

Housing and land use is a Biblical (and therefore spiritual and moral) issue.

When the Bible addresses the issue of housing it specifically is framed as an issue of security. In Micah 4:4, the prophet describes a day of restoration where all shall sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees and no one will make them afraid. In Isaiah 32:17-18, restoration again specifically identifies that people will live in peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. Housing, or one's own plot of land and secure dwellings, is part of the Kingdom vision.

If housing is part of the Kingdom design, then our task in bringing the Kingdom to earth is to prioritize the security that housing creates for all of God's people, regardless of their ability to own or their worth by society's standards. We unfortunately live in a world fraught with homelessness, transience, eviction, segregation, and exclusion from the housing market.

God's vision of home and security is not only perverted by the stark reality that many people all over the world have no or sub-standard housing that creates a lack of security, but also by the lust for land, ownership and possession of property so that some people have an accumulation of property and land while others have none. In Micah 2:1-2, God condemns those with power in the society who were caught up in a similar lust for accumulation. They devised plans to covet land, seize houses, oppress the householder, and drive women and children from their homes; and they carried out those plans because they had the power to do so.

Though most of us do not directly plan and carry out the actions Micah addresses, we have become accustomed to a lust for land and property. We tolerate when those with power demolish affordable housing to make way for high-end condominiums, when they seize houses from families that cannot afford their mortgage on minimum wage jobs, and when they clear women and children from public housing and prevent them from returning. In the midst of this atmosphere, we also find ourselves buying into bigger and better properties to increase our own equity and wealth.

Part of the reason that these egregious acts of sin are tolerated is because we are part of a society in which the values of personal responsibility, economic liberty, and the owning of property are central tenets (ie the Declaration of Independence which guarantees the "pursuit of happiness [property]"). Throughout American history, wealth is accumulated through property, and property ownership has defined success and personal worth (ie "The American Dream"). However, as Christians, we are not only members of American society, but we are also members of the Kingdom.

The values of American society and the values of the Kingdom of Heaven are in conflict, particularly around the issue of ownership. God's law in Leviticus 25:18 reminds us that we are but aliens and tenants on the land that God owns. Living in a society that prioritizes ownership and property accumulation does not change the fact that the Earth is the Lord's; and everything in it, *and built upon it*, also belongs to our King. We are merely stewards of the land that we own. Stewardship demands that we must always use the land in a way that honors God and builds security. In addition, we must remember that anything we own, by society's standards, does not define our worth. Jesus identified the man with excess property (and excess harvest) a fool (Luke 12:13-21). Our worth is defined by Jesus, who died for us in spite of the fact that we were not worthy of his sacrifice.

We must move from being people who pledge allegiance to the values of the ownership society that says our land, our homes and our property are truly ours and make us successful, to being a people who pledge allegiance to the values of the Kingdom truly understanding that the land, our homes and our property belong to God and do not define our worth or our success. We must deny the lust for ownership that our culture perpetuates and become people who advocate that all people be given access to the security that housing brings. Following the example of the early church, we also must reassess our understanding of personal property in the light of the Jubilee that Jesus announced (see Luke 4:18 and Acts 4:32-37).

Owning property is not a sin, nor is finding security in the home that you have or the land that you own. What God mandates of us is that we use the power we have not to lust for more land, property or more homes for our money, but to use the power we have to advocate that all have access to the security and stability that housing brings.