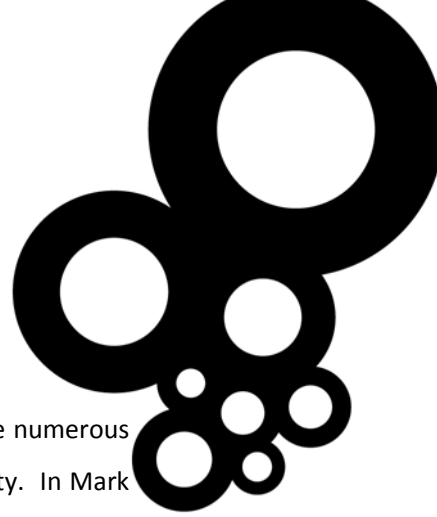
The example of Jesus

As followers of Christ we are to be living his example out daily in our lives. Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection were actions of an advocate – our mediator who seeks to reconcile us with God. Whilst He was on earth we have numerous examples of Christ as an advocate for those who were on the margins of society. In Mark 11 we read of Jesus' action of clearing the temple of the money changers and shop owners. This act of advocacy on behalf of those who had no place to worship but in the midst of what had been turned into a marketplace, placed Jesus in direct confrontation with the Religious leaders. We see throughout Jesus' earthly ministry that he would stand with those who were marginalised and oppressed, even when it placed him in opposition to the status quo.

In the story that we know as 'the good Samaritan' (Luke 10: 25 – 37), Jesus told about a society that had its value system around the wrong way and showed that it was the most despised Samaritan who was upheld as the true neighbour. He gave a graphic description of what will happen at the time of judgement to those who have not cared for the sick, or fed the hungry, or welcomed the stranger or visited those who were in prison. Jesus befriended prostitutes and ate with tax collectors. This maverick behaviour doesn't stand at the edge of his life and ministry – it was at the centre of the good news he proclaimed.

Many Christians support agencies which do valuable work in long term development but we need more than generous individuals. We need our governments to respond with urgency, generosity and justice to the needs of the poor – it is our responsibility as a wealthy nation. We know from history that advocacy can be effective and those who are involved in it ought to be persistent. Proverbs 25:15 reminds us that "Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone." We live in a time where we can effectively address the worst effects and causes of global poverty – we have the technology, the money and the skills, all we need is the will to act.

It is easy to think that others will do this work, that our church community has different priorities, that it is too hard to deal with global poverty. Moses protested five times to the Lord that he was not the one to lead his people out of captivity and five times God answered his doubts (see Exodus 3-4). God equipped Moses to do the task and God will equip us also if we say, "Here I am."



Some Advocacy Ideas

- Sign the Micah Call online at www.micahchallenge.org.au
- Responsible purchasing – This includes boycotting certain companies or products or intentionally purchasing Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, No Sweat shop and other such products. One important and easy way your group can raise awareness about consumer issues is to use fairly traded tea and coffee at all your events and sell it for people to use at home. Consider hosting a Fair Trade Fair. This is a fun and effective way to engage your local community.
- Direct Lobbying – Be part of this year's *Voices for Justice* conference
- Visit your local Member of Parliament. See the Micah Challenge website for a useful guide to visiting your local MP.
- Education – Learn more. Ignorance is not bliss, it is dangerous! Dangerous for us as we remain ill informed about the state of our world – but particularly dangerous for those suffering from the effects of poverty. Educating others on the issues to do with global poverty and how we can address them is an essential element of ongoing advocacy. Raising awareness of issues is fundamental to advocacy. There are very simple things we can do such as wear a white band and start a conversation!
- Letter Writing – Consider involving your group in this year's *Offering of Letters*. For more information or to download a useful letter writing guide, see the Micah Challenge website.
- Prayer - We are called to pray for our leaders and decision makers, and we ought to actively pray for our world. If we define advocacy as speaking to the powerful on behalf of the powerless then we must certainly speak to the most powerful God. Both prayer and action are essential components to Christian advocacy.

We need to remember that our lives – all of our words and deeds - are to speak of the new Kingdom of God which Christ has begun. Bryant Myers reminds us that 'We are the 67th book of the Bible. People read our lives, our actions and our words and believe they know what being a Christian means.'ⁱⁱⁱ We are to live our lives following the heart and will of God and to demonstrate, through advocacy and other means that God cares deeply about His creation, His people and justice.

ⁱ Barker A 2006 *Make Poverty personal*, Urban Neighbours of Hope, Melbourne

ⁱⁱ Gordon. G. 2003 *What if you got involved?*, Paternoster Press, Cumbria UK

ⁱⁱⁱ Myers, B 1999 *Walking with the Poor*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York

