

Speak up Bible study 1 – the Jesus model

The key aim of this study is to discover how Jesus responded to people and their needs, as a model for our own response.

Begin with welcomes, introductions, explanations about the course, and a prayer.

Distribute copies of *document 1.1 the Jesus model* (this and the other document to be used in this study are on the last pages for you to duplicate)

Go through one question at a time; either allow a minute or two for people to write their own thoughts before discussing them with the group – or suggest people use the space to record the key point they want to remember from each discussion. If you are working with a number of groups as part of a larger gathering, allow them 20-30 minutes for discussion of all the questions, then collect feedback and explore the answers further.

The summary answers that follow are not intended to be the only right answer, but to indicate the purpose behind the question, and to give ideas for guiding the discussion.

³⁵**Jesus went through all the towns and villages,**

What's the significance of this itinerary?

This is geographically and socially inclusive – there were no ‘no-go’ areas for Jesus. Explore what geographical areas and social groups around your locality are missed by the church. Some members of the group may be able to tell stories of remote places they have visited where Jesus has gone through his people. If you have a copy of *Tear Times*, identify the variety of places and countries mentioned.

teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

How did Jesus view people? Which one of these activities was most important?

Jesus saw people as whole people – mind, spirit and body. So in that sense none of the activities was most important. He met the needs of whole people: teaching (mind); preaching (spirit); healing (body). Explore the significance of this in your own church's ministry. Think about how this might affect how a relief and development agency goes about its work. Should it just distribute food? How does preaching and development go together? Do you agree that effective evangelism will always include social action, and effective social action will always include evangelism?

³⁶**When he saw the crowds,**

Which crowds does the UK church need to see?

Hungry crowds; HIV/AIDS crowds; excluded crowds; local and global crowds. The discussion may centre on the ‘crowds’ around the church; or there may be a global focus – make sure both are touched on.

he had compassion on them,

How did people know that Jesus had compassion on them?

He healed, he fed hungry people – he did something. Check out Matthew 14:14; Mark 8:2; Mark 1:41. The Greek word for compassion comes from the noun *splanchna*, which

refers to the viscera: the heart, lungs, liver and intestines. The Greeks believed these were the seat of the emotions; Jesus was moved to the very depths of his being. There has been some uncertainty about the translation of the word and variations in the manuscripts. In Mark 1:41 this means that *anger* and *indignation* have both been used where the NIV has *compassion*. What are our emotions when faced with poverty and injustice? Do they get turned into action?

because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

How does Jesus describing himself as the good shepherd help us understand this verse?

John 10:14-15 indicates that he knows each one of his sheep. Jesus does not let the crowds obscure the individual.

³⁷**Then he said to his disciples,**

Why did Jesus choose to have disciples?

John 14:12 offers one clue, but it remains a mystery why God chooses to work in and through people, rather than bypass them completely. It is something to do with what human beings were made for. He calls people to work with him, to play a part in fulfilling his purpose. This is the only example of Jesus having compassion where he asks his disciples to act – by praying for workers.

"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

What is this harvest? Why are the workers few?

The narrow interpretation would favour the harvest as those who do not know Christ. The wider view is that it includes the fruitfulness of doing the right thing, of living the life of the kingdom that follows from knowing the King. The traditional application of this passage is to overseas mission. One reason for there being few workers may be because we have a narrow view of what a worker is – see the next section.

³⁸**Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."**

Why did Jesus want his disciples to pray this prayer?

One answer might be to get them to think about how they could be the answer to their own prayer! Discuss the different ways we can all become workers – in prayer, in encouragement, in campaigning for justice.

CHAPTER 10

¹He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

Why is Jesus' authority so important?

It is very important to know that God's workers don't only have his model to follow, but his Spirit to empower them. See story available on *document 1.2 A Ugandan teenager* and explore how she came to be an effective worker in the harvest field. It ends with the wonderful expression 'do things together for the glory of God'. End the discussion with prayer around the themes you have discussed, and finish with a prayer based on this phrase.

Speak up 1.1

The Jesus model

Matthew 9:35 – 10:1

³⁵Jesus went through all the towns and villages,

What's the significance of this itinerary?

teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

How did Jesus view people? Which one of these activities was most important?

³⁶When he saw the crowds,

Which crowds does the UK church need to see?

he had compassion on them,

How did people know that Jesus had compassion on them?

because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

How does Jesus describing himself as the good shepherd help us understand this verse?

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Why did Jesus want his disciples to pray this prayer?

CHAPTER 10

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Why is Jesus' authority so important?

A Ugandan teenager

That particular morning we had arrived to video a women's group at Kampala Baptist Church, who met in a little prayer chapel by the side of the main building. They were all people with AIDS: within two years they were no longer with us. Perhaps not surprisingly they were slightly nervous of the video camera, but when the crew had packed away they asked me about my family. I produced the photos of my daughters I always have with me, and immediately the atmosphere changed and the conversation began to flow. I was asked their names. When I indicated that the older one was called Katharine, one of the younger members of the group became very animated. 'That's my name,' she told me. 'Do you think I could write to your daughter?' I thought this would be fine, and wrote down my address for her. When I arrived home ten days later Katharine had already received her letter; in fact, she wondered why a total stranger could manage to write when her own father did not seem capable.

I asked if I could read it. It was simply stunning.

I am a born-again Christian and I help with the AIDS ministry of my church. I don't have AIDS but I just wanted to serve God for this time really. I'm on a 6 months long vacation from junior high school after O levels, which is ending in June. My brother asked me before the vacation began whether I would like to work with the AIDS ministry. I said, 'Yes, why not?' But inside me I was honestly scared.

Very soon vacation began. The day before I began working I just couldn't settle, till I got on my knees and cried before God. I told him, 'God, listen to this, whatever the case may be, you see I'm quite scared of getting involved with people with AIDS, but I have made up my mind that I'll be a sacrifice to you, O God, with my spirit broken and contrite. I asked the Spirit to empower me to be the best I can to these people.

Right now I'm used to them. I have learned from them and they say they have learned from me. Though there are times which are bad I'm able to cry with them, laugh with them and do things together for the glory of God.'

I have read this out loud in churches many times since, and every time I can feel the tingle on the back of my neck: a Ugandan teenager had discovered more about what it means to follow Jesus than perhaps I ever will.

Stephen Rand, *Guinea Pig for Lunch*

Speak up Bible study 2 – the Holy Spirit mission

The key aim of this study is to explore the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus, who is our advocate.

Begin with welcomes, introductions, explanations about the course, and a prayer.

Distribute copies of *document 2.1 Dying for a drink*. (this and the next document are the last pages of this study)

The document has a space to write down how the reader reacts to the story. Give people a few minutes of silence to write, and then encourage them to share their thoughts. It is interesting to explore whether they think the teacher was brave or foolish; whether they would have done the same.

Distribute *document 2.2 Advocacy*

Advocacy means speaking up in support of someone in need.

Write down an example of advocacy (from your experience, in the movies, from the newspaper, in history)

Dying for a drink gives one example of advocacy – use this question to find other examples, so the group develop a broader view of advocacy in action.

There is no word in the Bible that exactly matches the English word advocate. The nearest is the Greek word *parakletos*, which literally means ‘called to one’s side’.

Write down how it is translated

- in John 14:16: counsellor, counsel for the defence, helper, comforter, advocate
- in 2 Corinthians 1: 3-4: comfort, consolation, help
- in Romans 15:4: encouragement, counsel

The questions that follow: either give individuals time to write their own answers, or go through them as a group. The document encourages them to look up the verse after they have tried to answer the question.

1. For whom does Jesus act as an advocate? (1 John 2:1)

Anybody who sins – therefore those doing the study. He pleads for those unable to plead for themselves.

2. Why do they need an advocate? (Romans 6:23)

Because they are under sentence of death.

3. What qualifies him to be our advocate? (1 John 2:2)

He is the ‘atoning sacrifice’ – ‘the means by which our sins are forgiven’ (Good News Bible). He

has served the sentence. His willingness to die for us gives him the right to speak up for us.

4. What are the characteristics of his advocacy? (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34)

He is always effective because he lives to intercede; he never gives up; he is at the right hand of

God, close to the judge, speaking up on our behalf. He is constant and consistent.

5. What is the effect of his advocacy? (1 John 2:2; Romans 8:1)

He saves; there is no condemnation.

Read out these verses aloud *1 John 1:5 – 2:6*.

Explain that in this Bible passage, Jesus is described as our *parakletos*. The context is a passage indicating the conditions on which we can have fellowship with God. After each section, there is a space for people to write – again, either give them time to write their own answer and then discuss, or encourage them to write in an answer after the discussion.

1 John 1:5 - 2:6

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

The first condition for fellowship with God is:

We must 'walk the talk'. This includes walking in fellowship with one another.

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The second condition for fellowship with God is:

We must recognise our sin and our failure, and confess – and notice it is because of God's faithfulness and justice that we can be confident that we are forgiven.

¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

CHAPTER 2

¹**My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence (*parakletos*)-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.**

²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

The third condition for fellowship with God is:

What Jesus has done and continues to do – he died for our sins and now pleads our cause. Jesus speaks up for us in a unique way because he paid such a high price to redeem us. Advocacy is at the heart of Jesus' continuing love and care for us. He has earned the right to be an advocate because he laid down his life for us. His advocacy is linked to his cross.

³We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. ⁴The one who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

The fourth condition for fellowship with God is:

We are back to the beginning – we cannot know God without doing what he wants. Because if we know God, his Holy Spirit is making us more like him, and encouraging and enabling us to live as Jesus did.

The Greek word *parakletos*, used by John to describe both Jesus and the Holy Spirit, points to advocacy as a characteristic of God. God's aim in saving lost human beings is that they should 'participate in the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4).

So, if advocacy is a characteristic of God, then it must also be a characteristic of God's children.

Finish this study by noting the close relationship between prayer and campaigning. We tend to think of them as very different activities; but this study has shown that speaking up is the same as intercession. One way of linking them is to define advocacy as 'speaking to the powerful on behalf of the powerless.' Sometimes we can intercede for others with God, and become aware that we can also intercede with those with human power. Equally, we can send our postcards to the Prime Minister, and forget to pray.

Ask the group to identify individuals and groups they would like to intercede for, then spend time in prayer. Refer back to *Dying for a drink*, and pray for those who are taking risks in speaking up for others.

Dying for a drink

Lily Chandrasekar was sitting on the low wall in front of the veranda of her simple dried-mud home. Next to her was a large framed black and white photograph of a man, black-haired and with a neat moustache. It was a photograph of her husband, and he was dead. At one point she propped the photo up on a chair, as if she wanted him to sit there once again. Lily told us the story. I asked an initial question; it was interpreted, and it was as if a tap of grief had been turned on. The story poured out. Lily did not wait for individual sentences to be translated. A torrent of words emerged with an intense passion, her eyes staring into the middle distance, focused on the past and not the present.

He had been the village school teacher, an active Christian - and also a harijan, a member of the low-caste community that made up less than a quarter of the village population of 3000. The water tank, the sole source for the village, was positioned in the high-caste, wealthier end of the village, and many of them had piped connections to their homes. As a result there was often little water available for the harijan community, the poorer people of the village.

Mr Chandrasekar had been one of the harijans who had taken their case to the local authorities, who had eventually decreed that the private water supplies to the high-caste Hindus should be disconnected and all water drawn equally from a tank in the centre of the village. It was to have ten taps: eight for the high-caste villagers, two for the harijans.

This was not a universally popular ruling, and the tank became the focus of tension between the two communities, as the high-caste villagers objected to drawing water when the harijans were present. Six months before our visit the situation had come to a head, when the harijans were prevented from obtaining water at all. Lily's husband had gone to the high-caste village leaders to protest.

At this point, our interpreter explained, the story became confused. The police had intervened and arrested him, taking him to the police station. It was while he was being questioned that he had been beaten to death. Some claimed that high-caste villagers had taken the law into their own hands, killed him and then ensured there would be no backlash from the harijans by setting fire to 45 of their houses and two school buildings.

As we listened to the story, and looked at the photograph, it seemed almost unreal. A Christian school teacher, about my age, beaten to death because of water. But Lily's face was real. She explained that every night her three year old Noel asked when Daddy would be coming home.

EFICOR had heard the story. They had sent the drilling-rig into Vilapakkam. They had gone straight to the heart of the harijan area, drilled down to 60 metres, and had hit water. But within weeks the supply had begun to dry up. The harijans were in despair. Having been set free from dependence on their oppressors, now they were to be forced to go back to them and beg for water. They were desperate. They were pleading for the rig to return and try again, and set them free. Now we began to understand the looks as we had driven in through the high-caste part of the village. EFICOR's drilling rig could tilt the balance of power in the village. We had been allowed a glimpse of a spiritual battle, a battle for justice.

Stephen Rand, *Guinea Pig for Lunch*

Write down your reactions to this story:

Speak up 2.2

Advocacy

Advocacy means speaking up in support of someone in need.

Write down an example of advocacy (from your experience, in the movies, from the newspaper, in history):

*There is no word in the Bible that exactly matches the English word advocate. The nearest is the Greek word *parakletos*, which literally means 'called to one's side'.*

Write down how it is translated

- * in John 14:16:
- * in 2 Corinthians 1: 3-4
- * in Romans 15:4

What words are used to translate it in different translations?

Now answer these questions - the verses will give you clues, but use them after you've tried to answer for yourself:

1. For whom does Jesus act as an advocate? (1 John 2:1)
2. Why do they need an advocate? (Romans 6:23)
3. What qualifies him to be our advocate? (1 John 2:2)
4. What are the characteristics of his advocacy? (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34)
5. What is the effect of his advocacy? (1 John 2:2; Romans 8:1)

In the following Bible passage, Jesus is described as our *parakletos*. The context is a passage indicating the conditions on which we can have fellowship with God. After each section, can you identify the condition in your own words?

1 John 1:5 - 2:6

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

The first condition for fellowship with God is:

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The second condition for fellowship with God is:

¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

CHAPTER 2

¹My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence (*parakletos*)-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

The third condition for fellowship with God is:

³We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. ⁴The one who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

The fourth condition for fellowship with God is:

The Greek word *parakletos*, used by John to describe both Jesus and the Holy Spirit, points to advocacy as a characteristic of God. God's aim in saving lost human beings is that they should 'participate in the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4).

So, if advocacy is a characteristic of God, then it must also be a characteristic of God's children.

Speak up Bible study 3 – the Elisha insight

The key aim of this study is to think about how we see the world, and how that affects our response to it in prayerful action

Begin with welcomes, introductions, explanations about the course, and a prayer.

Distribute copies of *document 3.1 the Elisha insight* (This document is the last page of this study for you to duplicate)

Read the whole story of 2 Kings 6: 8-23 round the group. Explain that for the study we are focusing on three verses in the middle of the story.

Go through the document one question at a time; either allow a minute or two for people to write their own thoughts before discussing them with the group – or suggest people use the space to record the key point they want to remember from each discussion. If you are working with a number of groups as part of a larger gathering, allow them 20-30 minutes for discussion of all the questions, then collect feedback and explore the answers further.

¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city.

What kind of ‘enemy armies’ can affect us personally? What kinds affect people on a global scale?

It is always worthwhile including the personal and the local as well as the global; it sometimes helps people to see the principles more clearly. This was a physical army – and sometimes we can feel surrounded physically. We also experience emotional and spiritual forces surrounding us from time-to-time. On a global scale we think more of poverty, injustice, disease, debt. It could be interesting to look at the two lists – are there any linkages between them? Would Christians in the developing world be more acutely aware of the links between the global and the personal?

"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.

Describe a situation where you have felt helpless.

It is important here to first articulate the feelings of being helpless and afraid in the face of our circumstances. Then expand the discussion in two ways: first, how does our experience of helplessness and fear differ from that of people in the developing world? We have better resources, infrastructure, health services and so on – while recognising that traditional societies often win on community and family solidarity. The second thought is both people here and in the developing world can feel helpless in the face of the major global issues in different ways, but perhaps our sense of powerlessness in the face of injustice is a common link.

"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

In what sense do you think this might be true in the modern world?

It will be intriguing to discover the extent to which people feel a real sense of God being on their side. This question raises very deep issues about our trust and confidence in God. Sensitivity is needed: some in the group may be going through a personal experience where this is being tested. In the context of the ‘compare and contrast’ discussions, does the group think it is easier or harder for Christians living in poverty to believe Elisha’s statement?

¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see".

In what ways do the eyes of Christians need to be opened?

We may need to see the 'enemy armies', particularly in a global context. How well do we understand the forces of oppression, and all the factors that perpetuate poverty and injustice? We may also need to see and understand how God is involved in his world. The PowerPoint presentation highlights a range of ophthalmic problems which all have a spiritual parallel – you may find it helpful to explore these if you have time. The simplest way is to see if the group can identify the spiritual parallel:

blindness – just being unaware of spiritual realities, the needs of others.

nearsighted – only being aware of what goes on in our own home or locality.

farsighted – some Christians can be enthusiastic about mission and justice overseas, in remote places, while ignoring needs on their own doorstep.

colour blind – Christians should be colour blind in the sense of not being racist; but often Christians can be very slow to recognise racism in the church. It requires positive effort to ensure the church is practically colour blind so far as race and class are concerned.

tunnel vision – it is easy to think that our concern is the only one that matters; that can easily be true of campaigners! The church should be a community that affirms people's particular interest, while also encouraging people to be aware of each other's.

dry eye – a refusal to be affected by the suffering of others.

lazy eye – an unwillingness to make the effort to see what is going on around the world.

Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

How does this verse affect your thinking about your own response to personal and global challenges?

This question begins to open up people's understanding of spiritual warfare and what it means to have 'God on our side'. Before opening this up, though, don't miss the vital part of the story – that this was the insight that came in response to the reaction of helplessness and fear. One of the vital elements in campaigning is retaining the confidence that there is hope of change, that we work for God's Kingdom as part of his army.

Ephesians 6:12

'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'

Have someone read this verse. You will have to decide – on the basis of the nature of the group, the time you have and your own views – just how far you want to explore the concept of spiritual warfare. It is, of course, a controversial topic. In terms of this study, we would certainly encourage you to explore how this verse applies to the global issues of poverty and injustice. On one hand, when fallen human beings create powerful institutions, those institutions reflect fallen human nature, and can very easily multiply the reality and impact of sin. Structural sin is a way of saying that human organisation inevitably has sin woven into it. Others would argue that what appear to be impersonal forces like globalisation have a negative spiritual identity. A vocal group will discuss this kind of issue with great enthusiasm! There are two things to emphasise: one, that structural sin does not absolve human beings of their personal responsibility for their actions – that includes heads of government, shareholders, voters – all of us; second, this is a crucial reminder that prayer is an essential part of campaigning; Tearfund tries to use a phrase like prayerful action to avoid the implication of 'prayer and action' as if they were two different things.

The story that follows tries to root this discussion in reality – so move to it when you think that would be helpful! It is an extract from a book written by a missionary in the Philippines.

'Beside my friend's house is a vacant lot covered with rat-infested garbage. The politicians had called a meeting, discussed the need and even had a garbage pit dug, but still the field of garbage grew. So I asked the Christians to bring shovels. For a whole morning we shovelled the putrid rotting food, the rusty cans, the small snakes, cockroaches, ants and poisonous centipedes into the hole and set it alight.

A lady approached from a neighbouring house. 'O praise God!' she said. 'Last night I prayed, "Lord, I am unable alone to shift this rubbish." But day after day the winds blow its disease into my small house. Now, here you are, an answer to prayer.'

I smiled and told her, 'Yes, God is so gracious, isn't he! He wants us not only to be free from the rubbish in our hearts, so we can be saved; he also wants us to be free from the rubbish in our environment, so we can *live!* He wants us to be rulers over our creation!'

But still the trucks promised by the politicians did not arrive. These squatters had no bribe money; rich businesses did. The garbage filled the field again.

One prayer meeting night with other young squatter believers, I felt constrained to pray that God would completely get rid of this rubbish beside my friend's house.

The next day, workers came. They pushed the rubbish down the hill into the river ('That wasn't quite what I had in mind, Lord, but thank you anyway'). Then they placed a large sign: 'It is forbidden to throw rubbish here: fine P100. Signed: Barrio Captain.'

We are called to rule creation by work. Salvation enables us to rule also by the authority of the name of Christ in prayer!

Viv Grigg, Companion to the Poor

What does this story tell us about the relationship of prayer and work in seeing God's kingdom come?

By now, hopefully, people will be convinced that prayer is part of the work we can do – while recognising that our work can be part of the answer to our prayer. You can bring that out of the story by asking the question 'How did the rubbish get moved?' But use the story as well to explore what kind of issues we should pray for, and how we should pray for them.

The group should be ready to pray! It may be helpful to try and gather up what people have learned from the study, if their behaviour is going to change in any way as a result. It may be a good moment to promote Tearfund's prayer resources, you find more information at www.tearfund.org/praying.

Speak up 3.1

The Elisha insight

2 Kings 6: 15-17

¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city.

What kind of 'enemy armies' can affect us personally? What kind affect people on a global scale?

"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.

Describe a situation where you have felt helpless.

"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

In what sense do you think this might be true in the modern world?

¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see."

In what ways do the eyes of Christians need to be opened?

Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

How does this verse affect your thinking about your own response to personal and global challenges?

Ephesians 6:12

'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'

Prayer, politics and rubbish

'Beside my friend's house, is a vacant lot covered with rat-infested garbage. The politicians had called a meeting, discussed the need and even had a garbage pit dug, but still the field of garbage grew. So I asked the Christians to bring shovels. For a whole morning we shovelled the putrid rotting food, the rusty cans, the small snakes, cockroaches, ants and poisonous centipedes into the hole and set it alight.

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We are called to rule creation by work. Salvation enables us to rule also by the authority of the name of Christ in prayer!

Viv Grigg, *Companion to the Poor*

What does this story tell us about the relationship between prayer and work in seeing God's kingdom come?

Speak up Bible study 4 – the Esther moment

The key aim of this study is to explore how we get started in speaking up on behalf of others.

Begin with welcomes, introductions, explanations about the course, and prayer.

Distribute *document 4.1 How I got involved*. (this and the next documents can be found at the end of this study for you to duplicate).

Give the group time to read the story, and then encourage them to write down their answers to the questions in the boxes before or after discussion. The story highlights that most people need sharp awareness of the problem in order to be provoked into involvement.

Distribute copies of *document 4.2 the Esther moment* so you can read the whole story round the group.

Go through the document one question at a time; either allow a minute or two for people to write their own thoughts before discussing them with the group – or suggest people use the space to record the key point they want to remember from each discussion. If you are working with a number of groups as part of a larger gathering, allow them 20-30 minutes for discussion of all the questions, then collect feedback and explore the answers further.

The first three questions are about Esther, the next three ask the same questions of ourselves – bear this in mind as you encourage discussion.

What advantages did Esther have to assist her advocacy?

Was it right for her to use them?

What was there to put her off taking up the cause?

What advantages do we have to assist our advocacy?

Is it always right for us to use them?

What is there to put us off?

How did Esther prepare for her advocacy initiative?

How did others help?

How might this preparation apply to us?

The following two questions are not on the document, but they are very important: allow time to discuss them, and if people are taking notes, encourage them to use the back of the document.

In what sense have we come to ‘a royal position’?

The purpose of this question is first to establish that one biblical picture of what it means to be a Christian is that we are adopted as children of the King: ask members of the group to look up Romans 8:12-17; Galatians 4:4-7.

If we have this royal position, then there is one crucial difference between us and Esther – whereas she risked death to take advantage of it, we are welcomed into God’s presence, we can approach without fear. Have someone read Hebrews 4:16.

In the Lord’s Prayer we say ‘Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth...’ As children of the King, we are those who do not only pray for his will to be done, but who do his will ourselves.

What are the particular features of our situation that might define ‘such a time as this’?

You might allow the group a few moments to explore this question. But not too long – because although Mordecai was indicating Esther was there for a particular challenge, she also had a unique opportunity. At the beginning of the study we thought about the challenges; it is worth spending a little time on the opportunities. So encourage the group to spend a little time positively reflecting on the virtues of freedom and democracy in our own society – is there a sense that we have unique opportunities denied to previous generations?

One distinct opportunity that exists now is the challenge of meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Distribute *document 4.3 the Millennium Development Goals*. In the year 2000, national governments agreed to work together to halve world poverty by 2015. The document lists the Goals. Ask the group how they react to these goals.

How should the church respond to this challenge? In many countries the church is at the forefront of local efforts that are contributing to this battle against poverty. The governments of the North need to find the resources to fund the programme to meet these goals; to do that, they need the prompting and support of their own voters to back this use of taxpayers’ money. So we have a role to play.

Tearfund is supporting Micah Challenge, which is linking the Micah Network with the World Evangelical Alliance to encourage Christians of North and South to respond biblically and effectively to work in support of achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Spend the rest of the study in prayer

It may be appropriate to look at particular campaigning opportunities – the group may be ready to do something in response to the study. The latest campaigning actions can always be found on www.tearfund.org/campaigning

How I got involved

I became actively involved in Jubilee 2000 following a talk about the debt crisis at a college in Bristol. The college had several students from indebted countries who were able to speak from personal experience.

The night of the Jubilee 2000 meeting was a very sad one in the life of the college because the life support machine of the baby of one of the college families was being switched off at 9 p.m. during the course of the meeting.

After we had stopped to mark that moment, a Franciscan priest from Zambia stood up to speak. He spoke of the tragedy of the baby's death and was in no way belittling the pain of the situation, but went on to say, "that baby was given every possible medical chance to life. In my country, babies die because their parents can't afford the £1 it would cost to cure their child in the hospital"

He also spoke of the squadron of warplanes Zambia owned, bought from the UK and never used because Zambia is a peaceful country, not at war with anyone.

After all I learned that evening, I couldn't not be involved. My anger at the injustice was ignited; it still burns fiercely.'

A Jubilee 2000 campaigner

What do you think makes people want to speak up for others?

What do you think stops people speaking up for others?

It can be easy not to get involved. Many of us feel too insignificant, too ill informed, too powerless to change the world. But then God honours the few, the brave, the frightened, the committed, the 'unrealistic idealists'.

Can you think of examples – in the Bible, church history or current Christian experience - that demonstrate this principle of the mustard seed in faith and action? What lessons can we draw from these people and their experiences, that can help us in 'changing our world'?

'There's really no excuse now for not realising here what is going on elsewhere, and for not realising that what we do here affects people completely around the world.

And if there's no excuse, we ought to respond.' *Simon Hughes MP*

The Esther Moment

2:17 Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favour and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen.

3:13 Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews – young and old, women and little children on a single day, and to plunder their goods.

4:8 Mordecai told Hathach to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. 9 Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, 11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold sceptre to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." 13 Mordecai sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" 15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done I will go to the king even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

5:1 On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the

hall, facing the entrance. 2 When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold sceptre that was in his hand. 3 Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you." 6:3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favour with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request.

8:7 King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther 8 Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring – for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."

What advantages did Esther have to assist her advocacy?

Was it right for her to use them?

What was there to put her off taking up the cause?

What advantages do we have to assist our advocacy?

Is it always right for us to use them?

What is there to put us off?

How did Esther prepare for her advocacy initiative?

How did others help?

How might this preparation apply to us?

In what sense have we come to 'a royal position'?

What are the particular features of our situation that might define 'such a time as this'?

Speak up 4.3

The Millennium Development Goals

By 2015 all 191 United Nations Member States have pledged to:

1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

- * Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.
- * Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

2 Achieve universal primary education

- * Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, girls and boys alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

3 Promote gender equality and empower women

- * Eliminate the gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and to all levels of education no later than 2015

4 Reduce child mortality

- * Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate

5 Improve maternal health

- * Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio

6 Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

- * Have halted, and begun to reverse, the spread of HIV/AIDS
- * Have halted by 2015, and begun to reverse, the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

7 Ensure environmental sustainability

- * Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources
- * Halve by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water
- * By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

8 Develop a global partnership for development

- * Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory. Includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction—nationally and internationally
- * Address the least developed countries' special needs. This includes tariff and quota-free access for their exports; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries; cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction
- * Address the special needs of landlocked and small island developing states
- * Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term
- * In cooperation with the developing countries, develop decent and productive work for youth
- * In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries
- * In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies—especially information and communications technologies.

Speak up Bible study 5 – the Nehemiah method

The key aim of this study is to explore how we can be effective in speaking up on behalf of others. There is a particular focus on building a relationship with your MP.

Begin with welcomes, introductions, explanations about the course, and a prayer.

Distribute copies of *document 5.1 the Nehemiah method 1* and *document 5.2 the Nehemiah method 2* so you can read the whole story round the group.

Go through document 5.1 first; either allow a few minutes for people to write their own answers before discussing them with the group – or go through the questions together, with people recording the correct answer as they go. If you are working with a number of groups as part of a larger gathering, allow them a few minutes to discuss and record their answers before running through the answers all together.

The situation does not look hopeful. v3

Nehemiah is on his own, and the problem is far distant. v1, v2

He has no direct experience of it himself; he has to rely on the reports of others. v3, v4

And while he is upset and angry about what he hears, there seems so little he can do. He is not an expert on the issue. He appears to have no relevant qualifications: he is a cupbearer, not a builder. v11

But he does have two things going for him: he can speak to God about it, v5

and he can speak to the king – he has access to the powerful. v11

At this point allow each person the time to look back and tick any of the statements that they feel apply to them as they think about the world and themselves. The purpose of this is to establish the extent to which people identify with Nehemiah's position, and its relevance to them. You may want to explore this a little: for example, do people think third world issues are far distant and the situation does not look hopeful? Do they feel there is so little they can do? Do they feel they can pray and have access to the powerful? You can discover the answer by checking how many of the group ticked different statements from this list.

Now move on to document 5.2 *the Nehemiah method 2*. If you have established that many of the group feel there is little they can do, then this begins to build a picture of how one person can make a difference. Again you can choose your method: either allow a few minutes for people to write their own answers before discussing them with the group – or go through the questions together, with people recording the correct answer as they go. If you are working with a number of groups as part of a larger gathering, allow them a few minutes to discuss and record their answers before running through the answers all together.

The answers shown below are suggestions for a helpful wording of the answers.

Can you list the stages of Nehemiah's involvement in speaking up for others? The verses give you clues as to where to find the answers.

1:2 He found out about the problem and established the facts

1:4 He wept – he was emotionally affected by the problem

1:4 He fasted – he prepared himself spiritually, he committed time to his response

1:4 He prayed – he sought God as to what he should do

1:6 He repented of his own and his own nation's role in the problem

1:11, 2:4 He prayed for help as he spoke to the powerful

2:5 He spoke to the powerful

2:7 He sought the help of the powerful to bring change

Do you think these suggest a pattern for us?

Explore briefly the pattern of:

Research – make sure you know the facts

Discuss the kind of ways you can establish the facts – newspaper articles, TV programmes, Tearfund publications, web sites etc.

Response – allowing oneself to react to the situation

Many people know the facts; few get involved in doing something. If you have time, it could be instructive to explore the reasons for this.

Preparation – spiritual and specifically practical

Campaigning activity needs to be thought through, focused on saying the right thing to the right people at the right time. But if we take the message of study 3 seriously, then spiritual preparation is also needed. Ask the group what they think might be appropriate.

Prayer – for the situation itself and for the campaign activities

Get the group to think about practical opportunities to pray – what meetings are available? Visit www.tearfund.org/praying for prayer points

Lobbying – speaking to the decision-makers

Nehemiah lobbied – he used his position to raise the issue with the powerful. Discuss briefly who the decision-makers are in the 21st Century, and what access we have to them.

Campaigning – involving others in the task

Campaigning is when the lobbying becomes a public group activity, involving others. Public opinion, reinforced by the media, can be very effective in bringing change. Moreover, relatively few people can have quite a big effect.

Nehemiah had access to the king; in the 21st Century we are voters, with access to our representative, our MP. They may not have autocratic power – but they are our most obvious route to political influence. This study concludes by thinking about how we can successfully build a relationship with our MP for the sake of others.

Try and sum up why it is worth trying to work with your MP.

Answers might include:

- An MP can be encouraged to discover the facts of the issue for themselves
- An MP can amplify the voice of the campaigners to ministers, to other governments, to officials
- An MP can ask questions on behalf of the campaigner – and have a better chance of getting answers.
- A good MP will follow up the concerns of their constituents.

At this point you could continue the study by making specific plans for action with your won MP. The group may want to plan an initial meeting with their MP.

Look at *document 5.3* and download a guide on lobbying your MP from the resource section of www.tearfund.org/campaigning

Spend some time in prayer, particularly focusing on any plans that may have been made. Spend time praying for your own MP.

The Nehemiah method 1

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 1

¹The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, ²Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. ³They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." ⁴When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. ⁵Then I said: "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, ⁶let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. ⁷We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. ⁸"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, ⁹but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' ¹⁰"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. ¹¹O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

Here's a summary of the story: fill in the verse

numbers that relate to each statement:

The situation does not look hopeful. _____
Nehemiah is on his own, and the problem is far distant. _____

He has no direct experience of it himself; he has to rely on the reports of others. _____
And while he is upset and angry about what he hears, there seems so little he can do. He is not an expert on the issue. He appears to have no relevant qualifications: he is a cupbearer, not a builder. _____
But he does have two things going for him: he can speak to God about it, _____
and he can speak to the king – he has access to the powerful. _____

Now look back. Tick any of the statements

above that you feel apply to you as you think

about the world and yourself right now.

'We need faith to accept that our small contribution can make a difference in big issues.'

'I learned that through action, faith is clarified and strengthened – that action backed by faith can enable me to speak in places and with people who I would not once have dared to address'

The Nehemiah method 2

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 2

¹In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; ²so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”

I was very much afraid, ³but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

⁴The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, ⁵and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favour in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.”

⁶Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. ⁷I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? ⁸And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king’s forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?” And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests.

‘When we Christians get involved directly in advocacy, whether our concern is to support the life of one individual or a whole community, our participation reflects the maturity and conscience of our shared faith...We Christians can’t allow it to be ‘just other people’ who cry out for and uphold justice. Demanding justice shouldn’t make us feel guilty – it’s not doing it that should make us feel guilty, for not doing as Jesus has commanded us.’

*Alexis Pacheco, Tearfund Regional Advisor,
Honduras.*

NEHEMIAH:GETTING INVOLVED

Can you list the stages of Nehemiah’s involvement in speaking up for others? The verses give you clues as to where to find the answers.

1:2 _____

1:4 _____

1:4 _____

1:4 _____

1:6 _____

1:11,2:4 _____

2:5 _____

2:7 _____

Do you think these suggest a pattern for us?

Speak up 5.3

How to know your MP

The primary work of an MP is to represent the concerns of their constituents in parliament. These can be individual private cases, such as benefit claims or social care standards; they can also be local issues impacted by national policies, such as response to the UK's homeless people or environmental regulation on industry; or international concerns, like the government's response to flooding in Mozambique or the impact of trade regulations on small farms in the Caribbean. In short, your MP is your access to influencing the decision-makers!

Every MP has access to the decision-makers, whether they are members of the ruling party or the opposition, or ministers or backbenchers. They not only have access to government, but government has to listen to them. MPs can question the government in various ways, and we can influence what questions they ask!

Who is my MP?

Finding out who our MPs are, or what constituency we live in, is very easy. There are a number of ways:

*** Internet**

Visit www.locata.co.uk/commons/ with your postcode or address and by doing a simple search you can find out your MP's name, their political party, and what constituency you live in.

*** Telephone**

Call the parliamentary information office on 020 7219 4272 and if you give them your postcode or address they will tell you the name of your MP.

MPs often try to become experts in one or two fields of policy and it is useful to know what interests your MP has. It is also useful to find out what, if any, positions they have within the government, their political party or committees and groups.

Again there are a number of sources to find this information:

* One of the most reliable and up to date sources is the parliamentary internet site: www.parliament.uk This provides a huge amount of information on the business of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. There is a section of the parliamentary site on information about MPs and their responsibilities, including individual membership of select committees, all-party groups, ministerial offices, parliamentary private secretaries and spokespersons' details. It also allows you to search parliamentary publications such as Hansard, which shows all speeches that individual MPs have made in debates and question times.

* The parliamentary information office (Tel: 020 7219 4272) answer a variety of queries, including details of business going through parliament, individual MP's voting records and requests for information on all-party groups.

* There are a number of reference books that give biographies and details of members' interests in particular subjects: Dodd's Parliamentary Companion is published annually and has information on members of the Commons and Lords; and Vachers, updated quarterly, lists the key select committees and back-bench committees and their members. Your library is likely to have copies of these books as well as copies of Hansard; the most efficient method of searching Hansard, however, is on the parliamentary internet site.

Although finding out this information is not essential when contacting your MP, it can prove to be very valuable in showing them that you are taking an interest in their work. It is also the best way to obtain reliable information on their views on an issue; copies of a speech or question that they have asked on a development issue tell us a lot about an MP's interests and views.