

REMEMBERING THE POOR

A Bible Study Series



**ANGLICAN
VERSEAS AID**

ANGLICORD

Contents

Introduction	01
Bible Study 1 - Global poverty – Does God care? Should We?	02
Bible Study 2 - Transformation, the Jesus way	06
Bible Study 3 - Seeing Jesus in the eyes of the poor	10
Bible Study 4 - Your kingdom come...on earth	13
Some practical suggestions	16
Afterword	17

Introduction

They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor,
which was actually what I was eager to do.

Galatians 2:10

Anglican Overseas Aid (AOA) is an overseas relief and development agency of the Anglican Church of Australia. Our work is inspired by the gospel of Christ, with a vision for a peaceful, just and sustainable world for all. Working with Anglican and like-minded agencies, we aim to create and strengthen partnerships in developing countries to overcome poverty, injustice and disaster. We support our partners to assist marginalised communities to take control of their own lives and promote community wellbeing.

AOA supports projects in countries across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. All that Anglican Overseas Aid does comes out of who we are. Our Christian identity is central to this. Everything we do comes out of our desire to be Christlike.

These Bible studies have been created with this in mind. At their core, they ask why Christians should care about global poverty, not simply as a humanitarian response, but as an outworking of our faith in Christ. We seek to alleviate poverty because we are Christian.

Caring for the poor is a central aspect of the Gospel. These studies are designed to help individuals and groups explore this foundation. They contain a series of questions for either individuals or groups to consider, as well as a practical application.

Bible studies are most useful when they are applied. In Jesus' world, love is about giving; it is about action. It is why the first letter of John encourages us to love not just in words but in actions and in truth (1 John 3:18).

The Bible contains more than 2,000 verses which speak of God's concern about poverty and injustice. We see this concern most fully revealed in Jesus. In his relationships with outcasts, the marginalised and poor, he showed how much God cares for them.

Our prayer is that these studies will lead you closer to the God revealed in Jesus, to the One who lived out God's heart for the poor. May you be simultaneously encouraged, challenged, and blessed by them.

*Cover: Children at a primary school in Nyeri, Kenya are able to receive guidance counselling.
Left: Farmers herding their livestock in Laikipia, Kenya.*

All photos in this study are credited to AOA unless otherwise stated.

Bible Study 1

Global poverty – Does God care? Should We?

It takes a couple of people who are committed to raising awareness amongst the church community to create change. That's all it takes.

Jacob Sarkodee

BIBLE READING

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’

And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ – Revelation 21:1-5a (NRSV)

This page: Sr Sarah (left) and Sr. Daisy of the Christian Anglican Sisters of the Melanesian Church, who run the Christian Care Centre, one of only a few women's refuges in Solomon Islands.



BACKGROUND

Sheryl is a 66-year-old woman who lives on Pentecost Island, Vanuatu. She is a mother of eight, grandmother, and a community leader.

Like many women from Pentecost, Sheryl grew up witnessing her father abuse her mother. In a home and community where violence against women was the norm, Sheryl believed “it was okay for men to hit women”.

It was not until Sheryl began work with the government and the Anglican Church of Melanesia’s Mothers’ Union that she became aware of beliefs and attitudes that were different from those she grew up with.

Sheryl was introduced to women opposing gender-based violence (GBV) and learned that the violence she was experiencing was wrong and that she no longer had to endure it.

Does God care about the abuse that Sheryl has experienced? By extension, should we care?

The answer in the Bible is a clear “yes” to both questions. The Bible contains more than 2,000 verses which refer to God’s concern for the poor and for justice.

When the American author and activist, Jim Wallis, wanted to find out what the Bible said about poverty - if anything - he got together with a friend and they took a Bible and pair of scissors and proceeded to literally cut out from their Bible any verse they could find that spoke of God’s concern for the poor. The way Jim describes what happened is that they were left with a ‘holey’ Bible. It was a Bible full of holes; it was in tatters, such was the enormous number

of passages they found that expressed God’s concern for the poor.

From the creation story in Genesis, where humans are made in the very image of their Creator, to the giving of the Law, in which the people of God are called to care for the poor and comfort the orphan and widow in their distress, to the prophets who rail against the injustice of Israel, to Jesus who summarised the Old Testament in the commandments to love God and neighbour, to the letters of Paul who encouraged his readers to love, to that wonderful passage quoted from Revelation 21 where we are told that there will come a day when there will be no more pain or tears or death, we see God’s concern for those who are marginalised.



Above: Mary works as a paralegal providing education about gender-based violence in Lekiji, Kenya.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What feelings come up for you when you read Sheryl’s story? Name three feelings.
- What are some feelings you think God feels about Sheryl’s plight? Do they differ from your feelings?
- When you consider the Scriptures as a whole, what stands out the most to you?
- Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God more than anything else. How would you explain the kingdom of God to a stranger?
- Apart from talking about the kingdom of God, Jesus also constantly called people to follow him. What does following Jesus mean to you? What does it look like in your life and in the life of your church?
- After his resurrection, Jesus said to his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you”. Where was he sending his disciples? What might that mean for you?

REFLECTION

Sheryl says the church is starting to stand against gender-based violence by preaching and raising awareness of it. She is also working hard with the Pentecost chiefs and has caused a shift in their beliefs to the point where the chiefs now refer cases of abuse to her and involve her in running awareness sessions.

Revelation 21:1-5 expresses the great Christian hope of heaven coming to earth. It is a prayer we pray every week in church when, in the Lord’s Prayer, we echo Jesus in asking for God’s kingdom to come right here on earth as it is in heaven.

The kingdom of God is very important to Jesus. It is mentioned no less than 100 times in all the gospels. In fact, Jesus spoke more about the kingdom than he did about anything else. Interestingly, Jesus never defined what the kingdom is. He always alluded to it, expressing it in terms such as “it is like...”. And he used contemporary metaphors to describe it. He talked about mustard seeds and yeast and hidden treasure.

In Jesus, the kingdom of God had come to earth. Jesus lived a life that could be summed up in love of God and neighbour. In fact, for him, love of neighbour was an expression of love for God. While the Pharisees and teachers of the law became upset with Jesus because he didn’t strictly follow the Law as they saw it, he lived out its true meaning by living a life of complete love.

Jesus’ ministry was directed mostly to those on the margins of society: those who were called ‘sinners’. In the society of Jesus’ day, if you were poor, it meant that you had sinned in some way and you deserved your plight. Jesus’ response though was completely different to that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. He showed real compassion and gave us the example of how to treat those who are less well off than us.

IDEA FOR APPLICATION

Read Revelation 21:1-5. Can you picture a world in which there are no more tears, no more pain and no more death? Spend some time drawing or writing about it to express what this world might look like. Use your creativity. We all have it! If you are doing this study in a group, share what you have drawn or written. Pray together the prayer on p.15.

Bible Study 2

Transformation, the Jesus way

Our relationship to God is tied to our relationship to others. We can't worship God without being considerate of the needs of others.

Ruth Padilla Deborst

BIBLE READING

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.

She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."

Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?' He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

– Mark 5: 24-34 (NRSV)



BACKGROUND

In countries like Kenya, women and girls often find themselves in powerless positions, subject to the will of their family, and unable to direct their lives or access education.

Some even find themselves abandoned and living in poverty. AOA works with the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) in educating communities about the rights of women and children, advocating and negotiating on their behalf, helping them access education and find ways to earn a living. They are supporting networks for women who have experienced domestic violence, and help community leaders promote respectful treatment of women.

Many women in Kenya face extraordinary difficulties and an uncertain future. Occurrences like the COVID-19 pandemic increase their vulnerability, placing their health and livelihoods at risk.

AOA's program in Kenya has been bringing renewed hope through community education and support to those who are most vulnerable, despite the immense challenges faced.

In 2000, the World Bank commissioned a study called 'Voices of the Poor', in which they interviewed 60,000 people living in poverty. One of the questions they asked was around what poverty is. The vast majority of the responses indicated that poverty is not so much a lack of material things (although it does include that), but that poverty is inherently about a lack of a sense of dignity. It is a feeling of being trodden on and not valued.

In Mark's gospel, there is a story of a woman whose sense of dignity had been trodden on. The woman with the flow of blood had faced adversity and marginalisation for many years. Let's have a look at her story.

Whenever we look at the stories in the Bible, we need to consider the context in which they were written. In this story, Jesus' popularity was at its peak. It could be said that he had rock star status. Word of his healings had spread around the towns and villages, and everyone wanted to see him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe a time when you were hoping for something good to happen to you, but you didn't want anyone to know about it. What happened?
- Have you ever been affirmed in front of a group of people? How did it make you feel?
- Imagine yourself as one of the crowd of onlookers. What thoughts go through your head as the woman comes forward after she is physically healed by Jesus?
- What is the significance of Jesus calling the woman, "Daughter"?
- Imagine you are a Pharisee or a teacher of the Law in the crowd that day. What is your reaction to Jesus healing the woman and calling her "Daughter"?
- Why is it important that the woman was not just healed physically?

REFLECTION

The woman with the flow of blood did not have a lot going for her. She was a social outcast. She was on the edge of society, someone to stay well clear of and ignore. Her sense of self-worth would have been at rock-bottom. So, it is no wonder that she came to Jesus in the crowd thinking that if she just laid a finger on his cloak, hopefully she would be healed and would be able to scurry away and not be noticed. The terror of being noticed by the crowd would have been too much for her. You can almost imagine her hunched over as she approaches Jesus.

Then we see the first stage of her healing. She touches Jesus' cloak and everything changes. The bleeding stops. After all the years of going to different doctors, something has changed in her body and she knows it.

It is at this stage that we see the strange question of Jesus: "who touched me?" Understandably, the disciples are somewhat bewildered. If you have ever been in a crowded shopping centre or a football crowd, you will know that people brush past each other all the time. So, the disciples justifiably remind Jesus that there are people all around him, so it could have been anyone who touched him.

But Jesus is unperturbed. This was different. He had felt power go out from him. Then the woman comes forward, unable to hide any longer. When Jesus healed people, he always did so according to their own context. Some people he healed in isolation apart from the crowds, while others he healed in full view of everyone, like this woman.

So, imagine her terror when she comes forward. What is Jesus going to say? What he says is the next part of her healing. In calling her "Daughter", he affirms her in front of the whole crowd. This woman who was an outsider is a pariah no more. She is included; she is one of the family.

This woman would have gone home that night feeling on top of the world. For the first time in years, she is not just accepted, but she feels it. She knows it in her heart. Her sense of dignity is restored.

When Jesus heals, it is holistic. It is not just physical, not just spiritual and not just emotional. It encompasses all of these. This is the Jesus way of transformation. The woman could now be a part of society. While Jesus always accepts people as they are, sometimes he heals in ways that were necessary to overcome social prejudice and disadvantage.

IDEA FOR APPLICATION

Think of a person who might be a modern-day analogy for the woman with the flow of blood. They might be marginalised because of their gender, illness, poverty or anything else. How can you show dignity to a marginalised person or marginalised people this week? Talk about this in your group.

Pray together the prayer on p.15.

Bible Study 3

Seeing Jesus in the eyes of the poor

Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.
Mother Teresa

BIBLE READING

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

This page: Ruth is a member of the Economic Empowerment Group conducted by AOA's partner, the Anglican Church of Kenya, in Nyeri.



Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’

And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’

Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

- Matthew 25:31-46 (NRSV)

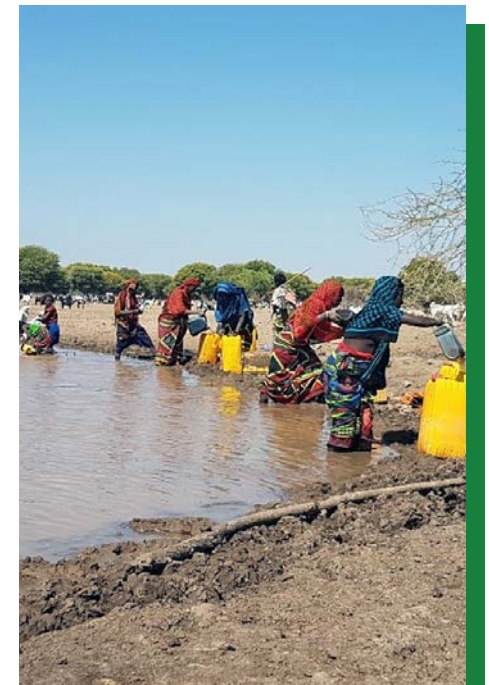
BACKGROUND

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats is possibly the most confronting story Jesus tells, especially for those of us living in the West. It seems to clearly state that, in the end, we will be judged on whether we fed the hungry, clothed the naked and took in the stranger.

Stories like this need to be taken in the context of not just the broader biblical narrative, but more specifically, the character and life of Jesus. If we look at his life and teachings, we see that love of neighbour is directed at anyone in need, regardless of their race, religion or gender.

In Luke 10, after telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus tells us to follow the example of the ‘outsider’ Samaritan by being a neighbour to the one in need.

Our aim in life is to follow Jesus in all that we do. Any good works we do are not just good humanitarianism. We do them because we are Christian. What we do comes out of who we are.



Above: Women collect water from the Bargaale dam in the Afar region of northern Ethiopia. Photo credit: Afar Pastoralist Development Association (APDA)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who does the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats specifically refer to? Who is Jesus addressing?
- Why does Jesus use the analogy of sheep and goats? Hint: consider what Jesus says about sheep in John 10.
- Do you think the hungry, thirsty, naked and strangers would be looking forward to judgment? Why/why not?
- Who are the 'Samaritans' in our society? If you were telling the Parable of the Good Samaritan today, who would you make the hero of the story?
- Thinking about the answer you gave to the previous question, how does your response make you feel?
- Who are the hungry, thirsty, naked and strangers in your life who you can be as Christ to?

REFLECTION

Jesus was known as a 'friend of sinners' (Luke 7:34). In his society, 'sinners' included the poor. The extremely poor were generally despised in 1st Century Palestinian culture.

In the gospels though we see that Jesus had a special affinity with these people. His interactions with them confounded the religious leaders. He was claiming to be from God and yet he broke many religious rules of the day. He clearly favoured people over legalistic niceties.

By doing this, Jesus broke down the social divisions that existed between the wealthy

and the poor. This pointed the religious leaders back to the reality of who God is and to the true purpose of the Law. The Scriptures the religious leaders talked a lot about care for the poor. The Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) gave clear instructions about looking after the widow, the alien and the orphan.

The importance Jesus attaches to treatment of the poor is very confronting at the end of Matthew's Gospel in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats.

The profound emphasis in this parable is that Jesus identifies so closely with the poor that he says that whenever we are helping them, we are helping Jesus himself.

This begs the question of us – do we see Jesus in the eyes of the poor? Do we see them as he does? When we hear of the plight of people affected by earthquakes, famine and conflict and see their photos in the news or online, do we see Jesus in their faces?

Following Jesus is often uncomfortable. But it is on this narrow road that we find the abundant life that Jesus promises.

IDEA FOR APPLICATION

Find a photo of a poor person, or someone who has experienced a disaster or trauma. Spend some quiet time looking at their face, especially their eyes. Then close your eyes and imagine them as Jesus himself. What is he saying to you?

Share your experiences and your feelings with the other people in your group.

Pray together the prayer on p.15.

Bible Study 4

Your kingdom come...on earth

The kingdom of God is not about God being king over us; it's about God being king through us.

N.T. Wright

BIBLE READING

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

"Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one."

- Matthew 6:5-13 (NRSV)

This page: A woman sits by a campfire in Vanuatu. AOA works with our partner, the Anglican Church of Melanesia, to support disaster resilience.

BACKGROUND

Every week in church when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask for God's kingdom to come on earth as in heaven. What do we mean when we pray this?

The kingdom of God is mentioned more than 100 times in the gospels. It is what Jesus spent most of his time talking about. But Jesus never actually defined the kingdom of God. When he talked about it he spoke in parables, often using analogies such as, "it is like..."

For Jesus, the kingdom of God was nothing less than the integration of the perfect kingly rule of heaven extended on earth, seen in his life, death and resurrection. His teaching, deeds of compassion, healings and the way he interacted with people displayed and initiated the reign of God in the world.

What does the reign of God look like? Or, as the New Testament theologian, N.T. Wright, says, "what would it look like if God was running the show?"

The reign of God looks like outbreaks of love, justice and peace. It might include the hungry being fed, parents being able to afford to send their children to school instead of having them work, or women being able to work because they have undergone training and learned new skills. It is ultimately about people's sense of God-given dignity being made real for them.

This is what Jesus means when he prays that God's kingdom will come on earth just as in heaven, as we pray every week in the Lord's Prayer. Jesus is the beginning of the coming together of heaven and earth. He invites us

to pray for this to continue, but also to be the answer to this prayer with our action.

Helping people who are living in poverty is one way of being an answer to this prayer and reflecting God's love out into the world. We do it by working for a sustainable, just world for everyone, a world that is being renewed by God.

The hope we have in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus gives us strength to persevere as we see little outbreaks of God's kingdom appearing throughout the world amidst the daily strife that confronts millions of people.

Because of Jesus, we have a vision of a world that will be fully restored when he returns to complete the work of renewal. It is important to emphasise that it is God who builds God's kingdom; our role is to build for the kingdom, making our faithful and obedient contribution to what God will finally make complete at the end of all things.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If the world is being renewed by God, why do we still see poverty, injustice and conflict?
- What does prayer have to do with the kingdom of God coming to earth?
- Why did Jesus command us to "go into your room and shut the door" when we pray?
- What do you see as the difference between building for God's kingdom and building God's kingdom?
- What role does the Holy Spirit play in bringing God's kingdom on earth?
- As mentioned above, Jesus used analogies to describe the kingdom of God. How would you describe the kingdom in today's language? Start with the words, "it is like..."

REFLECTION

What Jesus was teaching us to pray for in the Lord's Prayer was what the prophets of our Old Testament had promised: that God would return as King.

When the New Testament speaks of God's kingdom, it always speaks of the reign of God coming to earth – it is never a spiritual place in the sky where we go when we die.

When the Spirit came upon the early church at Pentecost, it was to empower Jesus' disciples to go out and be the answer to Jesus' prayer. This is also our calling today.

Jesus is the bringer of the kingdom, of God's reign on earth. We are the messengers of God's reign, sent into the world to participate with God in bringing this new order. Little by little, the love, justice and healing of God will overcome within a sinful and broken world.

IDEA FOR APPLICATION

Close your eyes and imagine what God's kingdom on earth might look like. What are its attributes? Discuss what comes to mind.

PRAYER

God of Glory,

Thank you for teaching us to pray, and for giving us your Spirit to empower us to work for your kingdom to come on earth as in heaven.

We ask that you empower us to live for your kingdom by making us more like Christ. Help us, as Isaiah prophesied, to prepare the way for you, to live as examples of what your restored world will look like.

Be with poor communities in both near and distant places. Let them know that, though we may be distant from them in geography, we are close in spirit. We pray for strength for them and for us, as we each play our part to work for the renewal of your world.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who prayed that your kingdom come on earth. Amen.

Left: A Palestinian child at the Spafford Children's Center takes part in play-based therapy to address learning difficulties, often caused through trauma. Credit: Spafford Children's Center

Some practical suggestions

In working for a better world, for God's kingdom to come on earth as in heaven, there are many actions we can take. Here are just a few you could do:

PRAY FOR THE POOR

In your public and private prayers, include the poor both in your local neighbourhood and overseas.

WRITE TO OR VISIT YOUR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

Australia's overseas aid giving is a vital part of our moral obligation as a nation. Encourage your local MP to provide real leadership by championing policies that inspire generosity and help.

DONATE TO ANGLICAN OVERSEAS AID

Financial support helps our work continue to thrive in poor countries in different parts of the world.

This page: Women in Gaza attend the Women's Health and Wellbeing program at the Ahli Arab Hospital. Credit: Ahli Arab Hospital.



Afterword

We hope you have gained a lot from these studies, and that you have been lifted up, encouraged, and challenged.

Bringing transformation to communities is what Anglican Overseas Aid is all about. Our tagline is 'Life. Abundantly. For All.' It is taken from John 10:10 where Jesus says that he has come that people may have life in all its abundance. And as communities overseas are transformed, we are also transformed as we work for change from here. The love of God is transformative in every way.

We believe that God's dream is for everyone to live a life where there is dignity and sufficiency. It is also our dream, and we hope that these studies have inspired you as you live out God's dream in your lives.

If you would like to find out more about the work of Anglican Overseas Aid, go to our website at www.anglicanoverseasaid.org.au or call us on 1800 249 880.

Left: Improved agricultural practices that support enhanced nutrition and health outcomes in Mozambique.



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Above: Children at a community consultation on improving the safety of women and children in Vanuatu.