

‘What does the Bible say about poverty?’

Leader’s Notes



Methodist Relief & Development Fund

Thank you for using MRDF’s Study Pack to explore what the Bible says about poverty. We hope that your group finds it useful and thought-provoking. These notes are to be used alongside the Study Pack booklet.

Tips for using this pack

- Adapt any of the material to suit your group’s needs
- Everyone in the group, including yourself, will need a copy of the study pack (phone 020 7467 5132 to order more free copies)
- Prepare materials for each week in advance to ensure that everything is ready in time
- Involve other group members before and during the sessions in reading, praying or preparing materials
- Most importantly, read through the Bible passage and discussion questions before the meeting and pray for your group as you prepare to study them together.

Each session follows the same outline and should last no more than 90 minutes:

▶ **Getting started** A short warm-up activity to start people thinking about the topic

■ || **Bible reading and discussion questions** Not every discussion question is answered in the notes, as many depend on the group’s experience and opinions. However there are some suggestions and guidance

▶▶ **Activity** An interactive response to what has been learnt or discussed. Photocopiable templates needed for some of the activities are available on www.mrdf.org.uk

† **Closing prayer**

◆ **This week** A simple action for each group member to do or think about in the week ahead. It might be appropriate to share these at the start of the following session.

Week one

Equipment needed:

- pens, post-it notes
- cards with facts written on them (shown overleaf and photocopiable template on www.mrdf.org.uk).

Main focus: Introduction to poverty, how it is measured, why and how Christians should respond.

▶ Getting started

At the start, spend some time in welcome, introductions and finding out what people expect from this course. This is especially important for a new group.

Ask everyone to write two or three definitions of poverty on post-it notes. First, give these examples:

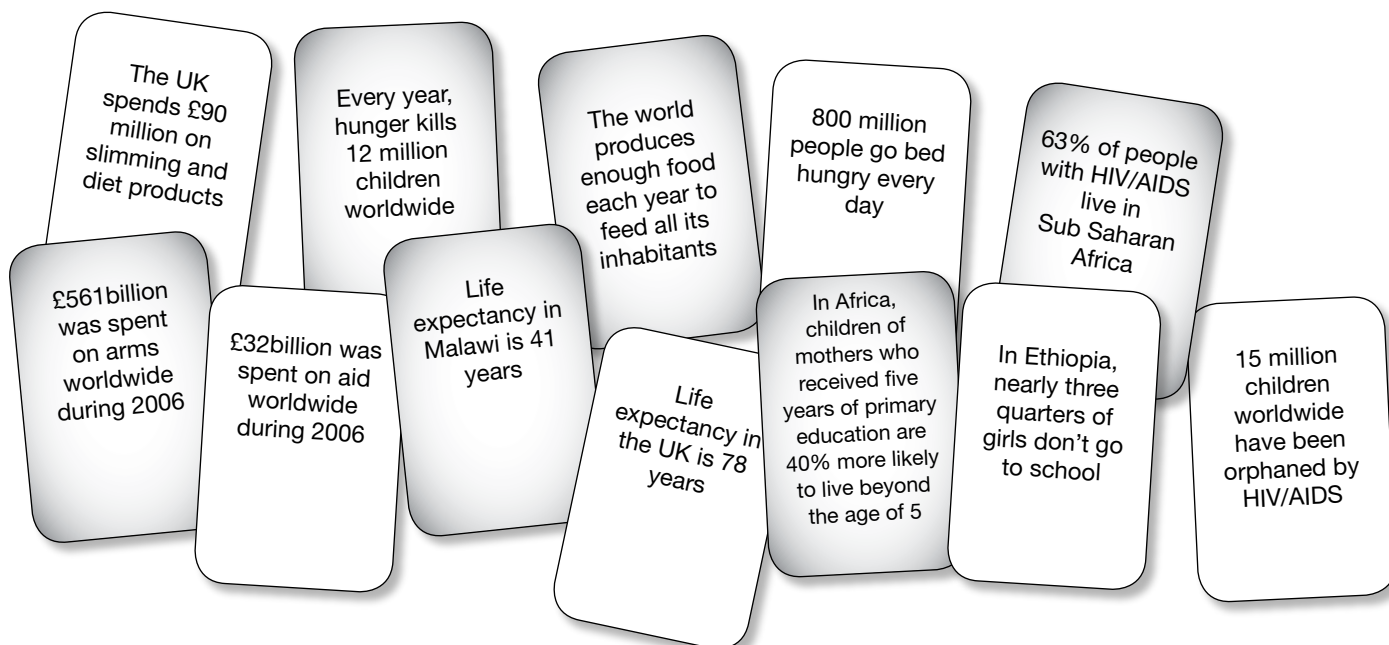
Poverty is...

- Being at the bottom of the pile
- Not having enough money to buy what you need
- Having no access to health and education
- Spiritual as well as economic.

Display the definitions so everyone can see them for use later in the session.

Next, place the fact cards (overleaf) in the centre or pass them round, allowing people time to look through them all.

Ask everyone to choose one card that made an impact on them and in pairs to share their reactions to the cards that they chose. How does it make them feel? What questions does it leave them with?



■ Bible reading

In this psalm, the writer pours out his heart to God about the injustice that he sees. It is a creative picture examining the relationships between the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor.

|| Discussion questions

- Q1** Ask everyone in the group to respond with a word or a sentence.
- Q3** Orphans were likely not only to be poor, because of the lack of a family wage earner, but also were at risk of exploitation. Orphans could not inherit property or become apprentices unless someone was willing to sponsor them. In today's world, millions of people have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Other groups especially affected by poverty could include women, who still often lack equal rights to inheritance, land ownership or work; refugees or people living with HIV/AIDS. MRDF focuses on marginalised groups within poor countries.
- Q5** Encourage the group to think about inequality within both rich and poor countries.
- Q8** Reasons could include: an expression of faith, imitation of God or Biblical command.
- Q9** Encourage group members to think about their own response, as well as the role of world leaders, the church as a whole and charities.

▶▶ Activity

Do as a group or play some quiet background music and allow individuals time to write their own responses.

Week two

Equipment needed:

- These items with price tags/labels attached: a jar of honey (£70); an exercise book (£10); a pint of milk (£2); a packet of seeds (£1).

Main focus: what wealth means to us and to the people that MRDF partners work with, the problems of wealth and how to use it well.

▶ Getting started

Quiz answers are:

- 77 people have access to clean water
- 67 people are not be able to read
- 51 people are malnourished
- 1 person has a university education
- 5 people control one third of the world's wealth
- 33 people live on 3% of the world's wealth.

■ Bible reading

A preoccupation with becoming rich is still going strong in 21st century Britain. Read this quote from the author of 'How to Get Rich' published in 2006: "I don't regret my wealth. I regret that I went on [getting richer], but getting rich is not an art form, it's a drug – there's no way out. It's an addiction, and that's one of the downsides to it." *Felix Dennis.*

II Discussion questions

Split the group into two, one group looking at each passage, to answer questions 1-4. Share answers from these and then, as a whole group, read Luke 18:18-30 and consider the remaining questions.

- Q1** Could include pride, forgetting God, greed, exploitation, dissatisfaction, lack of sympathy for those in poverty.
- Q2** Wealth is a gift, but only appears to be a blessing when enjoyed, shared with others and not gained through exploitation.
- Q3** Both poor and rich are adversely affected by poverty and inequality. Poverty is not just a concern for those who suffer directly as a result.
- Q5** The idea that wealth, despite its pitfalls, was a blessing from God was conventional wisdom. Wealth was not to be used to exploit others, but if you followed God, it could be your reward.
- Q7** Companies with high profits and high earning individuals are seen as examples of success; thousands of people appear on TV game shows each year with the hope of getting rich quick. A brief look at the day's newspapers will give you more ideas.
- Q8** Neither Jesus nor Peter lived an easy life surrounded by wealth and security. Try to bring out the idea of renewed relationships coming before material wealth.

▶▶ Activity

Read the second part of Annie's story (p.5). Wealth for her might mean the security of a small loan, the support of a group or resources to help her to earn a living for herself.

Show the items with price tags. Refer to Annie's story, and then to the milk with the £2 price tag. Once Annie's group have their cow, the cost of feeding it for a fortnight will only be £2. But that small amount of money can make a big difference in helping her to make a living.

Ask the group to guess what the other items represent, and then explain how MRDF partners are using this kind of help to bring new opportunities for people in poverty.

- Seeds (£1) represent the cost of planting a fruit tree in Nepal, which produces crops to eat and sell.

- Exercise book (£10) represents the cost of training two women in Ghana how to manage their money.
- Honey (£70) represents the cost of a beehive and bee-keeping equipment used by young people in Ethiopia to make and sell honey.

All of these items represent opportunities for people to earn an independent living for themselves in future. None of the amounts on the price tags seem incredibly large or would make us particularly wealthy, yet they can make a huge difference.

Week three

Equipment needed:

- world map, coloured wool, scissors and blu tac.
- latest campaign action materials from one of MRDF's campaigning partners: Labour Behind the Label, Fairtrade Foundation or Tourism Concern (available from www.mrdf.org.uk).

Main focus: How our lives and choices connect us to people in poor countries and how we can make simple changes which benefit others.

■ Bible reading

These rules were given to a new community: the Israelites coming out of slavery in Egypt and into their own land. The Biblical laws are so important in setting out a vision of society that they are still studied and remain the foundation of many laws today.

II Discussion questions

- Q1 & Q2** No person or area of life is exempt from obeying these laws. This passage covers family relationships, work, worship, criminal justice, community relationships, and financial dealings, but try to focus the discussion on the laws that are concerned with preventing poverty.
- Q3** These groups could be vulnerable to exploitation or their needs could easily be overlooked.
- Q4 & Q5** Consider how these laws reflect what we know of God's character and priorities.

Q6 & Q7 Loving your neighbour doesn't just refer to people that you know and like: all are entitled to respect, protection and the means to make a living. As a group, find some examples, for instance not always choosing the cheapest deal, but buying Fairtrade even if it is more expensive.

▶▶ Activity

- a) Shopping for food – produce grown overseas.
- b) Driving to work – pollution produced by cars contributes to global warming; petrol prices dependent on international alliances and conflicts.
- c) Buying new clothes – cotton grown and clothes manufactured overseas.
- d) Going on holiday – staff at tourist resorts, pollution from air travel contributing to climate change.

Encourage the group that there are ways to have a positive impact in a 'global village'. As an example, look at the campaign materials from one of MRDF's partners for ideas of how to change habits and to lobby governments and companies to change.

You could fill in postcards or letters together if those are available (www.mrdf.org.uk will have the latest information).

† Closing Prayer

Place the world map in the centre of the room. As you pray for yourselves and your global neighbours, encourage people to use the wool and blu tac to join the UK/Ireland to the country on the map that they are praying for.

Once everyone who wants to has added some wool to the map, close with the prayer in the Study Pack.

Week four

Equipment needed:

- Activity cards.

Main focus: The importance of rich and poor working together to tackle poverty.

▶ Getting started

Divide into teams; give each team 2 minutes to write down as many different types of 'partner' as possible, for example: marriage, partner in crime, business partner, dance partner, tennis partner, development partner.

Characteristics of partnership could include equality, working together, communicating, a shared responsibility and goal.

■ Bible reading

Today's session looks at how Paul urges three churches to work in partnership to help each other.

After many years of helping new churches, the church in Jerusalem has fallen on hard times. The church in Macedonia has got in touch with Paul because of its desire to help. Paul now writes a letter to the church in Corinth, a city noted for its wealth, more than 1,000 miles away from Jerusalem.

|| Discussion questions

Q1-4 Answers should point towards a model of giving which is generous (copying the example of Christ), available to everyone (both rich and poor have something to give) and which aims to promote equality between people. It is a privilege for Christians to be able to give to help others.

Q5 The Corinthian church has been eager to give in the past, but has not followed through its early enthusiasm.

Q8 & Q9 Live Aid inspired thousands of people to give and act in response to the 1985 famine in Ethiopia and raised millions of pounds as well as huge public awareness about poverty in Africa. These questions are to challenge us to think about our attitudes towards those in poverty, not to play down the achievements of Live Aid, including its role in preparing the ground for

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY. Encourage the group to think about the value of giving, which enables us to use our gifts and respond to God's call to share and care for others.

▶▶ Activity

Distribute the cards equally between the group members. Each card has the name of a group or details of an activity (see below). Everyone works together to match the group with the activity that it carried out.

Who?	What?
Churches in the UK	Providing funds
MRDF	Sending funds, monitoring the project and helping local partner organisation with training and support
Voluntary Action for Development (MRDF local partner in Uganda)	Finding funds, overseeing the building of a well, training village volunteers and teachers in hygiene education and training masons to build the well
Kitemu local government officials	Incorporating work of the project into development plans for the whole area, making sure there is no duplication
Everyone in Kitemu	Clearing the ground for a new well and helping collect materials for building, electing people to a committee that looks after the well
Masons in Kitemu	Constructing the new well
Volunteers in Kitemu	Looking after the well and training neighbours in Kitemu in good hygiene

After the activity, discuss these questions:

- In the light of 2 Corinthians 8:12, which group do you think gave the most?
- What would have happened if one of the partners had pulled out?
- What are the characteristics of a development project like this one?

Try to highlight how important it is that all the different groups gave according to their abilities. A project like this aims to bring long-term benefits to the whole community and involves the people who will benefit in planning and decision-making.

† Closing Prayer

Our gifts come in response to God's extravagant, undeserved generosity to us: spend some time in thanksgiving for what you have received from God in the past week and during your Christian life.

Encourage the group to name some of these things out loud as you pray together.

To close, read 2 Corinthians 8:9 again.

You could follow up this session by asking someone from your church who has been on a mission or development project overseas to speak to the group, not primarily to talk about what was being done for or with the poor, but instead what they received from the people that they met and how they were changed by the experience.

Week five

Equipment needed:

- Envelopes, pens, writing paper.
- Latest action cards or sample letter on trade justice (from www.mrdf.org.uk or the MRDF office).

Main focus: The Bible's condemnation of unfairness and injustice, particularly in trade, how it affects people in poor countries and how we can challenge it.

▶ Getting started

Let your group know that this week's **Getting Started** activity will be a bit different. They have to imagine themselves into someone else's situation and to think carefully about how to respond.

Read out the following, followed by the text in the Study Pack booklet:

"Imagine you are Kenya's finance minister. Twenty years ago your country was on its way up, with a growing economy and businesses beginning to thrive. You currently have a trade deal with the European Union (EU) that enables you to sell your products in their markets."

Divide into smaller groups. Each one has to select which of the four solutions they would prefer. After a short time of discussion, they need to justify their choice to the whole group.

After the smaller groups have explained their suggested course of action, point out the following problems with each one:

- The EU has not suggested any alternative agreements. You would first have to reject this agreement, without knowing whether an alternative would be better or worse.
- You have far fewer negotiators and researchers than EU countries and would struggle to afford more time, people and resources.
- Where is the extra money going to come from once tax revenue has decreased? The EU has not offered any extra aid to help countries like Kenya to adapt to the changes. Anyway, World Trade Organisation rules forbid Kenya from increasing subsidies to its producers.
- You receive a lot of aid money from the EU, can you risk pulling out of the talks?

Group members may be left feeling frustrated and that they have been part of an unfair process. A

report from Traidcraft and Kenyan organisation EcoNews Africa has a similar conclusion: *"Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) as they are currently being proposed would undermine every aspect of Kenya's sovereign policy plans. There is nothing to gain and everything to lose."*

■ Bible reading

The book of Micah speaks out strongly against idolatry, corruption and religious practice that is not linked to social justice.

|| Discussion questions

- Q2** The Getting Started section highlights the continuing relevance of injustice in trade.
- Q3** There is a contrast between what we think God wants from us, and the kind of behaviour that God actually desires. The worshippers think that sacrifices will 'win over' God so that their daily lives and exploitative practices can remain unchanged.
- Q4** The prophet Micah was a political outsider. Despite coming from a small village, a community of poor farmers and shepherds, he spoke God's word to the rich and powerful and is still remembered for that today. Even though we may feel ill equipped or not well connected enough to make a difference, we are still called to get involved in political issues and to speak out.
- Q6** Many people remember the shock of seeing global injustice for the first time, for example through Live Aid or **MAKE POVERTY HISTORY** or a personal experience of unfairness.
- Q7** God is able to forgive us and also to bring an end to our sinful behaviour.

▶▶ Activity ◆ This week

Distribute the latest action postcards or copies of the sample letter from MRDF for everyone to fill in during the session or to do at home during the week.

Collect the letters and/or postcards at the end of the session. Group members may wish to contribute money for stamps.

To find out more about European Partnership Agreements visit www.traidcraft.org.uk

† Closing Prayer

As an introduction, read John 2:13-16.

Week six

Equipment needed:

- Flip chart paper and pens.

Main focus: How a vision of a new heaven and a new earth can inspire us to campaign for justice for the poor.

▶ Getting started

- a) Martin Luther King (US civil rights leader in the 1960s)
- b) Frederick Douglass (former slave and abolitionist campaigner in the mid 19th century)
- c) Desmond Tutu (Archbishop of Cape Town in the 1980s and opponent of apartheid in South Africa).

All these Christian campaigners were motivated by a strong vision of how God's world ought to be and what it could become.

■ Bible reading

This vision comes at the end of Isaiah. Their vision of how the world should be motivated prophets like Isaiah to speak out against injustice and to warn leaders and their people where it might lead.

|| Discussion questions

- Q2** Renewed relationships of all kinds are an important feature of this passage.
- Q4** This vision was given to a people recently returned from exile where they would have lost their own property and instead have had to work for others.
- Q7** This will vary depending on your church but it could include: practical (buildings, people, publicity) and spiritual (hope, passion, long-term commitment).

▶▶ Activity

Collect the group and church ideas from each pair, and write them all on a big sheet of paper.

Is there one idea in each category on which the group can agree? Decide together how will you take these forward.

Please let us know about the actions that your group is taking on the feedback form overleaf.

† Closing prayer

You could use this prayer as a meditation, by getting a different person to each read a section of the prayer, followed by a short silence.

Our Father and Mother,
who is in us here on earth,
holy is your name in the hungry who share their
bread and their song.

Your Kingdom come,
which is a generous land which flows with milk
and honey.

Let us do your will,
standing up when all are sitting down,
and raising our voice when all are silent.

You are giving us our daily bread in the song of the
bird and the miracle of the corn.

Forgive us for keeping silent in the face of
injustice,
and for burying our dreams, for not sharing bread
and wine, love and land, among us, now.
Don't let us fall into the temptation of shutting the
door through fear;
of resigning ourselves to hunger and injustice;
of taking up the same arms as the enemy.
But deliver us from evil.

Give us the perseverance and the solidarity to look
for love,
even if the path has not yet been trodden,
even if we fail;
so we shall have known your Kingdom which is
being built forever and ever.
Amen.

References

Week one

Facts from: Oxfam report, Arms Without Borders 2006; CIA World Factbook, www.cia.gov; www.just1world.org/food-and-hunger.htm; 12 Myths About World Hunger from www.foodfirst.org; www.just1world.org/health.htm; DFID, Developments magazine issue 34, 2006; UNAIDS/WHO Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic.

Week two

Felix Dennis, quoted in The London Paper, 21 September 2006.

Week six

Martin Luther King, quote from www.usconstitution.net/dream.html

Frederick Douglass, quote from 'The Meaning of July 4th for the Negro' www.pbs.org

Desmond Tutu, quote from Foreword to 'Transfiguration' by John Dear.

Latin American Lord's Prayer from www.twpcommunityministry.org, permission sought



Feedback form

Thank you for using this Study Pack. Please let us know what you found useful or what we could improve:

How did you hear about the Study Pack?

- Flier from MRDF
 - MRDF website or e-newsletter
 - Link mailing
 - Word of mouth
 - At an event
 - Church Times/Methodist Recorder advert
 - From another organisation or publication (please specify)
-

How many people were in your group?

- Fewer than 5
- 5-10
- 10-20
- 20+

What was the mix of ages in your group?

What kind of group did you use the Pack with?

- House group
 - Women's group
 - Youth group
 - Lent group
 - Other (please specify)
-

Have you used an MRDF Study Pack before?

- Yes
- No

Have you used any other MRDF resources before? If so, which ones?

How useful did you find the following parts of the Pack? (1 is very useful, 5 is not at all useful)

Prayers	1	2	3	4	5
Activities	1	2	3	4	5
Bible reading and discussion questions	1	2	3	4	5

What did you like most about the Study Pack?

What did you like least about the Study Pack?

What actions will your group be taking in response?

Name

Name of church

Please return to:

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Methodist Relief &
 Development Fund

MRDF makes **small miracles** possible for those living in the world's poorest communities through: long-term development, emergency relief and campaigning against the causes of poverty