



Rochester Diocese Lent Course 2015

Challenging Poverty



2: Learning from poverty and the poor

Notes for Group Members

To begin the session

'For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.' **2 Corinthians 8:9**

A prayer

God our Father,
Whose Son our Lord Jesus Christ was rich
Yet became poor for our sake,
To make us rich out of his poverty;
By your grace let our lives overflow
In a wealth of generous service
To you and to our neighbour;
Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

🕒 On the course DVD, watch the **Introduction to Session 2** (about 5 minutes). Pause at the Challenging Poverty logo.

Introduction

It's possible to think of the poor as a focus for charitable acts by which we salve our consciences. Though it's important not to romanticise poverty, the truth is that the poor have much to teach us about what it means to be fully human and how we can live lives that are freer and more fulfilling.

The challenge of the poor

As we get to know the poor and listen to their stories, we realise that they present a prophetic window through which we can look at what is going on in our society. They challenge us to ask questions such as: *Why is the gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' widening in the UK? Why does this country have one of the highest incidences of alcohol and drug-related problems among young people in Europe?*



- How do you respond to these questions?
- What do these facts tell us about what is going on in our communities and nation?

Learning from the poor

While we shouldn't minimise the destructive effects of poverty, there is another way of viewing the poor – as those whose values and ways of living have much to teach the rest of society. Of the many things we can learn from the poor, here are three:

1 The way they value what they have

'Often, the poor and outcast have a lot to offer. They smile brighter, laugh harder, and they are easily satisfied. They often just enjoy the company of strangers. Any small gift to them will provoke a thousand thanks. What they have they value, very little is wasted. They have much to teach us.' (missionsmanual.com)



- Is this true in your experience?

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Learning from the poor *cont.*

2 Their resourcefulness and lifestyle

As we saw in Session 1, over a third of humanity lives on US\$2 a day or less. With this small amount at their disposal, the world's poorest people must work out how to put food on the table, afford a home, educate their children and have enough for emergencies and old age.


Studies with impoverished villagers and slum dwellers in Bangladesh, India and South Africa show that most poor households do not live hand to mouth in a desperate bid to keep afloat. Instead, they are quite sophisticated in the way they budget and manage their money (*Portfolios of the Poor, 2009*).

-  • Spend a moment writing down your basic needs and those of your family – the things you couldn't live without. Then compare your needs to the needs, as you understand them, of those living on US\$2 a day. What do you learn from the comparison?
- Consider how many of your needs are actually wants.

3 Their generosity

'Virtually all of the rural Bangladeshi households followed the well-established tradition of musti chaul: of keeping back one fistful of dry rice each time a meal was cooked, to hold against lean times, to have ready when a beggar called, or to donate to the mosque or temple when called on to do so.'
(*Portfolios of the Poor, 2009*)


 Read **2 Corinthians 8:1-15**.

-  • How does the Apostle Paul appeal to Christians to give generously to the relief fund?
- How can you encourage a spirit of generosity in your life and the life of your church?

Learning from the intentionally poor

 On the course DVD, watch the interview with **Sister Mary John of West Malling Abbey** (about 5½ minutes).

 Read '**Detachment from material things: the nuns of West Malling**' in the background information. Then read **Matthew 6:25-34**.


-  • What things do people in our society become attached to? Does the same apply to you?
- What does this passage teach us about getting our priorities right?

 Read the quote from **Raam Dev** in the background information.


-  • Is this sensible advice?
- How might living by these values affect your way of life and the people around you?

Less is more – learning to live more simply


 Read the quote from **James Odgers** in the background information.

-  • Consider how your life would be different if you lived with less. Is the idea attractive to you? Does it make you feel anxious?

Jesus said: 'The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.' (**Matthew 26:11**)


-  • Why do you think Jesus said this?

 Read **Luke 10:1-9**.

-  • Why do you suppose Jesus told his disciples to take the bare minimum with them as he sent them out to proclaim and demonstrate the good news of the Kingdom of God?

To close

 Read **Philippians 2:1-11**.

-  Looking back over this session, share what you've learned about what it means to be fully human and what is really important to make life meaningful and fulfilling.

A prayer

**Merciful God,
give us the same attitude as Jesus,
who emptied himself
and was obedient to you
all the way to his death on the cross.
Make us eager to put others before ourselves,
and their needs before our own.
We ask this through your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.**

After the session, look up '**For further reflection and action at home**' in the background information and see if you can apply some of these suggestions in the coming days and weeks.

A thought to take away

'A person is rich in proportion to the things they can leave alone.' (**Henry Thoreau, writer and philosopher, 1817-1862**)