A scriptural study of restitution

God’s voice speaks loudly on the subject of restitution and making things right. This resource is a study discussing this biblical concept. This is not a full doctrinal statement, but rather an examination of the range of scriptures that discuss the matter either directly or indirectly. As the term ‘restitution’ is quite charged and evokes different mental images for different people, this resource is intended to help people grasp what God says with regard to this arena of life and faith. This study is not focused on the how, but rather the why. It is intended to help you grapple with the scriptures and seek God’s voice for your own life.

Exodus 22:1-14  
Numbers 5:5-8  
Deuteronomy 15:1-11

These passages focus on Old Testament laws for the people of Israel.
  - Why do you think this was part of God’s law for his people?
  - What do these laws teach us about the heart of God?
  - What is the impact on society if these laws are followed? (Reference Deuteronomy 15:4.)
  - In the Numbers passage, there is a three-part response: confession, paying back what was stolen, and paying more to the wronged person. Why is confession not enough?
  - What could these laws look like in the lives of Christ-followers in 21st century Cape Town?

Read Luke 19:1-9  
This is an example of restitution after someone encounters Jesus.
  - How does this account shape the way Christ-followers engage with restitution?
• What is significant about Jesus’ statement in v9-10?

It is clear that Zaccheus was guilty of wrongdoing and knew with whom he needed to seek restitution. Contrast this with the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37.

• What question was the parable answering? (v29)
• Who is the neighbour of a Christ-follower?
• What does this teach us about the nature of Christ-followers’ relationships with strangers?
• What does this teach us about engaging with victims of injustice, even when we are not directly guilty of their suffering?

**Leviticus 19** tells us how we are to love our neighbours:

- Love others with possessions v9-10
- Love others with words v11-12
- Love others by our actions v13-14
- Love others in our judgments v15-16
- Love others in our attitude v17-18

• What does this look like in 21st century Cape Town?

Read **1 John 3:16-18**

• Who is the ‘brother or sister’ in v17?
• What do these verses look like in an unequal society like Cape Town?
• What does it look like to have the love of God in us (v17)?

Read **Acts 4:32-35**

• What aspect of the work of Christ in people’s lives leads them to share their possessions with others?
• Would you say that churches today can be described in this way? Why?

The motivation for being generous is rooted in the generosity of God towards us.

Read **2 Corinthians 8:1-9**

Paul is reflecting on the generosity of the Macedonian church towards the famine in Jerusalem.

• What motivation does Paul use to encourage generosity?

Being generous is rooted in the recognition that all we have comes from God.

Read **1 Chronicles 29:10-14**.
Here we see David praising God for the generosity of people towards the building of the temple.

- What has God blessed you with (think resources, education, talents, opportunities, influence etc.)?
- What changes in your perspective of these things when you recognise that they have come from God?
- Which of these can be used towards making things right in our context today?

Being part of making things right is not limited to the distribution of means.

Read Isaiah 1:17 and Zechariah 7:8-12

- Considering that the fatherless, widow, the foreigner and the poor were the most vulnerable people in Israel’s context, what can we ‘translate’ of these verses into today’s context?
- Who are the most vulnerable in our society today?
- What does Isaiah 1 tell us of speaking up? What does that look like for us now?

One challenge of engaging with issues of restitution is the sense of guilt or responsibility. The scriptures below reflect some of the dynamics around corporate guilt and confession:

Ezekiel 16:49-50
Jeremiah 22:13-19
Isaiah 58:1-12

- What were the primary sins that these prophecies were revealing and challenging?
- In 21st century South Africa, which of these challenges ring true?
- Examining Isaiah 58, what are some of the responses we are to have in light of these scriptures?

Here are two accounts of individuals confessing the sins of themselves and their people:

Nehemiah 1:1-11
Daniel 9:1-20

- What do we learn from this in terms of individual sin (my own sin) and corporate sin (the sin of my people)?
- Nehemiah was moved to action to be part of restoring the walls of Jerusalem. How can confession lead us to action?
- What does this teach us about group responsibility or accountability?
What is God’s heart for those who are victims of injustice and those who, in some way, require restitution?

Psalm 10:14
Psalm 113:7-8
Isaiah 41:17
Ezekiel 24:16
Psalm 146:7-9
Luke 4:16-21

- What do we learn about God’s character from these texts?
- How does this change the way we view and interact with those who are victims of injustice?

What other scriptures can be used to deepen our understanding of restitution and making things right?