



Companion Bible Study

by

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*“I am only one, but still I am one.
I cannot do everything, but still I can do something;
and because I cannot do everything,
I will not refuse to do something that I can do.”*

— Helen Keller (1880–1968); Author, Lecturer, Activist

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

Dear Reader,

As I have written this study, I have been in prayer. I have prayed for God's grace and wisdom as I teach from his word. But I have prayed primarily for you — that as you search for God in these pages, you would find him; and that in finding him you would be changed.

In their book *Refuse to Do Nothing: Finding Your Power to Abolish Modern-Day Slavery*, authors Shayne Moore and Kimberly McOwen Yim awaken us to the injustice hiding behind our innocent-appearing lives. Then, with this kindling awareness, they implore us to refuse to do nothing. They call us to understand that fighting for justice is not primarily the job of far-removed groups of powerful people — members of Congress, non-profit organizations, or church committees — but the responsibility of each and every one of us. Bringing God's justice to our areas of influence is, they demonstrate, central to following Christ.

How do you think of Christianity? Do you think of it as an individual gift for you — bought by Jesus, given by God — of divine blessing and eternal life? Or do you think of it as the long process of Christ's body bringing his kingdom, justice, and righteousness to earth? The truth is that Christianity is both these things — requiring and offering new life to our individual spirits as well as our communities. As followers of Christ we have no choice but to harness the life-changing power of his love and forgiveness, letting it empower us with courage to confront injustice and build God's Kingdom.

This Bible study was created as a companion to *Refuse to Do Nothing*, and my hope is that as you dig into the Bible passages and lessons they will illuminate Shayne and Kimberly's message. The study contains six sections to be covered in six weeks. Each one looks at a different theme from *Refuse to Do Nothing*, and is intended to be done individually or with a group. I pray that it takes you deeper into what the Bible teaches about justice, courage, and God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

I am praying for you — that you would receive courage and compassion; that you would be given wisdom and strength; that you would experience the light of his truth. Before you begin each study, please take a moment to quiet your heart before God and join me in this prayer. Ultimately, it is him and his kingdom we are seeking.

Grace and peace to you,

Catherine McNiel

WEEK ONE: BECOMING SALTY PEOPLE

Praise God for salt. The other day I took a bite of bread-and-butter only to realize I had used unsalted butter. It was tasteless. You should have seen me running for the salt shaker (and adding salted butter to my shopping list)!

As ordinary stay-at-home moms, Shayne and Kimberly wondered what they could possibly do to impact global injustice — even as their eyes were opening to the suffering and oppression in the world. As they wrestled through increasing awareness they began to recognize their own power and influence. They realized that the world changes for evil or good when ordinary people choose or refuse to do nothing. They began to discover that the world needs ordinary, salty people.

Before we begin, read the Introduction and chapter 1 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*.

 As you read, consider: What does “power” mean to you? Do you see yourself as a person with power?

Some of Jesus’ best known teachings occur in what we call The Sermon on the Mount. This passage, beginning in Matthew 5, starts out “Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.” The next three chapters contain the longest uninterrupted teachings of Jesus that we have recorded.

 Take a moment to read through Matthew 5:1–16. Jot down anything that stands out or that you would like to study in-depth.

Early on in The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says to his disciples:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13–16)

I love the pictures Jesus paints for his followers. But the concept of being salt and light is almost lost on us in the modern world. In the ancient world, on the other hand, salt was absolutely necessary for survival. With hot temperatures and no refrigeration, salt was used to keep meat and food from spoiling, to kill bacteria, and slow the process of rotting. Salt was the preservative that held the inevitable decomposition at bay. Before antibiotics, it was also used to stop deadly infection from setting in a wound. And of course, we all know that salt draws out a food's flavor.

Jesus is telling his followers that their job, their very identity, is to be salt — to give flavor to their world and keep it healthy, slowing the process of infection and rot by sustaining life. Followers of Christ, therefore, are in part those influences that keep our communities on course, who keep our societies from running into destruction.

On the other hand, if a big block of industrial-strength salt comes in contact with a living thing, it will merely ruin and kill it; and as Jesus points out, salt that has lost its saltiness is worth nothing at all. This metaphor only works when many individual grains of salt infiltrate the meat, food, or wound.

Jesus then tells his followers that they are the light of the world. These are big words, and in the original Greek language they are spoken with emphasis — *you are the light of the world!* Imagine ancient times before electricity: for roughly half of each day you are trapped in darkness. There are no street lamps or light bulbs to reveal what might be hiding in the shadows, and the only relief comes from the far-off dawn. If there was a light — a candle or an oil lamp — it must be placed prominently to lighten the widest possible area, or it becomes worthless. For followers of Christ therefore, our privilege and responsibility is to shine our light atop a stand and not under a basket; to illuminate the whole area

It is interesting that Jesus is not speaking here to people in powerful or wealthy positions. This is not one of his confrontations with the High Priests, teachers of the law, or Roman collaborators. He is speaking to profoundly ordinary people — residents of Galilee and the surrounding areas — who are fishermen, tradesmen, and regular folk in every respect. Yet these normal men and women are the ones he describes as being the very influences that will keep the earth from sinking into darkness and rot, from becoming infected, flavorless, and decayed.

In today's world, we have refrigerators, twenty-four hour electric lights, congressmen, and non-profit justice committees. Yet we also have injustice permeating everywhere. Jesus's strategy is still the same: for the ordinary men and women, boys and girls of the world to infiltrate the places where they find themselves, making individual impacts together that add up to an entire earth preserved from its own decay. It is a handful of individual grains of salt that save the meat or staunch the wound. It is a candle in each window that provides safety and light for the city.

 Take a moment to read through Matthew 5:13–16 again. Look around at the passages before and after it and consider what Jesus is saying and who he is saying it to.

[] With Jesus' words in mind, think for a moment about the individuals you have seen acting as salt and light in your communities. What are some things they have said or done that made a difference, big or small?

[] What do you imagine would happen if your town, state, or country had *many* such “salty” people living their lives there?

Both the Old and New Testaments are full of stories describing ordinary people waking up to their own power and responsibility and making efforts that change the world. Let's take a look at a few of them, in the moment of their awakening and decision:

Moses. He was a Hebrew baby, born a powerless slave without even the freedom to survive his birth. Yet he was raised by a princess and grew up caught between worlds of privilege and powerlessness. As a shepherd in the desert, he met the LORD. Even then he balked, full of excuses and fear. But he obeyed God, one step at a time, and ultimately liberated his people.

[] **Read Exodus 3:4–15.**

In verse 11, Moses responds to God's instructions by describing his situation and ours: “But I am not a great man! How can I be the one to go?” What is the LORD's response?

Esther. She was a Jewish exile and orphan, essentially kidnapped by the king to become his “wife.” This was not marriage in the sense of a beautiful partnership — he had all the power and she could not even approach him without risking death. Yet when her uncle Mordecai learned of a plot to destroy the Jews, she took her life in her hands and courageously and strategically asked the King for help. Ultimately, the plot was overturned and the Jews were saved.

 **Read Esther 4: 10–16.**

Esther, like many of us, sees herself as vulnerable, not powerful. Yet she also realizes that she has an opportunity she could use. What is her decision?

Peter. He was a fisherman who left his nets behind to follow Jesus. Yet in his years as a disciple he frequently stumbled over his own ego, impulses, and fears. When Jesus predicted Peter’s denial, he refused to believe it — but deny him he did, just hours later.

After the resurrection, Jesus meets Peter in a powerful conversation of reconciliation. Jesus gives Peter his life’s work, and warns Peter of his brutal, future death. Once Jesus is gone, it is Peter who understands that the disciples must now continue his work. He begins to preach, teach, and heal in the name of his risen LORD — and the entire world is changed.

 **Read John 21:15–19.**

Then skim the first few chapters of Acts. What do you think turned Peter from a fisherman who ran from danger into the leader running joyfully into constant danger?

Can we really identify with such seemingly lofty Biblical characters? We can and we must.

In the introduction and first chapter of *Refuse to Do Nothing*, Shayne and Kimberly describe how their ordinary lives began colliding with a burden for justice — specifically regarding the atrocities of modern day slavery. They realized that in their own small ways and circles they were “good people in positions of power,” and could choose to use their place — whether as mothers, playgroup members, shoppers, voters, or writers — for good. Shayne reflects:

“I found that changing the world happens right where we are. It can be small changes in thinking and acting that end up having snowball effects and bringing the kingdom of God here and now.... So we do what we can. We start where we are. And slowly, but with real results, together we change the world” (pp. 16, 18)

In other words, we become salty people, each impacting those places we already touch toward life and justice. When each of our efforts are compiled, with God’s help we end up with a world whose deadly sickness is slowed, whose beauty is preserved, where God’s will is done and his kingdom reigns.

Human trafficking, modern-day slavery, is in every mall in America. It is in the lines of production in how and who produces our clothes, food, and electronics. Human trafficking is in every home, on our computers and the internet in the form of pornography and advertisements for prostitution. We are not as far removed as the enemy would like us to think from one of the greatest evils facing our generation. Yet, this great evil is easily hidden. How can we be the salt and light that exposes the truth and sets the captives free?

Philosopher Edmund Burke said that “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Hundreds of years earlier, Jesus said that the world would be preserved from darkness and decay by ordinary, salty people fighting for his Kingdom in their own corners.

 What are the burdens of justice that weigh on your heart, perhaps triggered by reading *Refuse to Do Nothing*? What positions do you hold, big or small, that you could begin to use for good?

WEEK TWO: WHAT DOES JUSTICE HAVE TO DO WITH ME?

It happens to us every day — we turn on the television, check our emails, or glance at the internet... and learn about a new atrocity somewhere in the world. We are mesmerized and horrified, maybe share a link, tweet a hashtag, or change our avatar to align with the cause. But what can else can we really do?

In chapter 2 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*, Shayne takes the words right out of our mouths when she describes filing the tragedies in the media under “can’t deal with at all” (p. 28). But this is her confession, not her final answer. Even though the insurmountable global problems are so much bigger than our arms can reach, Shayne and Kimberly insist that we must respond. In the face of injustice such as modern day slavery, it is in fact our Christian responsibility to respond.

Before we begin, read chapter 2–4 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*.

 As you read, consider: Do Christians have a responsibility to fight against injustices like modern-day slavery and human trafficking? Do we have the ability?

Questions like these should lead us straight to the Bible. What does God say about our responsibility to each other and to justice? What does he expect from us?

 To begin, let’s read Luke 14. Take a moment to find it in your Bible and read through the chapter, taking note of anything that stands out to you or questions you have.

Jesus is eating dinner at an influential Pharisee’s house. The Pharisees were a specific group of Jewish religious leaders known for their strict interpretation of laws and a high view of their own obedience. As a group they were notoriously at odds with Jesus.

Throughout the dinner, Jesus teaches a number of lessons that add up poignantly against his Pharisee host, including:

- [✓] Helping someone in need is more “obedient” than keeping laws without justice and mercy;
- [✓] We should practice humility and not assume places of privilege for ourselves;
- [✓] We should invest not only in people who will pay us back (because isn’t that just investing in ourselves?) but in those who are so deeply in need they will never be able to return the favor;
- [✓] in God’s kingdom, it is often the neediest and most broken who will receive a seat at the table, rather than those who view themselves as privileged, proud, and self-sufficient.

To his Pharisee dinner partner, Jesus points out the importance of humility and service to the needy, rather than only impersonal law-abiding and morality.

Then in verse 25 the scene changes. Jesus is now speaking with the crowds who have been traveling with him. These folks are generally the opposite of the Pharisees — they are eager and excited about what Jesus is doing and teaching, hopeful about what might happen in Israel. But Jesus tempers their zeal by warning them that following the Messiah is not something to be taken lightly. In fact, it may require something as drastic as parting with close family, taking on burdens as heavy and unbearable as a cross. “Can you leave everything behind and receive this heavy burden in exchange?” Jesus asks them. If so — and only if so — they can follow him.

Taking both messages together, we learn that Jesus is not only interested in our ability to obey the law, but in our willingness to humbly take up a heavy burden, a responsibility for seeking after his Kingdom.

- [✍] Look at Luke 14 again. Jesus has a different message to each listener — the Pharisees and the crowd of followers — based on their needs. But the underlying truth is the same. What is Jesus teaching about the responsibility that we each hold?

If we’re honest, when we talk about following Jesus we often focus on what’s in it for us: forgiveness, eternal life, a love that never lets go, a wonderful plan for our lives. And this is true — God’s fathomless love, grace, and forgiveness are the joyful wonders of the universe. But these benefits were never meant to be an end in themselves. When our lives are transformed by God’s

love and the good news of Christ, we then have the motivation and strength to answer his call to count the cost, pick up our cross, and follow.

 Take a moment to reflect on your own understanding of what it means to be in the family of God, and describe it here in your own words. What does God offer his followers, and what does he require?

Jesus did not invent the ideas he teaches in Luke 14. The message that God's people carry great responsibility for justice is woven throughout the entire Bible. Then Jesus arrived on the scene and claimed to be the embodiment of this message and plan.

 Take a moment to read Luke 4:16–21. What is Jesus saying here?

The Jews understood that the promised Messiah would be the one sent by God to finally make things right upon the earth. Jesus claims in Luke 4 and elsewhere that he is that person, that his very life is the fulfillment of God's desire for justice and righteousness laid out in what we today call the Old Testament. Let's take a quick tour of a few foundational passages:

An Epiphany to Moses. Throughout the early stories of Genesis, the Creator promises faithfulness to his creation. With Abraham, the general promise becomes specific. Then generations later, at Mount Sinai, the LORD enters into a covenant with the people of Israel, through Moses, to whom he reveals his glory and describes himself.

 **Read Exodus 34:5–8.**

This is the only place in the Bible where God describes himself. What better way to understand who God is than his own description! His character and values, expressed in this covenant with his people, form the Biblical foundation for everything we believe about justice. What does God tell us about himself here, and what does this have to do with our responsibility to justice?

A Letter from Jeremiah. When the captives from Judah were taken to Babylon, Jeremiah wrote them a letter from the LORD, instructing them how to withstand their captivity.

 **Read Jeremiah 29:7.**

Rather than simply surviving, exiled Judah was to actively seek the good of those around them. God's people had a responsibility even to their enemies who had captured them. In this letter, how is God's blessing connected to his people's responsibility?

A Poem from Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah is confronting the people of Judah for being rebellious and hypocritical. They are seeking God, but primarily wanting what's in it for them. Going through the motions of prayer and fasting but failing to live lives of justice, God confronts them with a reminder to keep the main thing the main thing.

 **Read Isaiah 58:6–11.**

God's words through Isaiah make it clear that he expects far more than just religious behavior. What does God require of Judah, and of us?

A Reminder from Micah. The LORD is filing a legal charge against his people who are under breach of contract. He has given his blessings and in return stipulated clear responsibilities which have not been delivered.

 **Read Micah 6:4–8.**

Judah has taken God's provisions without gratitude, notoriously acting religiously without pursuing the things he requires. What are the three things God ask here from each human being?

Today we have looked at a story spanning thousands of years — from God’s first declarations of himself to Moses to his rebuke of Israel and Judah — all of which lead to Jesus and the teaching he gave to the Pharisees and the eager crowds.

 Where do you find yourself in this story? Are you like the Pharisees, proud of their obedience but lacking a heart for justice and mercy? Are you like the crowd who cheered on Jesus the Messiah but were unprepared to shoulder a great burden and responsibility? Are you like the people of Judah who accepted God’s blessing but responded with empty religious acts rather than mercy and justice? Or are you like the exiles in Babylon who sought to bring tangible goodness even to their captors? Take a moment to prayerfully reflect and write down your thoughts.

As followers of God today, we make up his Church, called to carry on Jesus’ work in the world until his return. The gifts God gives us are free — there is nothing we could ever do to earn them. Yet we do not have the option of merely enjoying these benefits without responsibility.

 As Shayne and Kimberly remind us, Christians are called to bring justice to a world suffering under great injustice. In chapters 2–4 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*, they consider a number of different ways that ordinary people can fight against modern day slavery. What areas of injustice create burdens on your heart? Do Shayne and Kimberly’s ideas engage your imagination? Do you have other ideas of where to begin? How is God sparking your imagination where you can create change for good?

WEEK THREE: COMPLICATED COMPASSION

Can you imagine living five hundred years ago? Our worlds would have been so much smaller. We would have known the atrocities happening in our own family, neighborhood, or village, but not in the rest of the planet. Within our limited spheres we might comfort and confront the suffering and injustice we knew, because however daunting and dangerous the situation might be, it was happening in our actual life and place. We could act with compassion if we chose.

Fast forward to modern times — we are bombarded with news of atrocities from every corner of the globe. Technology has made the world small and we hear about injustice and suffering among people we cannot imagine ever touching. Our hearts might be broken, but what can we do in a world that is both so small and so very big? Being compassionate has become very complicated. So we must ask — can Christians still live lives of compassion in the modern-day world?

Before we begin, read chapters 5–7 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*.

 As you read, consider: On page 57, Kimberly writes, “Sometimes the obstacles are there to prepare us for the journey, the path he is calling us to take.” When have you needed to step out and trust God’s leading even when obstacles were not cleared?

 As we wrestle with what living lives of compassion look like in our world today, what things or circumstances cause us to pause? What are you afraid of?

The book of Matthew records a long teaching that Jesus gave his disciples while he was in Jerusalem for Passover, just days before his death. He is warning them of what is to come, enforcing his expectations for their faithfulness and watchfulness. He ends by describing the king coming back to reign, gathering all nations before him and separating them into two groups. One group is offered eternal reward, inheritance in the Father’s long-awaited kingdom. The other group is sent to eternal punishment.

These two options probably sound familiar, but the surprise lies in Jesus’ criteria: the two paths diverge based on who has offered food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, hospitality to the stranger, and care to the sick or imprisoned. No other factors are considered.

And more shocking still — anyone who offered or withheld these things to even the least-worthy person is credited as having offered or withheld these things from Christ himself. It appears that both experiencing and acting on compassion matters a great deal to God.

 Take a moment to read the story in Matthew 25:31–46. If you have time, read the chapters of Matthew 24–25 to get a better sense of what Jesus is talking about. Make a note of anything that stands out to you or questions you have.

 What does Jesus teach in Matthew 25 about what compassion looks like in God’s eyes and kingdom?

 What is the significant about the fact that this story comes in a series of warnings Jesus gives his disciples about the future?

The concept of God’s merciful love is all throughout the Bible. Translators sometimes use ‘compassion,’ or other words like ‘mercy,’ or ‘tender mercies.’ The Scriptures begin with the amazing, steadfast mercy that God shows to his creation, starting with Adam and Eve and continuing through Noah, Abraham, the nation of Israel, finally culminating in Christ. Both the Old and New Testaments are chock full of God’s tender compassion.

But the Bible does not leave compassion only in God’s hands. The outcome of this divine mercy is the expectation that God’s people will respond by experiencing and extending great compassion toward others as well. Even as the Bible tells us stories of God acting graciously toward his creatures, we find clear instruction to do likewise whenever we encounter a person in need — regardless of who the person is or if our personal sacrifice is required. We are invited to receive God’s compassion and respond by living lives of compassion.

Let's take a look at a few places where we find both divine and human compassion in the Bible, both as a gift from God and a command to his people.

Yahweh. The LORD has just given Moses the Ten Commandments, and is about to initiate a divine contract with the people of Israel. But first, he steps out of the cloud and appears before Moses to introduce himself. He gives his name — *Yahweh* (translated 'the LORD') — and then tells us a bit about himself and his divine character. It is a stunning encounter: Moses leaves the meeting with his face so radiant that when he rejoins the Israelites he has to don a veil.

 **Read Exodus 34:4–8.**

We read this passage in a previous week, because so much of what the Bible proclaims about God is rooted in this foundational description. It is his introduction to Moses and Israel, the birth of the covenant, and the only place in the Bible where God describes himself. What does God say here, both directly and indirectly, about his compassion?

The Law and the Prophets. Throughout the law books, the God of mercy and compassion instructs Israel to show mercy and compassion upon those vulnerable or in need. Later, the Prophets bring reminders that empty religious activity is not what God wants: instead he is looking for just and merciful action motivated by truly broken hearts.

 **Read Zechariah 7:4–15.**

The people in exile wonder if they should continue to follow the same rituals they have carried out in the past. God's pointed response turns the tables on their motives and faithfulness. What does God indicate is valuable and un-valuable? To whom does he require his people show mercy and compassion? What is the consequence of failing to do so?

Jesus. Where do we find sacrificial compassion more vividly than in Jesus? In becoming a man, the master became the servant in order to show us the father and bring us salvation. In his life he taught, healed, and lived among those in need. In his death he took up our sins, and in his resurrection he gave us life.

 **Read Matthew 14:14, Matthew 20:34, John 11:32–36, and Luke 19:41–42.**

You can open the gospels to almost any page and find Jesus being moved to compassion by the people he encounters — both in his emotion and in his actions. What does Jesus see in these passages that triggers his compassion? What does this compassion lead him to do?

The Samaritan. An expert in the law has asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life. Jesus confirms what the man already knows — to “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” But he then asks whom he should consider to be his neighbor.

 **Read Luke 10:25–37.**

What do you notice about the characters Jesus chooses for his story? The priest and the Levite would be considered holy people; the Samaritan would be considered an outcast. In this short parable, what does Jesus teach us about what really pleases God? And, what does he teach about the sacrifice that compassion may require of us?

Paul. In the early decades after Jesus’ return to heaven, his disciples spread the amazing news of what they had witnessed and the church was born. Missionaries went to the distant reaches of the known world, and the far-off churches were held together by visits and letters. In these letters, apostles such as Paul were able to encourage and teach the church how to handle their unique difficulties and follow Christ faithfully.

 **Read Colossians 3:1–17.**

Those who are in Christ have died to their former lives and are now meant to live in a different way. What aspects of human nature are Christians told to “take off” and what are we to clothe ourselves with instead? In reading through this description, do you become aware of anything you need to “take off” or “put on?”

 **Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–5.**

What have we received from God, and what do we therefore have the ability to give?

We often think of Paul as a hero of the early church — someone high above ourselves. Yet in 2 Corinthians 12 Paul describes a “thorn in the flesh” which he unsuccessfully begs God to remove. Though God does not choose to eliminate this obstacle from his life, Paul learns to use his suffering not as an excuse, but as an important component in his ministry. He learns to lean on God’s strength in his weakness, boasting not in his own glory but in God’s.

Likewise, in chapter 5 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*, Kimberly describes the circumstances that stopped her from turning the compassion she felt into action. The obstacles in her life felt insurmountable. Yet, encouraged by Paul, she came to realize that when she was weak, God was strong. As she began to step out in spite of her excuses, she too heard him saying “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

 What limitations are keeping you from a life of active compassion? Can you imagine what might happen if you surrendered these obstacles to God and allowed his strength to shine in your weakness?

Several times throughout *Refuse to Do Nothing*, Shayne and Kimberly implore us to *pray*. By starting in prayer we connect to God’s compassion and mercy, and our own hearts can be changed. As we learn more about injustice and lay the situations at God’s feet, our own thoughts and emotions become disciplined to see beyond ourselves, and we can be formed into God’s agents in the world. As Shayne says on page 163, “It is through such heart-expanding prayers that we find the strength to deal with the unthinkable realities....”

Compassion can be overwhelming in today’s global village. We can’t possibly offer cold water and shelter to every thirsty, hurting person in the world; but if we follow Christ we also must not stop offering what we can — even if this means personal sacrifice — to those we can. As we end today’s study, spend some time in prayer (alone or in your study group). Prayer was the foundation of the abolitionist movement two hundred years ago and it must be for us today. We cannot confront such moral evil as human slavery without the power and protection of prayer in our lives and for those on the front lines in this fight.

Praise the LORD for his great and boundless grace, and spend time remembering that *you too* are a recipient of boundless love and grace — a free gift, unearned. Let this gift wash over you. Then ask him to overflow your heart with compassion. Do not be hesitant to spend silent moments meditating in prayer, sitting at his feet.

Here is a prayer written two hundred years ago. May it be a springboard for your time in prayer:

Lord, may I be an Abolitionist
Oppression's deadly foe;
In God's great strength will I resist
And lay the monster low.
In God's great name do I demand
To all be freedom given;
That peace and joy may fill the land
And songs go up to heaven!

WEEK FOUR: GETTING ACTIVE WITH JESUS

Preschoolers love to sing *Jesus Loves Me, This I Know*. Who doesn't? Even world-renowned theologian Karl Barth summarized his entire theology with the words to *Jesus Loves Me*. In many ways, this simple song is the gospel in a nutshell. And yet, each year I have followed Christ, he has surprised me again and again. As Aslan tells Lucy in *Prince Caspian*, he appears bigger each year she grows older.

 Before we begin, take a moment to reflect on how you would describe Jesus. How has your understanding of him grown and changed?

Before we begin, read chapters 8–9 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*.

 As you read, consider: Authors Shayne and Kimberly implore us to see the power and resources at our disposal in order to care for those in need in the name of Christ. Does this direction come from Jesus, or is he primarily interested in our spiritual repentance and relationship with God?

 Was there anything new you learned when reading chapters 8–9? Are there places in your community where you now wonder if people are forced to work?

We often talk about Jesus as a divine-man whose primary work on earth, and now in heaven, is oriented toward our spirits, encouraging us to consider our internal relationship to God. A read through the gospels certainly confirms that God's son was concerned with our spiritual orientation and standing with God. But Christ's words and actions break through our modern idea that having one's heart right with God can be separated from living justly on earth. When we read the gospels we may be surprised to find in Jesus deep streams of activism.

The gospel writers offer little social context for the Jewish world under Roman occupation, for there was no need to do so — their readers lived and breathed that reality and could imagine little else. Israel, along with much of the known world, was Roman-occupied. The emperor (Caesar Augustus, at the time of Jesus' birth) was considered by the Romans to be divine; he was proclaimed "God's Son," "bringer of peace," and "the savior," and his deeds were told to the people as "good news" (gospel).

As a conquered people, Israel was under high taxation, and subject to various systems of economic and social injustice. Local governors were put into place to allow Rome to keep an eye on the local territories (King Herod, at the time of Jesus' birth). The sacred Temple in Jerusalem came to serve a dual purpose — the ancient worship of Israel's God, but also the center for increasingly burdensome Roman taxation. To many Jews, this felt both like idolatry and injustice — and rightly so. For decades, the Jewish people in exile and under occupation had been longing for God's promised Messiah, someone like their ancient King David who would save Israel from her current unjust situation in the hands of an empire that did not fear their God.

It was into this world that Jesus was born and lived; it was in this context that he was called the Son of God, Prince of Peace, and Savior; that his deeds were proclaimed to be "good news" or gospel. Given the injustices of Rome, the collaboration of Herod and the temple, and the proclaimed divinity of the emperor (and the language used to describe him) it is clear that Jesus' words and deeds were more revolutionary than we first realized.

 What social or political implications do you think there were when Jesus and his followers referred to Jesus as the son of God, and his message the "good news" or gospel — the same terminology used to justify the power and divinity of the Roman Emperor?

With this background in mind, let's begin by turning to one of the best known stories of all — Jesus' birth as told by Luke.

Page through Luke 1 and 2, paying close attention to the angel's visit to Mary; Mary's visit to Elizabeth and the song she sings, Zechariah's song; the birth of Jesus; and Simeon and Anna's response to Jesus' presentation at the temple.

 The angels, Mary, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna — they are each swelling with excitement, proclaiming that God is doing something here and now, in their time. As you read their joyful words, what do you hear? What is this child destined to be and do?

 Given their social, political, and religious context, what do you think these words and ideas meant to them? What would it mean to the Romans who overheard or read them?

Luke spends the first two chapters of his book laying a foundation for what the coming of Jesus means for Israel, and the words demonstrate a deep longing for tangible justice — relief from the unjust earthly powers that controlled them. From the start, it appears that Jesus is entirely about this sort of thing. Let's continue on in the story and see what we find later in his life.

Ministry Launch. In Luke 4:14, a now-grown Jesus has been baptized, tempted, and is beginning his ministry. At the synagogue he reads from Isaiah 61, an act which in itself provides no scandal. However, he then sits down and proclaims “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

 **Read Luke 4:14–21.**

Can you hear Jesus' words in their social and religious context? In claiming to fulfill that scripture on that day, he is claiming to be God's Messiah. What does this quoted passage state that he will be and do? How does this line up with what was said of him during his conception, birth, and infancy? What would this sound like to Israel's ears? To Rome's ears?

The Greatest Commandment. An expert in the law approaches Jesus and tries to trap him, asking “What is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus responds with two answers: love God, and love your neighbor as you love yourself.

 **Read Matthew 22:35–40.**

Jesus (and the Bible as a whole) consistently refuses the idea that God can be loved, served, or honored without sacrificial love and service to those around us. Does your faith community focus on both these commands, or does it lean more strongly toward one or the other? What about you personally?

Confronting Religious Leaders. The gospels contain many confrontations between Jesus and the religious leaders, who failed to use their power to help the weak, and missed the essential point of God's laws.

 **Read Luke 11:37–44.**

Jesus is being accused of neglecting a cleansing ritual, but turns the accusation back on the Pharisees. They cleaned their outer bodies, but not their inner selves; they tithed meticulously but did not seek after God's justice and love. There is a clear connection here between an inner life in relationship to God and an outer life of justice. What are the implications here?

After the Resurrection. Jesus has been crucified, and three days later rose from the dead — but this startling resurrection is not yet common knowledge. Two of Jesus' followers are walking down the road and Jesus joins them, though they are kept from recognizing him. Downcast, they summarize what has happened in the past few days: a great prophet of God has been put to death — but they had hoped he would be the one to save Israel.

 **Read Luke 24:13–35.**

The rumor started before Jesus' birth and we see here that it persisted even after his death — he was on earth to offer tangible relief and justice to Israel. Jesus corrects a number of mistakes in his disciples' thinking — both in this story and elsewhere — but he does not correct this fundamental idea.

Without a doubt, the Bible interprets the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as having spiritual, eternal significance. But this does not detract from the certain fact that the earthly community that walked with Jesus understood (and taught in their Biblical writings) that Christ intended to bring justice and tangible relief, to put earthly things right in a very immediate and ongoing sense. Jesus's game plan was certainly different from what Israel and the disciples were expecting. But the Bible is clear that Jesus' purposes were earthly as well as spiritual. Luke never recants the anthems of victory and justice that fill chapter after chapter of his book — before Jesus birth, throughout his life, and even after his death.

-  Have you considered Jesus in light of his social context? What does this study teach you about Jesus (and consequently, God's) commitment to justice?
-  What does this understanding mean for Christians who intend to follow Jesus? What does it look like for the Church to continue spreading this good news of “rightness” — a rightness so great that it includes earthly injustice as well as spiritual darkness — until he comes again?
-  In chapters 8 and 9 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*, we learn about the varieties of slavery that continue to flourish both around the world and in our local communities. Kimberly shares the struggle of wanting a “grandiose response to the injustice of slavery” and begins to see there are “small meaningful actions that are needed every day.” Are there some specific actions you could do today, in the next ten days, or the next ten months? Having studied the circumstances of Jesus’ country and how he responded, what do you imagine he would do — and ask his followers to do — if he was born today?
-  In Jesus, God became man and lived among us — we call this his *incarnation*. As Christians, we too are called to live incarnationally — physically bringing God through Christ to our communities. What might this sort of incarnational living look like in your community? What does it have to do with issues of justice?
-  If we have failed to follow Jesus in this way, how can we as Christians and the Church confess our indifference and inaction? What would it look like if our confession of faith as individuals and the Church focused on freedom and justice for all?

WEEK FIVE: TWO MASTERS

What could possibly be wrong with chocolate? I would certainly prefer the answer to be a resounding, “*nothing at all!*”

But Shayne and Kimberly spend several chapters of *Refuse to Do Nothing* unpacking the hidden suffering that lies in the supply chain of our favorite purchases. As we learn from the authors, our “stuff” is often our closest link to human trafficking, slavery, and many other manifestations of injustice. It turns out that our purchasing decisions make a significant impact around the globe. Though our hearts may be pure, our hands may be dirty. As Christians it is time we asked ourselves: has our love of “stuff” made it too easy to turn a blind eye to complicated layers of injustice and modern day slavery?

Before we begin, read chapters 10–12 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*.

 As you read, consider: In what ways do you impact the world through your purchasing “power?” Are there things you are willing and able — or *unwilling* and *unable* — to give up if it makes a difference?

In Luke 16, Jesus is talking to his disciples about money. Within this lesson is one of his most famous phrases — a sound bite almost short enough to be Twitter-worthy:

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

The Pharisees, whom Luke tells us loved money, were apparently listening in, mocking, and rolling their eyes. Jesus turned to them and rebuked them, stating that what people value highly is detestable to God.

 Take a moment to read Luke 16:10–15. What is Jesus teaching his disciples and the Pharisees about wealth?

 What do you think it means to serve money? What does your lifestyle say about who is your true master?

A few verses later, Jesus tells a parable. The story has two main characters — a rich man living a life of luxury and Lazarus, a beggar covered in sores who longs for some of his scraps.

Both men die. Lazarus is taken to comfort by Abraham's side while the rich man finds himself in torment. He calls for Abraham to send Lazarus with just a drip of water to cool his tongue. Abraham responds by reminding the rich man that in life he had plenty of luxury while Lazarus had only suffering. The rich man then implores Lazarus be sent to earth to warn his brothers of the torment awaiting them. But Abraham again refuses, insisting that they have been well warned by the Jewish law and the prophets: if that wasn't enough to get their attention, even someone from death will not persuade them.

 Go back to Luke 16 in your Bible and this time read through the end of the chapter. What is Jesus teaching in this parable? Write down any thoughts or questions you have.

 In this study, we have looked at a number of places in “the law and prophets.” What do you remember them saying in regards to wealth and justice that would have applied to the rich man?

Though we are not given the details, it does *not* seem that the rich man's failure was simply that he was rich — although he may have gained his wealth unjustly. Rather it is that he lived in great finery with no compassion for the suffering of those at his very doorstep. He lived large with what he had, paying no heed to the impact on those around him.

Depending on your financial status, you may not think of yourself as wealthy. In fact, you may be having trouble providing for your family's basic needs. Yet as we read the descriptions in chapters 10–12 of *Refuse to Do Nothing* of people suffering and terrorized in the making of chocolates and

cell phones it becomes clear that in this cast of characters we are the ones with the gadgets and sweets, not the ones whose lives are mangled in the production process.

 How can we heed Jesus' parable and the warning of his law and prophets? Is it possible that our love of "stuff" has made it difficult for us to hear them, apply their words to our own choices, and choose to sacrifice in the name of justice? How can we change our purchasing and consumption in order to "refuse to do nothing?"

 Take a moment to consider these questions for yourself and your family. If you are doing this study with a group, spend some time in discussion.

Let's take a look at a few other places where the Bible warns us about the power of money and possessions on our behavior.

Eternal Treasure. During another teaching, Jesus reminds his followers that God loves them and will provide for them — even more than he does for the beautifully dressed flowers of the field. This certainty of God's faithfulness can then embolden his people to live lives centered around generosity rather than possessions.

 **Read Luke 12:32–34** (read the passage before this as well if you have time).
Jesus encourages his followers not to be afraid, but to sell their possessions and give to the poor, storing their treasures where they cannot rot or be stolen. Have you ever seen someone live with this much trust in God's love? What would this certainty allow you to do? In what ways does fear hold you back?

Luxurious Oppression. The author of James has been addressing his brothers and sisters in the faith “scattered upon the nations.” Then in chapter 5 he gives a warning to the wealthy among them. These folks hoarded their wealth, failed to pay their workmen, and committed atrocities to maintain their lavish lifestyle. But their judgment is now coming from the LORD.

 **Read James 5:1–5.**

Likely, none of us could be accused of getting rich by not paying our workers. Yet if we enjoy affordable clothes, food, and toys because they were made by slaves, underpaid workers, or child labor, we are not entirely innocent either. How seriously does God take such injustice in this passage?

Godly Contentment. In this letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul is giving instruction to the Church. He begins this section by telling slaves how they are to act toward their masters, then warns and gives advice to those who are wealthy or wish to be.

 **Read 1 Timothy 6:6–19.**

What does Paul say is the downside to earthly riches? What does he suggest instead? How does this teaching apply to our modern situation as described in *Refuse to Do Nothing*?

As we have learned, the Bible describes wealth as a temptation, a potential rival for our affections and service to God, often acquired through the suffering of the poor. It is clear this is not a small matter in the eyes of God. While most of us do not view ourselves as wealthy, much less at the expense of vulnerable people, Shayne and Kimberly gently explain in chapters 10–12 of *Refuse to Do Nothing* that in many ways this is our reality. Perhaps to a greater degree than we had ever guessed.

 If Shayne and Kimberly are correct, we need to — individually and as a Church — consider what the good news of Christ requires of us in this area. We can only serve one master: are we serving God or our possessions?

As we close this week, spend some time in prayer and discussion around these issues and teachings — their application to your life, community, and your purchasing power.

WEEK SIX: HOPE THAT LEADS TO COURAGE

Have you ever had an injury so great your body couldn't feel the pain? The human body comes with a built-in survival mechanism — we can only take so much before we go into shock and, for a time, stop registering pain. In the same way, when our eyes and hearts open to injustice in the world we can easily hit a wall of paralysis. The problems are too big, too tragic, too global. The truth is painful to hear and absorb; the prospect of true life-change too terrifying; the knowledge that we cannot do everything too paralyzing. Throughout *Refuse to Do Nothing*, Shayne and Kimberly are honest about their own fears and excuses and the long journey that took them toward courage.

 Before we open *Refuse to Do Nothing* and the Bible this week, take a moment and ask yourself where you are at this point in the study. As you've taken a hard look at human trafficking, modern-day slavery, and the Biblical teaching on justice, how have you been impacted? In what ways do you feel paralyzed and in what ways do you feel empowered?

Now, read chapters 13–15 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*.

 As you read, consider: Has your opinion changed since the first week about what makes a “person of power?” What first steps could you take in fighting modern-day slavery and human trafficking?

Undergirding all true Christian teaching is *hope*. Without the universe-sized love, grace, and peace offered us by God through Christ, none of this is possible. We believe that in Christ God made tangible his promise to bring wholeness to creation. The good news of Christ's gospel proclaims that in Jesus, God's Kingdom has come to us *here and now* while at the same time being not yet fully realized. When we become followers of Christ we step into his Kingdom that is here and continue his work until he brings it to completion. As a community of Christ, we clothe ourselves in God's hope and follow him into the world.

As we have seen in the previous weeks, what God wills — throughout the Old Testament and the New — is justice and righteousness (right living) on earth as it is heaven. This is accomplished by God's people infiltrating the areas they can reach like grains of salt or flickers of light. Ultimately,

when added together, these efforts preserve the world from its own decay and darkness. Our purpose as a believing community then is not to rest and wait lazily with a passive hope, but to work together to bring this active, empowering hope to life on earth. It is a hope that leads to — and requires — courage.

In Luke 18, Jesus tells his disciples a story about a courageous woman fighting for justice. She was a widow, and in this ancient, patriarchal society widows were particularly vulnerable to injustice. In addition to her tentative social standing she was suffering from actual injustice at the hands of an adversary. To make matters worse, her town had a judge who did not care about justice, fear God, or concern himself about anyone at all. Yet with the cards stacked so heavily against her, this woman with no power took on the unjust, uncaring judge with all the power — and won.

Her struggle was not easy; at first the judge refused to help. But the widow was fighting with hope and courage, and righteousness was on her side. Ultimately, the judge consented, admitting that he cared not for justice, or God, or any person, but had been undone by the widow's perseverance.

We know little about this woman, but a few things are clear — she was a long-term victim of at least three layers of injustice: from a society that offered little recourse to a woman with no husband, from her adversary who acted against her (the story does not specify how), and from the judge who lacked character or integrity and refused to act in her defense. Yet she stood up, she had hope, she had courage. She was willing to approach a powerful and unsympathetic man and argue with him, insisting he act on her behalf. She fought courageously and did not give up even when she appeared to fail. And ultimately, justice was won.

 Take a moment to read through this story in Luke 18:1–8 in your Bible. Look around at the passages before and after it and consider what Jesus is saying and to whom he is saying it. Jot down anything that stands out to you, or that you would like to study more in depth.

 Have you ever found yourself in the widow's position, or even the judge's position? Have you ever seen someone courageously fight for what was right when the odds were against them?

 What does Jesus' story tell us about the need for hope, courage, and perseverance in our fight for justice? Is there an area where you need to put aside fear and excuses and approach injustice head on?

As Christians, our hope is not meant to sustain us as we sit idly by and wait for Jesus. Our hope is meant to fuel our courage, so that we can follow Christ in bringing his Kingdom here and now, ushering in the justice and righteousness so foundational to God's character, will, and commands.

History is full of examples of men and women of God who fought against fear and inertia, and found the hope and courage to make a difference in Christ's name. Let's take a look at a few.

Martin Luther King. He was a pastor, activist, and leader in the Civil Rights Movement in the USA in the 1950s and '60s. He led thousands to fight against racial injustice using nonviolence. The road he walked was always dangerous, and he was ultimately assassinated.

"If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to Earth. If we are wrong, justice is a lie, love has no meaning. And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream."
—Martin Luther King, addressing the Montgomery Improvement Association, 1955

 **Read Amos 5:22–24.**

How did Martin Luther King apply these words — originally delivered to Israel through the prophet Amos — in his struggle for justice?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a German pastor and theologian during World War II, known for being outspoken against Hitler, the Nazi party, and the atrocities they committed. He was arrested by the Gestapo, sent to a concentration camp, and ultimately executed for his role in the fight. He is now known world-wide for his writings and teachings that implore the Christian church to be engaged, even sacrificially, in the injustices of the world.

"Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its plea for the weak . . . Christendom adjusts itself far too easily to the worship of power. Christians should give more offense, shock the world far more, than they are doing now. Christians should take a stronger stand in favor of the weak rather than considering first the possible moral right of the strong." — Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sermon on 2 Corinthians 12:9

 **Read 2 Corinthians 12:9.**

How did Dietrich Bonhoeffer use Paul's declaration to confront the Church?

Amy Carmichael. She was a young Irish woman who heard God's call to leave her life behind and follow Christ. She moved to south India where she lived and worked with true courage, fighting for individuals and communities wracked by injustice.

"It means a daily dying to self and what self wants; a daily turning to our Master with a 'Yes, Lord' to everything, even to what is most against the grain. May He quicken those who have not yet begun to live this life to see what they are missing, before it is too late." — Amy Carmichael, *Edges of His Ways*, 1955

 **Read Mark 8:35.**

What did Amy learn is gained when she gave away her life? If we truly believed this teaching, how would it empower us to hope and courage?

In chapters 5–6 of *Refuse to Do Nothing*, Kimberly describes how she felt stuck and trapped, unable to live life as she had before her eyes were opened to injustice, but unable to find the courage to act. Yet once again, this was not her final destination. God's hope worked upon her heart, planting seeds of courage. In the closing chapters that we read this week, we learn how both Kimberly and Shayne found hope and power in their relationships, their advocacy, and their common life-skills and gifts. They were ordinary people living ordinary lives... yet began to make a difference.

 Followers of Christ are given the greatest hope the world has ever known, and with this gift we can become people of courage, making a difference in our circles of influence as so many others have before us. Are there areas in your life where you need courage to act? How can God's hope empower you in these areas?

In the final moments of this study, sit quietly before God. Ask him again to speak to you and teach you.

 Reflect on what has been created in you during this study. Has God ignited a heart for justice? Is your heart broken, yet your will stronger to be a voice for the voiceless? How has God sparked your imagination for being an agent of change in your community? Are there things

you have learned that we didn't touch on in this study?

Record and journal what you are committing to take away from this study and any next steps you feel compelled to pursue.

And then go in grace and courage. Be salt. Be light. Refuse to do nothing.

Thanks be to God.

CLOSING THOUGHTS AND FURTHER RESOURCES

Dear Reader,

My prayer is that this has been a helpful, life-giving study that has caused you to think deeply about what the Bible teaches about justice and our role in bringing God's Kingdom to earth. Please remember that God is a good shepherd, who gently leads his sheep and carries our burdens — if this has been overwhelming, allow him to teach you gently. And remember also that it is the certainty of our hope in him, and in his vast unshakable love and grace that calls, compels, and strengthens us. If you do not know this love, please make seeking and finding it your starting point.

Listed below are a number of resources you can use if you would like to learn more about joining Christ's church in refusing to do nothing.

Grace and Peace to you.

Catherine McNiel

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Catherine McNiel awakens readers to the creative, redemptive work of God in their daily lives. Whether writing about the Bible or spiritual formation, she aims to infuse God's wisdom and truth into the everyday experiences of real people. Catherine serves alongside her husband in a community-based ministry, while caring for three kids, two jobs, and one enormous garden. Connect with her at catherinemcniel.com, [Facebook](#), or [Twitter](#).



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional videos and information that coincide with *Refuse to Do Nothing*, check out:

- [✓] **Refuse to Do Nothing**
www.ivpress.com/videos/4302.php
- [✓] **Do a Little Good**
doalittlegood.com
- [✓] **Kimberly McOwen Yim: Abolitionist, Author, Speaker**
kimberlyyim.com
- [✓] **Shayne Moore: Hungry World**
www.shaynemoore.com
- [✓] **West Chicago Anti-Trafficking Coalition**
www.endtraffickingnow.org

SOCIAL MEDIA

Connect with the authors and stay informed on latest news and information regarding issues surrounding the problem of human trafficking:



Refuse to Do Nothing
facebook.com/RefuseToDoNothing



West Chicago Anti-Trafficking Coalition's Fan Page
facebook.com/WestChicagolandAntiTraffickingCoalition



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Shayne Moore is the author of *Refuse to Do Nothing: Finding Your Power to Abolish Modern-Day Slavery* and *Global Soccer Mom: Changing the World Is Easier Than You Think*. She is a founder and sits on the Board of Directors at Redbud Writers Guild. Shayne is also a founder and is on the board of the West Chicagoland Anti Trafficking Coalition — a volunteer group serving individuals coming out of exploitation while engaging the community, local churches, and organizations working to end slavery in our lifetime. With an MA in theology, Shayne is an active speaker, singer, and songwriter (www.ShayneMoore.com). She is a member of the World Vision Speakers Bureau. Shayne can be found at www.facebook.com/shayne.moore and on Twitter at [@shaynemoore0](https://twitter.com/shaynemoore0).

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