

Sermon outlines and ideas



What Causes Poverty?

Poverty is largely human-made, often caused by complex issues of war and conflict, unfair trade laws, unjust governments, corruption and plain old-fashioned greed. Poverty is a problem because humankind allows injustice to exist.

But poverty is not inevitable... poverty comes down to people's actions and choices. Making changes is all about how we choose to act. Just as importantly, it is about what we refuse to ignore.

Biblical Perspective

Read Matthew 25:31-41

In this passage Jesus commends those who give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty and clothes to those who have none. When we reach out in practical ways to help others we are responding to Jesus Himself. How will you, or I, feel 'when the Son of Man comes'? Which side will we be on?

The Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000 the United Nations Millennium Assembly, the largest ever gathering of world leaders, adopted the Millennium Declaration. Setting out eight goals, the declaration aims to reduce poverty by 2015. Some of the most important targets are to:

- halve the number of people living on less than US\$1 a day
- reduce the deaths of children under five by three-quarters
- reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS, malaria and other major diseases.

There are only seven years remaining in which to achieve these goals by 2015. This is a moment in history that has unique potential, when the stated intentions of world leaders radically echo the teachings of Jesus and the Biblical prophets.

"If you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness." Isaiah

"Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed."
Former U.S. President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, in a speech on April 16, 1953

What can we do to join our words, beliefs, actions and lives with theirs? In the face of compassion fatigue the church has an opportunity to swim against the tide of disaffection by engaging in the fight against poverty as an adventure and not as a burden.

Bono says of fighting poverty:

"God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house... God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives... God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war... God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us if we are with them."

"It's not a coincidence that in the scriptures, poverty is mentioned more than 2,100 times. It's not an accident. That's a lot of air time, 2,100 mentions. (You know, the only time Christ is judgmental is on the subject of the poor.) 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me - you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:40). As I say, good news to the poor."

Action

There are three ways you can be part of this adventure:

- Pray (see below)
- Send your *Blow the Whistle* postcard to the PM (order from www.micahchallenge.org.uk)
- Come and join the *Blow the Whistle* worship service and rally! People from all over the country are joining together in London to *Blow the Whistle* at half-time and hold the Government to account for the promises made in the Millennium Development Goals (for more information visit www.micahchallenge.org.uk)

Prayer

Dear Lord, we pray that You will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. We pray that You will help us to take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death and that you will rescue them from oppression and violence, for they are precious. Amen
(Taken from Psalm 72: 12-14)

Grace

Lord God, in a world where many are hungry, we thank you for our food. In a world where many are lonely, we thank you for our company. In a world where many have no hope, we thank you for our faith in Jesus. Amen.

Activity

At the beginning of the session, publicly hand a *Blow the Whistle* white whistle and a stopwatch to a member of the congregation. Explain that they should blow the whistle at exactly halfway through your presentation or sermon. This is to show everybody that this is what the *Blow the Whistle* campaign is about – not just to interrupt – but to mark that fact that we're halfway through.

Order whistles at www.micahchallenge.org.uk and after your introduction above, hand out the whistles and together blow them.

You could take a picture of your activity and send it to: Micah Challenge UK, 186 Kennington Park Road, London, SE11 4BT

SERMON THEMES AROUND JUSTICE, MERCY AND HUMILITY

Justice in Proverbs

Several proverbs condemn those who oppress the poor (e.g. 14:31; 17:5; 19:1; 22:16) and emphasise that riches have no bearing on one's spiritual state (e.g. 22:2; 28:6).

Indeed being wealthy carries greater responsibilities (e.g. 22:9; 28:27). Many of the prophets spoke out against the plight of the poor. They knew that the integrity of a nation was not measured by how it amassed wealth but by how it treated its poorer citizens.

Mercy in Deuteronomy 15:1-11

This passage clearly indicates that generosity and compassion are enshrined in the law of the Jews even though "...there will always be poor people in the land" (v11) the children of God should lend freely, give generously and cancel debts every seven years.

Humility in Matthew

Giving to the poor and needy should never be done for personal advancement (6:1-4). This central chapter of the Sermon of the Mount points us all away from seeing any earthly attainments as 'treasure'. Instead we are encouraged to store up treasure in heaven (6:19-21). Jesus encouraged those with wealth to give it away if it spoiled their relationship with God (19:21). He repeated the fact that the poor would always be with us (26:11). These themes are also found in Mark and Luke.

OTHER POSSIBLE SERMON THEMES

Psalm 33:1-5	The Lord Loves Justice and Righteousness
Isaiah 58	True Fasting
Amos 5:21-24	Let Justice Roll on Like a River
Micah 6:1-8	God's Call for Justice
Matthew 25:31-46	Whatever You Do for the Least of Them, You Do for Me
Luke 4:14-19	Jesus Sent to Preach Good News to the Poor
Luke 10:25-37	Who Is Our Neighbour?
Luke 3 11:37-52	Neglecting Justice
James 1:19-27	Pure Religion
James 2:14-26	Faith and Deeds