

# Bible Study 1: On Good Governance

## Introduction

The Bible teaches much about good governance. In the Old Testament this is expressed in terms of right relationships: between the ruler and the people and between the ruler and God. It also contains stories of when this relationship of trust is broken. The New Testament charts the relationship of Jesus and his followers with the religious and civil authorities of the time, describing harassment and persecution. These reflections throughout the Bible from generations of people of faith offer many insights into our own times.

Psalm 72 is a prayer to God to guide the rulers of Israel. It offers an ideal governance model, focused on a relationship of care for the poor and vulnerable. Good governance is shown based on the principles of justice, righteousness and compassion, defending the rights of the poor and marginalised and protecting the people from conflict. Quoting from Isaiah 61, Jesus declares his manifesto for leadership in chapter 4 of Luke's Gospel.

This Bible study is for use by small groups or individuals, and can be adapted to your own context.

You may wish to open in prayer. Read the Bible passage *twice*, if possible using different translations, and then discuss the questions that follow. If time allows, you may also discuss the second Bible passage, which offers other insights.

## Psalm 72: 1-4, 12-14 ~ Prayer for Guidance for the Ruler

*Give the king your justice, O God,  
and your righteousness to a king's son.  
May he judge your people with righteousness,  
and your poor with justice.  
May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,  
and the hills, in righteousness.  
May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,  
give deliverance to the needy,  
and crush the oppressor.*

*For he delivers the needy when they call,  
the poor and those who have no helper.  
He has pity on the weak and the needy,  
and saves the lives of the needy.  
From oppression and violence he redeems their life;  
and precious is their blood in his sight.*

## Discussion

You may wish to begin by identifying a couple of key words that stand out from the Bible passage and discuss why they are important to you.

**In biblical times:**

- *What is the passage about? Retell it in your own words.*
- *What are the qualities of a good ruler described in this passage?*
- *Which groups of people should be the ruler's special concern?*
- *What help should they be given?*
- *What are the signs that a people are well governed?*

**In our time:**

- *Which people today are the poor, weak and needy in your area?*
- *What can community, local or/and national government, leaders do to help the vulnerable in your context?*
- *What does this passage tell us about good governance in our own time?*
- *How can we help to promote good governance in our local area, in our country, in our world?*
- *What practical actions are we committing to take?*

Read the Bible passage *twice*, if possible using different translations. Then reflect on the questions in small groups.

**Luke 4: 16-21 ~ Jesus' vision for leadership**

*When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:*

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'*

**Discussion****In biblical times:**

- *What is the passage about? Retell it in your own words.*
- *What does Jesus say he has been anointed to do by the Holy Spirit?*
- *Which groups of people did Jesus identify here as his special concern?*
- *How did Jesus demonstrate his care for these vulnerable groups during his ministry?*

**In our time:**

- *In our own situation, who are the poor, the oppressed, the captives and the blind?(Can people be held captive in other ways – e.g. by fear, by corruption, etc? Can people be blind in other ways – e.g. to injustice, to truth, etc?)*

- *How can we work together with vulnerable people to improve their well-being?*
- *What does Jesus' example of servant leadership tell us about the relationship of people and their leaders in our own time?*
- *What practical actions are we to take to promote Jesus' example of servant leadership in our own context?*

## **How could we be changed by these Bible studies?**

### **By knowing:**

- *that the Bible has given us a clear pattern for good governance*
- *that the poor, vulnerable, needy and oppressed should be the priority concern for leadership*

### **By feeling:**

- *inspired to identify and help the vulnerable in our own context*
- *that we are able in our own lives and context to be guided by values that promote good governance in our society*

### **By acting:**

- *to defend the cause of the poor and vulnerable and to help them transform their own situation.*
- *to promote a biblical understanding of good governance and hold ourselves and our leaders to account*

## **Prayer**

Loving God,

We know that all authority comes from you and we pray for the guidance of our leaders by your Holy Spirit. We pray for ourselves and our leaders that we might follow Jesus' example of a leadership that serves; a leadership that cares first for the poor and the vulnerable in our communities. We pray for a land that is governed by principles of justice and righteousness, where people are free from poverty and oppression.

We pray that, being governed by your commandment of love and strengthened by your Spirit, we may also proclaim the year of the Lord's favour in our time. Amen.

## **Other passages for reading**

- **Leviticus 25.** The people of Israel are guided on how to govern the land sustainably so that all people and creation will be able to thrive.
- **Isaiah 61:** A vision of justice and reconciliation. Jesus quotes this scripture in Luke 4.
- **Matthew 6: 9-13:** Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord's Prayer to show how we might govern our lives on earth as in heaven.

## **References and other Bible studies**

*Bible text cited from NRSV 1989*

*Contextual Bible studies:* [www.ujaama.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ujaama.ukzn.ac.za)