



**ABUNDANT LIFE
FOR ALL**
A LIVING WAGE SERIES

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**On which side
of a jubilee
redistribution
would we fall?
Are we, in our
world today,
the very ones
with something
to lose from
redistribution
of wealth,
property,
and power?**



A BIBLICAL CALL FOR JUBILEE

Redistributive Justice and the Living Wage

By Susan Taylor

Living Wage as a Spiritual Issue

Money raises so many questions, dilemmas, and temptations – it always has – it is the second most frequently occurring theme in the Bible. “The standard of economic and social justice is woven into the warp and weft of the Bible,” writes theologian Ched Myers.¹ How, then, do we live into that divine vision of God’s economy of grace? What does discipleship look like in our time? And where does the conversation of a living wage – a conversation about the equitable redistribution of income that reflects the inherent human dignity of all – fit in?

Living Wage as an Act of Jubilee

Every seventh year, God’s people were to honor the Sabbath year. “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard and with your olive orchard” (Exodus 23: 10-11). Jesus scholar John Dominic Crossan writes that the law is “not about the agricultural wisdom, but about distributive justice.” Such a practice would put resources out of production for an entire year, slowing down personal accumulation and growth in inequality. Poor folks are entitled, by God’s law, to a portion of what the field – God’s field – produces. And because the processes generating inequality will persist even after the Sabbath year injunctions are followed, God encoded in the law a reset button, the Sabbath Jubilee. Crossan writes, “Since God’s inaugural distribution to the tribes and families of Israel was fair and equitable, the Sabbath Jubilee seeks to restore that original situation” on a regular basis – every fifty years.²

Jubilee was the radical remedy.

Jubilee established a periodic redistribution throughout the society. Debts were canceled. The chains of debt slavery were broken. Families separated by economic forces were restored. Foreclosed land – the primary means of production in an agrarian society – was returned. This redistribution was “neither utopian nor abstract,” according to Myers. Redistribution was “the concrete practice of restoring to the poor what is theirs by rights of community justice.” This is, indeed, good news to the poor. And for the wealthy? Such reparations are, according to Myers, their only way into God’s realm.³



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A living wage for all is ...about restructuring our entire society... in a way that reflects God's vision for economic justice."

Living Wage as God's Economic Justice

A call for a living wage for all is a call for God's economic justice. God's economy of grace provides enough for everyone, but we have structured our societal systems in such a way that we operate in scarcity and a "race to the bottom." A living wage for all is not just about raising the minimum wage – though that is an essential component. It is also about restructuring our entire society – not just our individual actions – through wealth redistribution, in a way that reflects God's vision for economic justice. When we equitably compensate people for their labor – with an emphasis on those at the bottom of the economic ladder – we necessarily rebalance an economic system that is currently designed to keep God's abundance in the possession of a very few.

Remember Jesus' conversation with the rich man who was asking how to receive eternal life? According to Myers, it is likely the man gained his vast properties in the debt/confiscation system, or inherited it from someone who did, so in spite of following all the commandments, the man has benefited from these unjust systems. The requirement to "sell what you have, give to the poor, and come follow me" is an exercise in redistribution – restoring the coveted and confiscated land back to the poor and freeing them from debt slavery. "Jesus is not inviting this man to change his attitude toward his wealth, nor to treat his servants better, nor to reform his personal life," Myers contends. "He is asserting the precondition for discipleship: economic justice." ⁴

About the author

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You may purchase the publication from United Methodist Women website: umwmissionresources.org

1) Ched Myers, *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics* (Washington, DC: Tell the Word Press, 2001), 14

2) John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of The Lord's Prayer* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 70.

3) Ched Myers and Andy R. Loving, "From Mammon to Manna: Sabbath Economics and Community Investing," workshop and DVDs produced by Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries and Foundlight Productions, 2009, Segment 1.

4) Myers, 33-34.



unitedmethodistwomen.org/living-wages

Abundant Life for All is a series addressing aspects of the United Methodist Women Living Wage for All Campaign for use by members in programs for education and action. The series is edited by E.N. West.