

# **Gary Haugen (1999). Good News About Injustice: A Witness of Courage in a Hurting World. Downer Groves, IL: InterVarsity Press, 200pp**

## **OVERVIEW**

Hopelessness and helplessness. Two likely responses of many who are faced with the overwhelming injustices of our world. Genocide. Terrorism. Rape. Slavery. It's easy to be frozen into inaction or work ourselves into a fatalistic mindset. Then comes Gary Haugen, who offers a Christian understanding of and response to injustice that is helpful for anyone seeking answers to the problem of injustice. As president and CEO of International Justice Mission, a Christian organization working to provide resources to relieve oppression and fight injustice around the world, Gary Haugen brings together extensive experience and research in this book. It serves as a good overview and practical guide to how we can think about and do justice in the face of devastating injustice. Haugen divides the book into three sections: the reality of the world's injustices, the character of a just God, and the response of God's people to injustice.

## **THE REALITY OF INJUSTICE**

The first section lays out the reality of injustice in our world. Haugen has had first-hand experience with the investigation of the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Using this as a starting point, he goes on to describe his encounter with and reaction to the extreme violence and injustice of what he witnessed. By giving other examples of injustices he has encountered during his work at IJM as well as the U.S. Department of Justice, he leaves the reader in no doubt of the grave injustices that exist in our world. Next, he expounds on Biblical references about injustice, and challenges the reader to use them as starting points in dealing with issues of injustice. He concludes this section by giving examples of three Christian "champions of justice" who made a stand against the oppression and injustice that they witnessed: Kate Bushnell, Edgar Murphy, and Jessie Ames.

## **THE CHARACTER OF GOD**

Haugen devotes the next four chapters to four characteristics of the God of the Bible, drawing numerous references from the Bible that talk about each of these characteristics. In the face of injustice, he challenges us to put our hope in this God.

### **1. Hope in the God of Justice**

God has an intense concern and love for justice. He cares deeply that His standards of holiness and moral excellence are kept in the world He created. He passionately detests the presence of injustice.

### **2. Hope in the God of Compassion**

God is a direct witness of the world's injustice, and suffers with their victims. He is never limited in His capacity to hear, see, and enter into suffering with victims of injustice.

### 3. Hope in the God of Moral Clarity

God knows and judges between what is right (just) and wrong (unjust). He has a holy indignation towards injustice. His righteous anger is always accompanied by the offer of forgiveness for those who are repentant.

### 4. Hope in the God of Rescue

God offers a response to injustice. This response is overwhelmingly to be carried out by His people. God has given His people various gifts, resources, and power to come to the rescue of those who suffer from injustice.

## **THE RESPONSE OF GOD'S PEOPLE**

The final section of the book provides the tools with which God's people are to respond to injustice. First, he tackles some difficult questions that may arise about injustice. These questions include "Why do such injustices happen?" and "Why does God allow injustice?". Then, he identifies coercion and deception as two key elements in the work of injustice. To uncover deception and overcome coercion, he gives step-by-step guidelines as practical tools to fight injustice.

To uncover deception

Step One: Get the Facts

Step Two: Ask the Right Questions

Step Three: Collect All the Related Evidence (Documentary, testimonial, physical)

To overcome coercion

Step One: Select the appropriate type of intervention (Perpetrator accountability, structural prevention, victim assistance)

Step Two: Choose the best method (Spiritual intercession, personal appeal, legal sanction, command discipline, public shame, economic interventions, military force)

Step Three: Determine the most effective agent (Who has the best or safest position, access, relationship, expertise, or credibility to be most effective?)

Finally, Haugen concludes the book by calling on all of God's people to some kind of action against injustice. He explains that leaders of the church and Christian organizations, field workers, cultural experts, and public justice and business professionals all have gifts and resources to contribute to the work of God's justice on the earth. Finally, he challenges all of God's people to either go, send, or pray; in doing so, all would participate in God's great work of justice.

## **QUOTATIONS**

Precisely because it is not our first and natural inclination, we are called to a conscious effort of reserving a space in our thought life for those who suffer abuse and oppression in our world (39).

The last people who should get caught off guard by injustice in the world should be Bible-believing Christians. For even as we celebrate the coming of Christ into the world, in Scripture we are powerfully reminded of the kind of world into which he has come (49).

In the end the battle against oppression stands or falls on the battlefield of hope. No one knows this better than the oppressors. They know that they never have enough power, lies or loyalty to withstand the onslaught of even a fraction of the power, truth and courage that humanity could at any minute amass against them. Therefore they rely on, utterly depend on, the inaction of despair (67).

In Rwanda, where I had to bear the burden of digging through the twisted, reeking remains of horrific mass graves, I tried to imagine, for just a minute, what it must have been like for God to be present at each of the massacre sites as thousands of Tutsi women and children were murdered. Frankly, the idea was impossible to bear. But the thought led me to imagine what it must be like for God to be present, this year, at the rape of all the world's child prostitutes, at the beatings of all the world's prisoners of conscience, at the moment the last breath of hope expires from the breast of each of the millions of small children languishing in bonded servitude. As I would approach my God in prayer, I could hear his gentle voice saying to me, "Son, do you have any idea where your Father has been lately?" (80).

Justice, for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is not a good idea, a noble aspiration, a theoretical satisfaction or an impersonal principle – it is his beating heart (81).

Let there be no mistake, evil and injustice thrive on moral ambiguity, equivocation, confusion and the failure to commit (90).

[God] could accomplish it on his own through supernatural power; but instead, he chooses for the most part to limit himself to accomplishing that which he can achieve through the obedience of his people (97).

Christians of mature faith know that love is both a deeply mystical and a profoundly practical calling... Whatever action God has called his people to do, the giants of faith have always understood that it is worth doing with real-world excellence (143)

In the work of seeking justice there are two stories that deserve to be told with passion and excellence: the stories of the victims of abuse and the stories of what God has done to bring rescue (193).

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Why do you think there is so much injustice in the world?
2. Are you aware of the global injustices taking place right now? What can you do to educate yourself about these issues?

3. What does the God of the Bible have to say about injustice? How does your own faith compel you to think about and respond to issues of injustice?

4. How can you respond to injustice when you witness it in your home? School? Workplace?

### **IMPLICATIONS**

1. Injustice is a reality that must not be ignored.

2. The God of the Bible cares deeply for justice and uses His people to fight against injustice.

3. God's people are given gifts, resources, and power to bring about justice for those who are victimized by oppression and abuse.

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