



Deep Justice Journeys Leader's Guide: 50 Activities to Move from Mission Trips to Missional Living
Copyright 2009 by Kara E. Powell

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THE PARABLE OF THE CRACKED ROADS

BY KARA POWELL



BIG IDEA: Beyond meeting immediate physical needs, justice invites deeper, more holistic, and more systemic solutions.

YOU'LL NEED:

- Whiteboard or poster paper
- Pens
- Bibles
- Copies of **The Parable of the Cracked Roads** handout (pages 32-33), and/or copies of the *Deep Justice Journeys Student Journal* (pages 12-14.) You need at least three copies for your three readers, or you can make copies for everyone.
- **HAVE MORE TIME?** option: Copies of the **Not-As-Deep Service vs. Deep Justice** handout on page 34

Ideally, you would lead this discussion in a location where cracked roads or cracked concrete is visible (a parking lot, quiet side street, or a deteriorating sidewalk would work well). If that's not possible, you might want to start by commenting on either the cracked roads you've driven on that day or the cracked roads that crisscross their way through your home city.

Ask for three volunteers who like to read aloud and give each one a copy of **The Parable of the Cracked Roads** handout. Explain that each reader represents a different way youth ministries serve others.

After the three readers are finished, lead the following discussion, taking notes on the whiteboard:

Q: **How would you describe the Quick-and-Easy Physical Solution of the first youth ministry?**

Q: **How about the second youth ministry's Warm-and-Fuzzy Friendly Solution?**

Q: **You guessed it...What about the third youth ministry's Deep Solution?**

Q: **Chances are good that the goal of our upcoming mission isn't to fix cracked roads, so let's translate this parable to what we will be doing. What are the immediate physical needs of the people we'll be serving?**

Q: **How will we try to meet those needs?**

Q: **Let's think about some deeper needs of the people we've served. What are their...**

Emotional needs?

Relational needs?

Educational needs?

Spiritual needs?

Q: **What deeper structural problems might have led to those needs?**

Q: **What is preventing the locals from meeting those needs themselves?**

Q: **What, if anything, could we do to meet those needs?**

Explain: **One way to think about the difference between service and social justice is that we *serve* when we give water to people in need; we engage in *social justice* when we figure out why those folks don't have the water they need in the first place, and then work with those individuals and communities so they have access to clean water in the future.**

At this point, invite the third reader to re-read the final portion of the parable and then ask: **What would it take for us to move in the direction of the Deep Solution?**

Q: **What would we gain by trying to go deeper? What would we lose?**

Q: **What would it look like if our goal wasn't to meet the needs of the locals, but to help them discover ways to meet their own needs?**

Q: **Chances are good we won't be able to finish the Deep Solution before we head back home. How does that make you feel?**

Q: **What, if anything, can we do once we're back home to help the locals in the area we visited keep making progress toward a Deep Solution?**

Close by giving students a few minutes by themselves to pray individually about the questions and feelings that have emerged as they've contemplated asking the deeper WHY questions. If it doesn't feel safe to send out students as individuals, ask them to sit together, or walk together, but to remain in silent prayer.

HAVE MORE TIME?

Distribute copies of the **Not-As-Deep Service vs. Deep Justice** handout (page 34) to your students and review it together. Lead the following discussion:

Q: **Which parts of the table don't make sense to you?**

Q: **Which rows on the table seem most important for us to keep in mind in our upcoming work? Why?**

Q: **What can we do during our trip to help us be more like the right-hand side of the table?**

Q: **What can we do here at home, both before and after our trip?**

THE PARABLE OF THE CRACKED ROADS

HANDOUT

► PAGE 1 ◀

READER ONE:

Once upon a time, three youth ministries decided to address an unusual—and dire—problem permeating _____ . (Note to reader: Insert the name of the city or town in which you'll be serving.) Somehow, the streets and sidewalks in this town had fallen prey to alarming cracks that crisscrossed the entire town. These cracks were two to four inches wide and several feet long, making the roads dangerous and virtually undrivable. No one knew the exact cause of the cracks, yet residents felt trapped in their homes and ventured to work, school, and church only when necessary.

In an effort to fix the town's problem, the first youth ministry surveyed the damage and came up with a Quick-And-Easy Physical Solution. Their plan was to use a thin layer of topcoat to cover the cracks and render the roads drivable and the sidewalks walkable. Residents stood and watched as the adult leaders and kids poured out of their minivans, mixed up the topcoat, and spread it across the cracks like a layer of chocolate icing on a cake. Pleased with the quick repair, the townfolk hugged the kids and cheered as the youth ministry drove off in minivans.

The topcoat worked.

For a few weeks.

But the weight of the cars, the heat of the sun, and the pounding of the rain soon eroded the topcoat. The cracks reappeared, and residents retreated again to their homes. Some thought the cracks were not as severe as they'd been before the topcoat, but no one could be sure.

READER TWO:

The second youth ministry, after examining the town's broken roads, adopted a different strategy. Recognizing that there was a lot they didn't know, the students figured they'd better learn more about their town's needs and neighbors before making things right. They divided up into teams, some interviewing the residents and others visiting home improvement stores to learn about the type of cement that would best address the problem.

The neighbors had ideas for road repairs that the youth ministry never would have thought of. As a result, the youth ministry was able to develop a Warm-and-Fuzzy Friendly Solution in which the youth ministry and the neighbors worked side by side filling in the cracks with a customized cement.

The cement worked. For six whole months. But then, to the students' dismay, a new series of cracks began to crisscross the roads. Their new friends told them that even though the Warm-and-Fuzzy Friendly Solution had fixed the old cracks, an entirely new set of cracks had emerged, making the roads almost as hazardous.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE >>

Adapted from Chap Clark and Kara E. Powell, *Deep Justice in a Broken World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 11-12.

THE PARABLE OF THE CRACKED ROADS

HANDOUT

► PAGE 2 ◀

READER THREE:

The third youth ministry, having heard about the first two well-intentioned-but-failed strategies, knew that neither topcoat nor a brand new cement would make things right. Like those in the second youth ministry, these students spent several days interviewing neighbors and hearing stories and dreams about crack-free driving as well as the pain and fear caused by the unsafe conditions. Wanting to avoid the mistakes of the first two youth ministries, the third youth ministry adopted a more radical repair strategy.

The students decided to divide into two teams. The first team was tasked with repairing the current cracks. Recognizing that the very foundation of the city's roads was not right, the team members worked with their new friends to jackhammer large sections of road, dig up the resulting rubble, re-level the foundations, and then lay a brand new asphalt surface for the roads.

In order to prevent the cracks from reappearing, the second team investigated a few deeper and more complex questions. First, the kids looked into why the faulty roads had been built in the first place, and lobbied at City Hall to change the construction code so defective roads would never be built again. Second, they asked the local people why they'd been unable to fix the roads, and raised funds to provide the training in construction and asphalt-laying that their neighbors would need to keep the roads shipshape in the future.

This Deep Solution did the trick. Thanks to the new, stable foundation and the neighbors' new training, the broken roads were fixed—for good.

NOT-AS-DEEP SERVICE VS. DEEP JUSTICE

HANDOUT

Not-As-Deep Service

Service makes us feel like a “great savior” who rescues the broken.

Service often dehumanizes (even if only subtly) those who are labeled the “receivers.”

Service is something we do *for* others.

Service is an event.

Service expects results immediately.

The goal of service is to help others.

Service focuses on what our own ministry can accomplish.

Deep Justice

Justice means God does the rescuing, but often he works through the united power of his great and diverse community to do it.

Justice restores human dignity by creating an environment in which all involved “give” and “receive” in a spirit of reciprocal learning and mutual ministry.

Justice is something we do *with* others.

Justice is a lifestyle.

Justice hopes for results sometime soon but recognizes that systemic change takes time.

The goal of justice is to remove obstacles so others can help themselves.

Justice focuses on how we can work with other ministries to accomplish even more.

Adapted from Chap Clark and Kara E. Powell, *Deep Justice in a Broken World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 15-16.