

Reflect
Speak up
Take action

Act on Poverty

A Short Course for Churches & Groups

2 hours + a break

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 mins)

God of justice and compassion,
you are present with us.
Help us to listen to one another with care.
Give us open minds and hearts, ready to learn
and be challenged.
Inspire in us hope for change.
Fill us with energy and determination,
That we may act for the good of our neighbours.
Amen.



Talking Poverty, Talking Politics (10 mins)

Poverty and politics aren't easy subjects to discuss. We each bring different views and life experiences to our conversations.

Access all audio and video at
caid.org.uk/actonpoverty

Listen to Methodist Vice President (2023-24) Deacon Kerry Scarlett talk about her family's experience of poverty.



Kerry encourages us to be mindful of the assumptions we make about other people.
It is important to avoid stereotypes about poverty and those it affects.

Political discussions can be divisive but Christianity has a lot to say about how we should do politics and what our priorities should be. Jesus taught about the issues and everyday choices facing ordinary people and those in power. He wasn't afraid to confront unjust power structures that were harming the very people they were supposed to nurture and protect.

Take a moment to agree some simple ground rules for your group discussion, such as:

- We will listen to each other – no one will interrupt or speak over someone else.
- We will strive to disagree well, showing respect for one another and asking questions without judgement or hostility.
- We will keep confidential any personal information shared in our discussions.

What is poverty? (10 mins)



Let's look at one possible set of definitions.

Discuss in your group how you would answer this question.

Would you say that someone was or was not in poverty if...

- ***they had enough to buy the things they really needed, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted?***
- ***they had enough to eat and live, but not enough to buy other things they needed?***
- ***they had not got enough to eat and live without getting into debt?***

(Definitions from the British Social Attitudes Survey 2023)

There are lots of ways to measure poverty, from the number of people who are destitute (unable to afford the fundamentals of life) to those whose income is below the minimum level to have an acceptable standard of living in a particular country.

Poverty is complex in its effects. It is not just a matter of finances but can impact physical and mental health, access to education and services, and our sense of self. People who experience poverty often face discrimination and marginalisation.

Listen to Disability Activist and Anti-Poverty Campaigner Stef Benstead talk about the pressures that come with living in poverty.

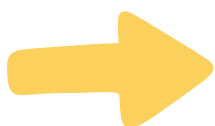


Of course poverty isn't just an issue in the UK. More than half of the people in the world living below the International Poverty Line of \$2.15 per day live in sub-Saharan Africa.

Listen to Stephen Amusala from the Anglican Development Service in western Kenya talk about the impact of poverty on communities.

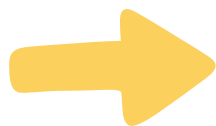


Look together at the following figures. Do they surprise you?



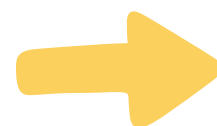
3.8 million

...people in the UK experienced destitution in 2022 (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)



More than 50%

... of the world's poorest people are children (Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023)



25 countries

... were able to halve multidimensional poverty* between 2005 and 2021 (Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023)

*Multidimensional poverty is a measure that uses health, education, mortality and living standards as well as income.

The Anti-Poverty Prophet: Amos 5.11-12, 16, 21-24 (5 mins)



Choose someone in your group to read this passage aloud.

... because you trample on the poor
and take from them levies of grain,
you have built houses of hewn stone,
but you shall not live in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.
For I know how many are your transgressions
and how great are your sins—
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe
and push aside the needy in the gate.

...

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord:

...

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them,
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like water
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Take a few minutes to think about what stands out to you in this passage. You might want to underline some words or phrases.

Speaking Prophetically about Poverty (15 mins)

Amos was an anti-poverty prophet in the 8th century BCE. Choose two readers in your group to read aloud the following reflections on what we find in the passage above.

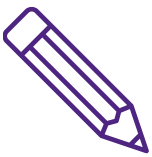
Reader 1: The fact that some people are rich and others poor is not an accident, Amos says. It is a result of deliberate exploitation carried out by the rich to create and increase their wealth. The rich **'trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain'**. This might be a reference to an unfair taxation system, or to bribery, fraud and corruption on the part of the powerful. It could also point to a form of indentured servitude. This is where people are forced to take on a debt and then to work to repay it. Today this is one of the techniques used to trap people in modern slavery.

Reader 2: Amos speaks of those who **'push aside the needy in the gate'**. Later in the same passage he refers to people who have failed to **'establish justice in the gate'** (5.15). The gate in Amos' time was the place where official business went on. It was where decisions were made by those with power and significant transactions were carried out. The prophet criticises those who use wealth and power to "game the system". The powerful, he says, are making cheating a routine part of how they live and govern.

Reader 1: For Amos the division between rich and poor goes against what God intends for creation. It might seem at first like the wealthy are doing well and are enjoying a good life. But Amos' proclaims that this cannot last: **'you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.'** These verses suggest a time of judgment yet to come. Those who act unjustly will not profit forever.

Reader 2: God speaks through Amos and rejects the worship and praise offered by those who are participating in injustice and oppression. Their songs will not be heard and their offerings will not be welcomed until 'justice rolls down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.'

What does it take to be a prophet? Jot down here some qualities that you think a prophet needs or any examples of modern day prophets that you can think of. Take a few minutes to chat with the person next to you or with the group about what you have written.



Your group leader will share some ideas about the qualities of a prophet that we see in Amos.

You might see a prophet as someone exceptional, someone particularly gifted with the capacity to speak out, guided by God in a special way. Whilst it can be a distinctive calling, we are all called to proclaim the good news and to speak out when we see injustice and wrongdoing.

Act on Poverty: How can you and your church speak up? (20 mins)

Let's return to Stephen Amusala from the Anglican Development Service and to activist Stef Benstead. Hear from them about how they have taken action to create change.

Stephen Amusala speaks about the church's work on lobbying local government in Kenya about the climate crisis and connecting with people living in poverty



Stef Benstead speaks about her role in the Manchester Poverty Truth Commission



Think about those prophetic qualities you have discussed. How could you grow those in your church? Where do you hear voices of lived experience of poverty? Where do you hear people speaking out against poverty?



Stephen talks about the church's role in holding government to account. Do you know who your elected representatives are? Have you ever written to one of your elected representatives or engaged in another form of political action? Share your experiences with others in your group.

Time for a Break!



When I Needed a Neighbour: Luke 10.25-37 (5 mins)



Choose someone in your group to read this passage aloud.

An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Neighbours and Passers-by (10 mins)

Choose two readers in your group to read aloud the following reflections on what we find in the passage above.

Reader 1: In the Gospels Jesus tells us that the world is not as it should be. Sinful actions cause harm to ourselves and others. This wasn't just a message for Jesus' first century followers. When we look around us today, we can see broken systems that deepen suffering and exclusion. We can see divisions between and within our communities. In our reading from the Gospel of Luke, we see the consequences of divisions fed by fear.

Reader 2: We don't know exactly why the Priest and the Levite of the story were so keen to hurry on past the man who had been assaulted but it seems probable that their response came at least in part from fear. Were they afraid that the man had already died and that approaching him might break religious rules around the handling of dead bodies? Were they concerned that the robbers may still be nearby and that they might become victims too? Did they fear that the man was pretending and that this was a trick of some kind? Whatever the case, the question that was at the front of their minds was: 'If I stop for this man what will happen to me?'

Reader 2: The challenge of Jesus' story doesn't end with the question of whether we are like the passers-by. The person who stops to help is a Samaritan and the implication of the story is that the injured man was Jewish. Jesus would have been well aware of the hostility between Samaritans and Jewish people in his context. Just as the Samaritan crosses the road to help, so Jesus takes his listeners by the hand and crosses the division between Samaritan and Jewish communities. In this way, the parable pushes back against the audience's expectations. Do we need to be open to a similar challenge to our preconceptions and biases? Could we follow Jesus in telling a different story about the divisions in our world?

Reader 1: When the Samaritan sees the injured man he is 'moved with compassion'. The Samaritan's question is not 'what will happen to me?' but 'what will happen to this man if I pass by?' He treats the man who has been robbed and provides for his welfare above and beyond his immediate need. The Samaritan is the 'one who showed... mercy'.

Reader 1: In a speech in 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. focused on this question in the Good Samaritan story. King suggested that, like the Good Samaritan, we are called to a 'dangerous unselfishness'. It is dangerous to be unselfish because it can put us at risk, it can require a great deal of us. But what is the alternative? When we draw boundaries around our love and concern, focusing only on ourselves and our priorities, we become people who 'pass by on the other side'. We protect ourselves at a cost to someone else.

Reader 2: Another Christian thinker, Dorothee Solle, said this about the story of the Good Samaritan and its meaning for us today: 'more and more people are becoming spectators, spectators to others' lives but also to their own. ... Jesus had a very clear purpose in mind when he told his story. He wanted to decrease the number of spectators and add to the number of those who feel sympathy and act on it.'



Reader 1: Today our economic and political systems increase the likelihood that we will overlook others in need. For example, the supply chains that bring us food or clothes can be hard to unpick and understand. We don't see underpaid garment workers when we select our clothes for the day or farmers in debt bondage when we make our morning cup of tea. Those with power in our society can encourage division by suggesting that a particular group is a threat. Political campaigns stir up our need for self-preservation, suggesting that there is a choice between 'us' and 'them'. If we help someone else, we are led to ask, then 'what will happen to me?'

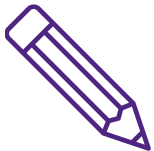
Reader 2: The word 'mercy' is a translation for something that is not easy to express in English. It is deep loving-kindness, empathy, compassion, a willingness to reach out, a warmth to others as we find them, whatever their difficulties or circumstances, a letting-go of any animosity that divides us. We might call it 'dangerous unselfishness'. It is what God extends to us, perfectly, and what God invites human beings to echo in their behaviour towards one another.

Who is my neighbour? (20 mins)



Your group leader will give you a story to read from someone with lived experience of poverty or from an anti-poverty activist.

What stands out to you from the account you have read? Write down and share your reflections with your group



Making your Act on Poverty plan (20 mins)

Draw some inspiration for your next steps from long-time Christian Aid supporter Margaret Robinson. Watch our video to see how Margaret became involved in activism and campaigning.



Now is the time to decide as a group what you can do to act on poverty, local and global.

Can you commit to take three steps? Look at the list of suggested actions below. Try to choose one action from each of the three lists. You can also, of course, add your own actions.

First Steps

- Build a fact-file on your elected representatives. Find out about their role and their views.
- Pray for action on poverty regularly as a community.
- Write a piece for your church newsletter, website or social media about the need to act on poverty.
- To join the movement to end UK poverty, visit letsendpoverty.co.uk. To take action on global poverty go to caid.org.uk/campaigns



Next Steps

- Hold a service, using our Act on Poverty worship and prayer resources (caid.org.uk/aopworship) Invite your elected representative to join you.
- Attend one of Christian Aid's monthly online drop-in sessions 'Faith into Action' to learn more about tackling global poverty (caid.org.uk/faithinactionsession)
- Look at what role anti-poverty action plays in your church's mission statements and plans.
- Host a bring and share meal to discuss what you have learnt in the Act on Poverty course and the next steps you will take.

Going Further

- Invite your elected representative to your church or to a local community project. Plan the questions you will raise with them about action on poverty. Christian Aid and JPIT both have resources to help you plan an effective event with your representative. See Christian Aid's 'Breaking Bread with your MP' guide (caid.org.uk/breakbreadMP) and JPIT's Constituency Action Network (jpit.uk/can).
- Join or organise a vigil or protest in response to an issue that matters to you. Even a small, local gathering can generate interest in acting for change.
- Order a Let's End Poverty banner (letsendpoverty.co.uk/banner) and display it outside your church or in another community space.



Closing (5 mins)

Listen to Zanele Makombe from Act Ubumbano, South Africa, describe her understanding of how our faith requires us to act against injustice.

God of righteousness, who spoke through the prophets,
Help us to speak truth to power.
When we are tempted to be spectators,
Transform us into actors, working together to build your kingdom.
Help us to pay attention to the experiences of those who carry the unjust burden
of poverty.
Challenge us to put our faith into practice,
To love our neighbours in deeds as well as words.
Inspire us with your Spirit to follow your call,
That we may do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with you.
Loving God, with you all things are possible.
We pray for an end to poverty,
In our communities and around the world.
We ask this in Jesus' name,
Amen.

