



# The Bible, debt and poverty

A three-part Bible study for students



# The Bible, debt and poverty

## Session 1



## Creation and the Fall

### Getting started

Not so long ago, the State used taxpayers' money to enable people to go to university free of charge. Then, in 1998, the Government introduced tuition fees: £1,000 a year. Things have changed a bit since then!

Many of you, or those you know, will be accumulating debt to study. Is that something you think about much? How do you feel about it?

So what do you think? Should people be able to study without paying, and what impact might the prospect of debt have on students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, or who don't end up with extremely high-paying jobs when they graduate?

Watch this film that takes us through the whole story of the Bible in five minutes.

*Grace Twum – Regional Coordinator, Just Love*

[Click here for video](#)



Did anything stand out to you from the video?

## Creation

Read the following verses from Genesis about creation (this is from the NRSV Anglicised version, and you may find it interesting to look at other translations):

- 1:27 – So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- 2:15-16 – The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden’.
- 2:18 – Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’

If Eden is the world that God looked on as ‘good’, what do these verses tell us about human worth, relationships and work as God intended? Share your thoughts and write them down as a group list.

Consider your list and share some times in your life when you have witnessed, or experienced, the world as God intended it to be. What did it feel like? Did you recognise the presence of God?

## The Fall

Read Genesis 3:17-19.

According to this Bible passage, how does sin entering the world affect work and working relationships?

Watch Anthony’s story and think about the impact of debt and poverty on human worth, relationships and work. As you listen to Anthony talk about the negative impact of debt on his life, make a note of one word or phrase that particularly strikes you.

[Click here for video](#)



Share your word or phrase with the group along with why it impacted you. Where else have you seen or experienced debt and poverty as evidence of the Fall, either on an individual level, or in the systems and structures of our country or the world?

Lament is a biblical way of honestly expressing strong emotions, and it is given to us to help us express our brokenness and distress over injustice and poverty. As we cry out in pain alongside those that are hurting, we find that we are also standing alongside God.

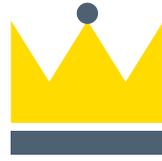
Many Psalms express lament, as do the prophets.

Think about times in your own life that have been full of grief or deep anger at what has happened.

Spend some time praying in lament over the fallen nature of humanity, and for the broken lives and relationships that lead some into poverty and debt. If you want to use a passage to help you, then try Lamentations 3.

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## Session 2



## Jubilee, justice and Jesus

Welcome to the second session of *The Bible, debt and poverty!*

Last time we were introduced to the subject within the context of the grand narrative of the Bible. We began by looking at creation, and God's intention and design that work and human relationships were designed to be fulfilling. We then looked at the impact of people's rebellion against God, in the Fall. This caused God's original design for relationships and work to be disfigured, and poverty and debt entered the world.

Today we're going to look at the next two parts of the grand narrative: Israel and Jesus, as the ways in which God acted to bring people back to his purposes for them.

- Israel was called to model a society which rewarded work, promoted fairness and minimised inequality.
- Jesus came to preach good news to the poor.

### Getting started

When was the last time you thought, or shouted, '*This isn't fair!*'?  
What beliefs about justice lay behind it? Share your stories and thoughts.

## Group activity: Restoration and renewal

The ancient people of Israel were far from perfect. They lived in a fallen world, but the Hebrew Bible is full of signposts to redemption.

### Jubilee and justice

In the Old Testament, a jubilee was celebrated in each fiftieth year (after seven x seven years). When God's people settled, the land was divided equally between everyone – the idea of the jubilee was that everything was reset back to that equal division. Debts were cancelled and land returned. The start of the jubilee year was marked by the blowing of a 'Yobel' or ram's horn and some think that this is where the word 'jubilee' comes from.

Look at and discuss these verses from Leviticus 25:

- 8-10
- 23
- 35-36
- 39-40

Jubilee aims to ensure that everyone maintains an economic stake in society, and so demonstrates justice in action for those who fall into poverty and debt. Such an approach is rarely reflected in the world around us where people are grouped into 'deserving' or 'undeserving' of being 'poor'. Where have you witnessed this stigma in the media or in the behaviour of others?

The evidence suggests that over time the jubilee model was ignored, and Israel's society became increasingly unequal and characterised by extremes of wealth and poverty. Jubilee was a pretty radical idea at the time, just as it would seem radical to most people today. Perhaps this shows that the powerful economic interests in maintaining the status quo are not new! How do you imagine a jubilee approach going down if it was to be pitched as an idea today?

Read Amos 5:21– 24.

- This passage makes clear God's desire for justice for his people rather than only sacrifices and worship. How do you think God's idea of justice differs from a human one?

When, after his temptation in the desert, Jesus begins to teach in Nazareth, he chooses to read from the scroll of Isaiah (Isaiah 61, and the account of Jesus reading it is Luke 4).

In doing so, Jesus announces that **he** is the one through whom God is going to bring jubilee and justice to the poor; to people like Joanne.

Watch Joanne's story and then ask someone to read Luke 4:16-21

[Click here for video](#)



Did you notice the language Joanne used when talking about being freed from debt?

*'It's been approved, the fees have been paid.'*

*'To be debt free is very, very peaceful, it feels like heaven, it feels very liberating knowing that I have a second chance.'*

- How does this link to the themes in the reading?
- Take a quick look together at the words and actions of Jesus as he brings good news to the poor:

Matthew 8:20

Matthew 19:16-24

Matthew 25:40

Luke 8:43-48

Luke 6:20-21

Luke 14:12-13

- Can you think of other examples from the life and teachings of Jesus on this topic that have impacted you?
- Which reading do you think is most powerful in challenging the Church to bring good news to those experiencing financial difficulty? Make a note of the one you have chosen.

## Prayer

Use the reading you chose in the previous section to spend some time praying for the Church and its response to debt and poverty. Ask God to show you how you can play your part.

## What next?

Over the next week, try and keep Jesus' words (Luke 4:18-19) in your mind. Notice where you encounter people that Jesus specifically said he came for.

# The Bible, debt and poverty

## Session 3



## The Church and the new creation

Welcome to the final session of *The Bible, debt and poverty*!

Last time, you took a closer look at three specific biblical takes on our topic:

- The Jubilee system which was aimed at reducing social inequality and oppressive debt in ancient Jewish society.
- The Old Testament's consistent focus on justice, particularly for the poor.
- The purpose of Jesus' ministry being to bring 'good news to the poor'.

Today's session will draw your exploration of the biblical call to social justice to a close as you first meditate on how God sees each one of us and conclude the course by considering an appropriate response: what might you do next?

### Getting started

At the end of the last session, you were encouraged to pay attention to where you encounter people that Jesus particularly referred to in Luke 4:18-19. What did you notice? How easy is it to open our eyes to situations of poverty and need around us? Are there people and situations you would rather not see?

## Reflection: the Church and the new creation

Read and discuss Luke 14:12-24.

- What kind of picture of the Kingdom of God does the Parable of the Wedding Feast give?
- Parables are supposed to be challenging. What do you find difficult about this?
- Who might you find it hard to invite in?

Read Acts 2:44-45.

- Consider the example of the first Christian community in Jerusalem. In what way might their way of living with each other, and in their communities, be applicable to tackling poverty and debt today?

Read Isaiah 65:17-25.

- As someone reads, take notice of where your attention is drawn: of all the pictures that the passage paints, which do you long for most?
- This is the joyful future that God promises to us all. What practical things can you/we do to live in expectation of this future?

Watch this video about Jenny and Steve, and their family's journey out of debt. Which of the three readings we've looked at today (the Parable of the Wedding Feast, the Christian community in Jerusalem, and the promised future in Isaiah) does this most remind you of?

[Click here for video](#)



## Response

Spend up to ten minutes individually reflecting on what has struck you from these sessions: the journey through scripture, the stories of those in debt and poverty, the input of others, and your own reflections.

Here are some passages to help you:

- Leviticus 19:33-34
- Galatians 2:8-10
- Luke 11:11-13

As you reflect, use paper and pen, or a device, to gather your thoughts and feelings. These could be notes, a sketch or picture, a poem, or however you prefer to express yourself.

If you feel able to, share what you have done with the group.

What is God leading you (as an individual, group or church) to do to serve those experiencing poverty and debt? Are there any commitments you can make to each other to take action?

## Prayer

Use these thoughts to lead you into a time of prayer for those in poverty and debt, and for God to enable you to make a difference.

## What next

Sign up to join us in our campaigning and advocacy to bring about change for those in debt and poverty.

[Sign up here](#)





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A three-part Bible study for students

was developed in partnership with



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