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Book Review: Compassionate Justice: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Two Gospel Parables on Law, Crime, and Restorative Justice

Marshall, C. D. (2012). *Compassionate justice: An interdisciplinary dialogue with two gospel parables on law, crime, and restorative justice* (Vol. 15). Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Dr. Owen D. Webb

BArrett (2013) proposed that modern restorative approaches have preceded the development of the theoretical foundations underlying practices. Christopher Marshall (2012), in his work, *An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Two Gospel Parables on Law, Crime and Restorative Justice*, explained how modern psychology, moral philosophy, and law can enhance our understanding of scripture. He challenged his readers to examine how parables can enrich our understanding of justice, mercy, law, morality, and love through a comprehensive analysis of two specific parables: The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the parable of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Marshall's in-depth examination of the contextual, legal, social, and philosophical underpinnings surrounding the parables allows him to build a case for how scripture creates a foundation to effectively employ restorative practices as a means for addressing conflict in our society. Marshall does not shy away from examining critiques of restorative justice; he turns the table and rather than having social science theory and law critique scripture, he employs scripture to enrich and critique modern conceptions of moralism and legal philosophy.

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build a case for how scripture creates a foundation to effectively employ restorative practices as a means for addressing conflict in our society.

Marshall's (2012) book is comprised of three core sections. The first two sections are tied into two terms that often pervade restorative justice philosophy: victim and offender. The first section is focused on the story of The Good Samaritan, and its focus on the Samaritan's restoration of the victim found in the ditch after being beaten by robbers. The second section is focused on the parable of The Prodigal Son, and how the father as a victim responds restoratively to his sons, the offenders in this story. The final part of the book is focused on just compassion, named as a central theme in each parable. As a result, compassion is not only the theme of the final section of the book, but is woven throughout each section. Marshall stated, "Compassion is the key ingredient that inspires and enables justice to be done" (p. 10). His emphasis on compassion stressed the need for restorative justice to be founded in community values, made possible by the care, accountability, compassion, and forgiveness that individuals bestow on other individuals.

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In Part 1, Marshall (2012) helped the reader to understand how the lawyer, or teacher of the law (Luke 10: 25), sought to justify himself and thereby justify his ability to enter heaven. He sought justification through his legal understanding of neighbour, grounded in the Jewish law. When asked by Jesus how to attain eternal life, the lawyer responded with the love commandment. The parable that follows served to support Jesus in helping the lawyer see love and law working together. In listening to the least likely of people, a Samaritan, helping the victim in the ditch, the teacher of the law experienced an individual compelled by compassion to restore this victim of crime. Marshall asserted, "What fundamentally upholds the law's authority, the parable implies, is not a strict definition of neighbor, but a generous definition of love" (p. 46). Marshall added that it is only through love that the law is fulfilled. The lawyer set out to define neighbour to satisfy himself, and he left defining a love that looked to the needs of others. In doing so, the teacher of the law understood a justice that is a restorative justice.

In the second part of his book, Marshall (2012) examined the story of the Prodigal Son. This parable is all about interpersonal relationships: the complexity that exists between the father, the youngest son, and the oldest son. In following the story of the younger son, who took his inheritance and left, Marshall noted that this son ultimately hit rock bottom; this is where the process of restoration is able to commence. The younger son's acknowledgment that he had sinned provided a foundation for reconciling his relationship with his father. When the younger son arrived home, he experienced a mercy so great that it allowed for restoration of the relationship he formerly denounced. "This truth—that there is no justice without mercy and mercy is essential to attaining justice in its thicker or restorative sense—is something that the father of the prodigal seems to understand intuitively" (Marshall, 2012, p. 219). While the two sons seem opposite in many ways, Marshall noted their similarities: a lack of love for their father, a displacement from their place in the family, and a failure to see what their father had provided for them. When the older son challenged the father's choice to celebrate his younger son's return, and

stressed to the father that he, the eldest, had never been celebrated, the father must stand on his merciful convictions. He defended his relational and restorative concept of justice, in contrast to the rule-following justice of his eldest son. The father was explicit in naming that a restorative justice serves to make relationships right.

Marshall (2012) used Part 3 to support readers in understanding how restorative justice and compassion are concepts that are integral to each other. "Restorative justice may be characterized, from a Gospel perspective, as a compassionate justice" (p. 252). He noted that compassion literally means, "to suffer with." The word "with" is core to a restorative framework, upholding a relationship that is grounded in high support and high accountability (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009). Marshall recognized that compassion allows us to observe worth and dignity in others regardless of the wrongs they have committed. This is evident in the compassion the Good Samaritan showed to the beaten stranger; it is evident in compassion the father demonstrated for each of his sons despite the wrongs they had committed. Marshall called this restorative compassion: individuals using the tools at their disposal including dialogue, love, and forgiveness in order to right relationships that have been broken.

The focus of this book is justice, whereby law and crime are examined from a restorative perspective. Justice themes are incredibly relevant in today's schools. Marshall's work encourages educators to be mindful of the injustice that takes place in schools every day. From subtle actions to clear defiance, educators must be courageous in responding to injustice, because unjust acts break relationships. As educators respond, they need to be compassionate and merciful in bringing justice to both the victims and the offenders. An educator's response is necessary for restoration, in order to bring about right relationship. Compassion is critical for educators as they seek to restore relations when conflict occurs. Compassion can be incredibly difficult when an educator responds to a student who has hurt another student.

Christopher Marshall's (2012) widespread research in theology, philosophy, and law is one of

the most comprehensive arguments for restorative justice that I have come across in my reading of restorative literature, Christian or otherwise. In using these two parables, Marshall helps us to understand how Jesus moved people from legalism and conformity toward mercy and compassion. Marshall's work also pushes us toward scripture, away from our punitive nature toward a compassionate response. In this way, we can respond to conflict, which will always impact our relationships, by seeking to restore what has been broken. When relations are made right, then we are experiencing true justice.

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