

# *A Framework for Action*

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Not for Sale

*Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.  
Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.  
Isaiah 1:17*

How does one begin to process the information and emotional impact of modern slavery? Once the individual is convicted and compelled, then what? How does an entire faith community live righteously? Then, how do the individual and the faith community effectively begin to transform society?

Isaiah 1:17 begins to answer these questions and helps provide a framework for smart activism in the faith community. In one verse Isaiah uses five active verbs. The challenge to us is not only to understand and believe, but also to put our faith into action.

To begin, one must *learn*. We don't automatically know what to do, what to say, where to go, etc. We must learn. It's active. We read good books, examine statistics, attend seminars, watch films, listen to sermons. It takes effort and experience to learn to do right. Simple belief is not enough. One can believe human trafficking is evil. However, that belief alone does nothing to create new futures for the oppressed and vulnerable.

*"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."  
1 John 3:18*

Next, another active verb, *seek*. We are to pursue justice. Again, justice will not just suddenly appear and we will not find it by slothfully waiting. Justice is to be sought, pursued, and taken hold of.

*Defend* the oppressed is next, yet another active verb implying that we must stand between the oppressed and the oppressor. Learning about the issues is important, but it's not enough. Seeking justice must be specifically defined. This definition is in the word "defend". Webster's dictionary defines defend as, "to resist an attack. . . protect from harm." This implies that we will stand up against oppressors, taking the risk of

*"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."  
Micah 6:8*

personal sacrifice.

“Take up the cause” of orphans and “plead the case” for widows are the last two admonitions. The statistic that 80% of slaves in the world today are women and children make these admonitions stand out. Women and children are vulnerable to all manner of crimes. Women and children are in the majority of the powerless. Therefore, we in the faith community must advocate, actively work for, defend, plead, help, etc.

All five of these action points stand together, showing us holistic, smart activism. We are not content to only learn. Seeking is not enough. Helping the vulnerable, interceding for the orphan, and caring for the widow require smart solutions, not quick, emotional responses.

Isaiah 1:17 must be placed in proper context. Those to whom Isaiah writes are going through the motions of worshipping, but yet have no heart for the matter. They are doing evil, despising the Lord, but still seeking to earn God’s favor.

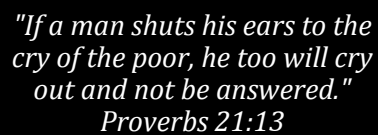
They are confused as to the nature of their relationship with God. Magic is being practiced instead of faith.

Magic is the notion that if one says the right words, practices the right deeds, then the deity will bless. In this context these magic words and deeds are part of their worship experience which they have separated from their

everyday actions. This is a theme that Isaiah continues to bring up, like in chapter 58, for example.

Isaiah calls the people back to faith. Faith which is holistic in it’s substance and form. Not just the motions of worship, but also the belief systems, attitudes, words, business practices, and community values of the people.

Isaiah 1:16-20 calls God’s people to a cooperative response: if we will turn from evil and wash ourselves, God will pour out grace and bring healing. But as stated above, the change must be holistic. Worship is not separated from correct business practices; words are not separated from action; caring for the oppressed is not separated from theology. We believe and act on that



*"If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered."  
Proverbs 21:13*

belief. We don't go in for magic, but for faith that calls both individuals and communities to right thought and right action which then help repair the world and naturally is blessed by God.

How do we do these things?

Using Isaiah 1 as the blueprint for change I offer these suggestions:

1. Faith Communities are encouraged to confess the sins of participating with oppressors, ignoring the plight of the poor, and practicing magic instead of faith. Confession must then move to repentance which is an active turning away from doing wrong. Now we are back to the first action verb of Isaiah's verse 17. Confess - Repent - Learn.

2. Faith Communities should take seriously the admonition to learn. People of faith are increasingly less and less Biblically literate. Fed sound bites and headlines which skim the surface instead of revealing what is real and true, knowledge is set aside for entertainment. Subjective, self-serving reality has replaced objective, foundational truth. People of faith should be leading the way in the pursuit of knowledge, truth, and wisdom. We

should be debating with each other, challenging easy solutions, actively researching key issues, and prophetically calling leaders to lead with truth and wisdom. All of this should be doing with a commitment to loving discourse and unity. This moves us to the second active verb and the rest of verse 17 - this is what it means to seek justice.

Specifically:

Good books

Not for Sale, David Batstone

Generous Justice, Timothy Keller

Spiritual Activism, a Jewish Guide to Leadership and Repairing the World, by Rabbi Avraham Weiss

Educational

Not for Sale's Backyard Academy, coming to a city near you. See [www.notforsalecampaign.org](http://www.notforsalecampaign.org).

Other organizations such as Rabbi's for Human Rights and various denominations hold seminars and conferences about these issues.

*"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."  
1 John 3:17-18*

3. Caring for orphans, widows, slaves, and others who are vulnerable is not an option.

We are commanded to do so over and over again in scripture. We can not use excuses that we don't know. We can not reason away the issue with excuses. Obedience is the real question.

That and effective strategies.

Specifically:

Faith communities are encouraged to find ways to address these issues not just on a global level, but also in their backyards. Serious work will be needed to form committees, find connections, study the issues, engage the congregation, etc.

The Not for Sale Campaign has a wide variety of programs, platforms, ways to give, etc., that effectively address the needs of those vulnerable to human trafficking or trapped by modern slavery. Find more at: [www.notforsalecampaign.org](http://www.notforsalecampaign.org).

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service directly cares for families in crises, leading the way serving refugees and immigrants who are vulnerable. Find more at: [www.lirs.org](http://www.lirs.org).

There are many good organizations specifically addressing care for orphans. International Child Care Ministries (<http://www.childcareministries.org>) and Children's Hopechest (<http://www.hopechest.org>) are two excellent choices.

In conclusion, it's important to remember that ancient scripture is not trapped in time, but is living and relevant for today's issues. Isaiah speaks not just to people long dead thousands of years ago, but the words are for us today. We need to heed the warning. We are invited to worship with the heart. We are challenged to turn away from magic. We are compelled to link justice to worship and live lives of vibrant faith.