

## Challenging Poverty

### 3: Friends of the poor

Notes for Group Members



#### To begin the session

##### A prayer

Lord, we thank you that we love because you first loved us.  
Thank you that we can share that love with those around us.  
Please help us show your love in a practical way to those who are struggling and in poverty.  
We ask that you open our eyes to the needs of those struggling in our own neighbourhoods, and help us to meet those needs.  
We thank you that when we serve our neighbours, we serve you.  
Help us to speak up for the poor and helpless, and to break the silence of those who feel trapped.  
We pray that they will find hope again and ultimately a new life in you.  
We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

🕒 On the course DVD, watch the **Introduction to Session 3** (about 10 minutes). Pause at the Challenging Poverty logo.

#### Introduction

Becoming 'friends of the poor' is a serious challenge and will take all of us out of our comfort zones. But doing so brings huge rewards and often becomes a life-changing adventure. It should certainly not be a burden.

#### Being open about poverty

🕒 Watch the '**Break the Silence**' clip from *Christians Against Poverty* (about 5 minutes).



- Why do people find it so hard to tell others about their debts?
- As Christians, how can we help people to talk about what's really going on in their lives so that we can help?
- How can we speak up for the poor and helpless?

#### Friends of the poor: Old Testament

📖 *The Old Testament offers clear direction and challenges as we consider our responsibility to the poor. It speaks of our response to the voiceless, the destitute and the needy (**Proverbs 31:8-9**), the distressed and the victimised (**Isaiah 25:4**), the oppressed (**Proverbs 16:19**) and the poor and vulnerable (**Proverbs 22:22**).*



- Take one or two of these passages that seem most relevant in today's society. Discuss why you see them as relevant and what they tell us of God's concern for the poor.

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### **Friends of the poor: New Testament**

In the gospels, we find that Jesus has not 'moved on' from the Old Testament's concern for justice and the poor. He has an intense interest in, and love for, the same kinds of people and concern for the poor is high on his agenda. Although he's preaching the good news to everyone, his ministry reveals a particular interest in the poor and the downtrodden.

 Read **Matthew 11:4-5** – Jesus' response when some of John the Baptist's followers ask him if he truly is the Messiah.

-  • What does this passage say of Jesus' priorities?

 Jesus 'moved in' with the poor and the outcast, associating with the socially ostracised (**Matthew 9:9-13** and **Luke 19:1-10**), with lepers whom no-one else would touch (**Mark 1:41** and **Luke 5:13**), with those whom others shunned as immoral (**Luke 7:36-50**) and with the bereaved (**Luke 7:11-17\***). He resisted the sexism of his day by speaking with a woman in public (**John 4:27**), refused to go along with the prevailing racism by praising a hated Samaritan (**Luke 10:25-37**) and set off a riot when he claimed that God loved Gentiles as much as Jews (**Luke 4:24-30**).

**\*Why would a bereaved widow be considered poor? Check the note in the background information.**

-  • From these examples, choose one or two that most strike you and discuss how Jesus' relationship with the people concerned shows his friendship and identification with the poor.

### **Friends of the poor: our response**

 Read **Jean's story** in the background information.

-  • In your church setting, do you, or should you, come into contact with people like Jean?
- Are you able, or willing, to change their stories by your actions?
  - If this is your experience, how have the changed stories of people like Jean changed your story?

### **Call to action**

So often our response to helping and serving the poor is muted, either because they're not seen as a priority or we're overwhelmed and don't know how to respond. As the church, we often favour words over action.

- 'Serving God is doing good to man, but praying is thought an easier service, and therefore more generally chosen. We must constantly ensure that our prayer never becomes an excuse for non-activity and non-engagement.' (**Benjamin Franklin, US Founding Father, 1706-1790**)
- 'One would almost think that **Luke 14:12-14** was not considered part of God's word, nor has any part of Jesus's teaching been more neglected by his own people. I do not think it is unlawful to entertain our friends; but if these words do not teach us that it is in some respects our duty to give a preference to the poor, I am at a loss to understand them.' (**John Newton, hymn writer and former slave trader, 1725-1807**)

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### **Call to action** cont

- 'When A sees B in grievous distress, his conscience always urges him to entreat C to help him.'  
(**Sydney Smith, clergyman and humourist, 1771-1845**)
  - 'Love thy neighbour is not a piece of advice, it's a command... The poor are where God lives... This is not a burden, this is an adventure... Don't let anyone tell you that it cannot be done; we can be the generation that ends extreme poverty.'  
(**Bono, singer-songwriter, b. 1960**)
-  • Take a moment to read and think about these quotes. Which of them speaks most clearly to you in your situation?
- Discuss how you and your church are currently a friend to the poor or able to become one.

🕒 *The song clip, 'Friend of the Poor' by Compassion Art, is a five-minute exploration in music and images of the way lives and situations are changed as we befriend the poor. You may like to use it before the closing prayer as a meditation or a lead-in to further prayer. Download details are in the Notes for Leaders.*

### **Closing prayer**

**Father of all, we give you thanks for every gift that comes from heaven.**

**To the darkness Jesus came as your light.**

**With signs of hope he touched untouchables with love and washed the guilty clean.**

**This is his story.**

**This is our song:**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

### **A thought to take away**

*Serving each other and the poor, giving our lives for each other and the poor, is the liberating principle at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. Mother Teresa of Calcutta put it like this: 'We are trying to make bombs of love, of prayer, of sacrifice, to overcome the world by love, and so bring God's love and proof that God loves the world as a living reality into the hearts of all.'*