

HOW TO USE YOUR LAW DEGREE FOR LIFE CHANGING IMPACT

By: Bruce Strom

Dee couldn't shake the feeling she should be doing something more with her law degree. She didn't miss the contention and time constraints of the practice she left behind to raise children, but should she be doing more to help others?

Randy could see the finish line of a long legal career. He was still healthy and had a wealth of experience. He couldn't shake the feeling that he could use his skills to serve others. But how?

Nancy lived on a six minute clock. She enjoyed law but something was missing. There had been great dreams of helping people when in law school. She worked for a Christian firm, but the business and busyness of law consumed her. Nancy longed for eternal impact - a way to integrate her faith and profession.

How About You?

Can you relate? I can. I was 27 years old when I formed my law practice. Eight years later I was consumed by the demands of time a large, multi-office practice demanded. But I was missing God's bigger purpose for me. God demanded my attention through a series of trials and suffering. I could build my kingdom or I could join Him in advancing His.

But advancing that kingdom is nearly impossible when we are frantically busy. We have to stop. Time cannot be our idol. Time is a gift from God and He asks us to steward it well. That means tithing a portion of the time He has given us to love neighbors through legal ministry.

But...

"But I'm not a poverty law expert."

"But I really don't have time."

"But I wouldn't even know where to begin."

I know. But here's the only question you need to answer - "Do you trust God?" Nothing else. He has given you a holy discontent for a reason. You may not want to feel discontented. The thought of taking action may be overwhelming. But God is bigger than all this and you are not alone.

After nearly 30 years of legal work assisting tens of thousands of low-income neighbors in need, I can assure you of the blessing that awaits if you will step out in faith. You can ignore God's call - I did. But trust me when I say that will not go well for you. You will end up with regrets, looking back wondering whether your legal career had any lasting impact.

Why God Wants You

"The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and he was appalled that there was no one to intercede." Isaiah 59:15-16

God sees injustice. Injustice is an affront to His character. So God sent his Son to endure all the injustice of this world. Jesus took our sins upon himself. He defeated injustice at the cross. True justice is possible because of the gospel. That is good news.

But is that good news just for you? Why are you blessed to live where you live? To have a law degree? Is it just for

you or does God have a bigger purpose for all He has provided you?

The average income in the United States is \$51,939. If you are average (not likely) you are in the top 1.9% of the wealthiest people on Earth. You earn more than 6.4 billion other people on the planet. As an attorney, you have special skills and a powerful license shared by only 0.4% of the population.

Less than one-half of one percent of Americans are attorneys and yet we hold a monopoly on the justice system which impacts all Americans.

America Has A Problem

I grew up reciting the pledge of allegiance. As a child I took for granted the final words, "...with liberty and justice for all." They had to be true. We are the wealthiest, most advanced nation in history. But the truth is we rank 97th in the world for providing affordable access to justice according to the World Justice Index.

The first code of ethics in America for lawyers stated: "I shall never close my ear or heart because my client's means are low. Those who have none, and who have just causes, are, of all others, the best entitled to sue or be defended; and they shall receive a due portion of my services, cheerfully given." Yet pulling together data from all the states that report pro bono hours by attorneys demonstrates 68% of lawyers don't volunteer any hours.

At the same time the most recent statistics demonstrate 71% of low-income households (60 million people) experienced at least one civil legal problem over the course of a year and 86% of those households received inadequate or no legal help.

God Has A Solution

YOU are God's solution to the problem of injustice. He created you and gifted you for a purpose. That purpose is to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with Him (Mic. 6:8). And it's easier than you think!

I have twin sons. Joseph worked as a lifeguard in the summer. One day he saved a little boy. Nothing grand. The boy simply wandered too far and found himself in over his head. The fear on his face was evident. Uncertainty paralyzed him. Before going under, Joseph jumped in the pool and gently guided him back to sure footing. Legal ministry is like that.

You have neighbors who find themselves in over their head. Fear and uncertainty overwhelm them. They don't know where to turn for help or even if their problem is legal. Without help, things could quickly get worse. But with a gentle calming influence and a nudge in the right direction, they can find sure footing. Might not seem like much, but the impact is profound.

Every day, notes are received across the country from grateful clients. Whether a single mom, homeless veteran, elderly grandparent or hard-working immigrant, they come needing guidance. They are afraid, often overwhelmed. What may be a simple landlord issue to you is a terrifying fear of homelessness to them. Confusing contracts, consumer abuse, and financial issues are often involved. Sometimes, the issues aren't legal or aren't worth pursuing, but knowing that makes all the difference.

As one client expressed, "Thank you so much. I was overwhelmed but your prayers and my new plan give me hope for moving forward." Jane.

Neighbors Need Your Help

Tina nervously walked into the gospel justice center with her three year old son in tow. The warmth of the person who greeted her helped put her at ease. She was directed to coffee while her son grabbed a cookie and

dove into the toys. Tina smiled, something she had not done in a long time.

The love of Tina's life had abandoned her. She didn't know how to protect her son. She felt overwhelmed and afraid. She looked over the clipboard in her hand and cried. A volunteer came over and comforted her.

Tina was met by an attorney who led her to an office. When the first thing the attorney did was ask if it was alright to pray, Tina cried. Her parents had given her money to see another lawyer who kept looking at the clock as he explained how they would "annihilate" the father of her son and make him pay. The contrasting compassion in this meeting was overwhelming.

"From that first moment walking into the office, I felt God's presence. The volunteers, the woman who greeted me with kindness at the desk - each had a hand in healing my crushed spirit." - Tina

Tina wrote: "I cried as the attorney prayed for me and also for my husband and son. No one shrunk back from me. They wrapped their arms around me. They promised protection through their legal knowledge, yet demonstrated God's healing love."

You have the opportunity to demonstrate God's healing love. What will you do? Will you return to your routine? Or by faith, will you stop to serve your neighbor? That was the choice Jesus presented another lawyer as he encouraged that lawyer - and YOU - to 'Go and Do likewise'. (Lk 10:37).

How To Use Your Law Degree For Life Changing Impact

Perhaps you are excited about the opportunity, but still

concerned about time. I understand. I started Administer Justice in 2000 all alone. I was overwhelmed by all the work that needed to be done. Establishing a not-for-profit corporation, building a board, raising money, marketing, serving clients, and creating legal, accounting and programming systems is really hard work. But you don't have to do that.

Administer Justice invites you to become a chapter. That means you operate under our corporate umbrella. We cover your insurance (both malpractice and general liability), take care of all corporate filings, and allow you to focus on ministry. All we ask is that you commit to training, invite others to volunteer, and give 3-4 hours a month on a Saturday morning.

Once you become a chapter, you will receive access to our member area with significant resources and a powerful team of people doing legal ministry across the country. You can join monthly phone calls for prayer and practical support. You will receive a care package with all the supplies you need, a professional banner for your site location, e-mail, and your own web page to promote the chapter. You will also receive a custom online volunteer and case management system called Justice Center Online which will allow you to operate efficiently and track impact. We will pay for you to travel to see another legal ministry in action and provide orientation training.

And all of this is at NO cost to you. God prompted a generous donor to launch your ministry. Going forward you can raise money through your web page and we will do all the receipting and reporting. You will collect \$30 administrative fees from clients and remit those to us. This provides dignity and value to the client while allowing us to sustain your insurance, database, web site, donations, and support.

Once a year we will also pay for an annual conference called Restore 117 where you can meet others from across the country, hear powerful speakers and receive practical tools - www.administerjustice.org/restore/.

Let's do justice together!

There are multiple reasons to say "no" to doing legal ministry.

But there is one reason to say "yes"!

One neighbor on the Jericho Road. One of "the least of these."

Jesus said each time we stop to serve one neighbor in need we serve Him (Mt. 25:40).

You will not serve alone. But will you serve?

We want to explore this opportunity further with you.

Please reach out to Judith at jmiller@administerjustice.org to further the conversation on how you can have life-changing impact through legal ministry.