

# Session 1

## Faith and action

‘Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.’ (James 2:17)  
 The letter of James has strong warnings for those who call themselves Christians and yet do nothing about people living in poverty. This session explores how these warnings might apply to us.



Amina Makoya found herself looking after six children when her husband and his relatives died after contracting HIV. Being HIV-positive herself and with no way of feeding the children, she needed the help of a Ugandan organisation called AIDS Care, Education, and Training (ACET). It gave her a goat, using money raised in a Christian Aid appeal. The goat provides milk and fertiliser, and has just given birth to kids, which Amina can sell. She now organises women’s groups so that she can tell others how to prevent HIV transmission. She is very upbeat, but, without antiretroviral drugs, she too is ill and her life is hard: ‘It is my prayer that Christian Aid will continue to support us. When I see other children who have more than enough, but mine do not have clothes or bedding, it is demoralising. It hurts to think I might not be able to provide for my children and send them to school.’

Amina Makoya, from Bugabelo, Uganda is HIV-positive. Christian Aid partner AIDS Care Education and Training gave her a goat which she can use to earn a living

## 1.1

## Introduction\*

In the centre of the group scatter 20 file cards with the following written on them:

- clean water from a tap in your home town
- clean water from a tap in your own home
- free time at some point in the day
- special help, if disabled
- freedom to worship in any way
- primary school for boys
- primary school for all
- secondary school
- a way of making a living
- shoes
- a name
- happiness
- a telephone
- computer access
- vaccination against preventable diseases
- a local doctor
- a midwife present when giving birth
- a bed
- breakfast
- antiretroviral drugs, if HIV-positive

Invite the group to work together to sort the cards into two piles – one containing all the things they consider to be the rights of every human in the world, and the other consisting of all the things they consider to be privileges to which not everyone is entitled. Try to reach a consensus, and discuss items that the group are not immediately unanimous on. (You may need to create a third pile of those that the group found it impossible to agree on.)

The group leader may wish to reveal some of the following information during or after the exercise in order to help the discussion:

- Of the six billion people who live in the world, 1.6 billion people earn less than 70p per day.
- Every eight seconds somewhere in the world a child dies from diarrhoea (an illness which in the UK can be quickly cured with a medicine that is basically just sugar and salt).
- 58 per cent of women in the developing world have a midwife present at birth; compared with 98 per cent in Europe.
- 1.2 billion people do not have a local supply of clean water.
- Of the 115 million children not attending primary school, 56 per cent of them are girls and 94 per cent live in developing countries.
- 70 per cent of the world's population have never owned a telephone, let alone a computer.
- The 200 richest people in the world between them own as much as the poorest 2,500,000,000.
- Africa is home to more than 26 million people living with HIV/AIDS. Yet only about one per cent of Africans who need them are receiving antiretroviral drugs.

## 1.2

## Worship

**The Lord is exalted over all the nations,  
his glory above the heavens.  
Who is like the Lord our God,  
the One who sits enthroned on high,  
who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?  
He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;  
he seats them with princes,  
with the princes of their people.  
He settles the barren woman in  
her home  
as a happy mother of children.  
Praise the Lord.**

Psalm 113:4-9

Choose from the following, depending on the time available:

- The leader should read Psalm 113:4-9, followed by a silence in which to think about the words of the psalm.
- With the file cards from the introductory activity spread out on the floor, invite the group to take part in a time of thanksgiving by naming before God privileges for which they are grateful. (Prayer for those who do not share these blessings will follow later in the session.)
- Choose songs that praise God as the provider of our needs. Numbers 4, 14 and 17 from the list on page 30 may be particularly suitable.

# 1.3

## Word

1 Read James 2:1-17 aloud. Invite everyone in the group to read it again silently, and to choose from it one phrase that strikes them as particularly urgent or important. Let each person, without further comment from themselves or the others, read out their chosen phrase.

2 Why do you think James used the quotation in verse 8? How does loving your neighbour relate to showing favouritism?

3 How does God respond to the world's system of values that favour the rich at the expense of the poor (verses 5-13)? What does this mean both for poor people and for those who don't treat them fairly?

4 Give examples of favouritism that you are aware of both locally in your church and community and also at a national and international level (verses 1-4).

5 Verses 15 and 16 give an example of what it means to have faith, but not the actions to back it up. Give an up-to-date example. Take a moment to reflect on how healthy your own faith is, using the standard set in verse 17.

6 There are many people in today's world going hungry like the person described in verse 15. Read through Amina's story (on page 6) and Ronald's story (on this page) and/or watch part one of the *Act Justly* video, and discuss the ways in which some of their needs have been met. How can we 'act justly' towards such people?

### \*The Act Justly video

The first part of the *Act Justly* video is a call to Christians to put their faith into action by seeking global justice. It is an ideal accompaniment to this session, and could be shown during the Bible study in order to root the conversation in the experiences of particular people whose lives are directly touched by the subjects under discussion. Alternatively, this section could be shown during a church service before these group sessions in order to publicise them in advance. Details about how to obtain the video can be found on the order form in the centre of this booklet.

### If you have more time...

You may like to do some further study, either with the group or as an individual at a later date.

Read Luke 4:14-30. What do we learn from Jesus' words in verses 18-19 about what it means in practice to bring good news to poor people? What do verses 24-27 teach us about who we should work on behalf of? What do verses 28-30 suggest might be the cost of doing this?

'I was hungry, and you formed a humanities group to discuss my hunger. I was in prison, and you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my release. I was naked, and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance. I was sick, and you knelt and thanked God for your health. I was homeless, and you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God. I was lonely, and you left me alone to pray for me. You seem so holy, so close to God. But I am still very hungry. And lonely. And cold.'

John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Marshalls, 1984)

When his mother left home, Ronald Avila Quispe found himself on the streets, sleeping rough, drinking alcohol and taking drugs. He was 11. Ronald's home, Lima, is the capital of Peru. The city suffers from high poverty levels which can lead to the violence and domestic abuse that make young people particularly vulnerable. The Christian Centre of Promotion and Services runs youth clubs to help young people living in the area deal with the difficulties they face and have a say in their own futures. It is funded and supported by Christian Aid.

The club Ronald joined is called Las Mascaras, meaning 'the masks', which specialises in drama. Being part of the group has given him the strength to turn his life around. No longer living on the streets, he hopes to become a policeman. 'I think God helped me to find Las Mascaras and being part of the group has helped me so much. It's hard to get out of a lifestyle that is all about drink and drugs. But it is possible, and I did it!'

Ronald Avila Quispe outside Las Mascaras Youth Club



Christian Aid/Jo Walker

## 1.4

## Our response

**Discuss the quotations and suggested actions. Decide on something you can do individually or as a group.**

1\*

Read through the information about Uganda and HIV/AIDS in the *Act Justly* appeal pack. Details about how to obtain the pack can be found on the order form in the centre of this booklet, or visit [www.surefish.co.uk/actjustly](http://www.surefish.co.uk/actjustly). You will need to make copies for each group member. Or visit Christian Aid's website, [www.christianaid.org.uk/world/where/where.htm](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/world/where/where.htm). Choose one of the countries in which Christian Aid works (perhaps one that was mentioned in the group) and click on it to find out more about life there.

2

Get more information from the world's poorest countries by registering to receive *Christian Aid News* through the post four times a year. Use the order form in the centre of this booklet or telephone 020 7523 2225, and ask for the *Prayer Diary* to be included in the mailing.

3

Discuss in your group how you could build relationships with minority groups or those who are living in poverty in your community. Is there anything your group could do to draw in such people?

4

Together, pray for people and groups who suffer because of favouritism which discriminates against them, and for those who endure life in great poverty. Ask members of the group to lay before God the areas of life where he has challenged them during the session to be open to God changing their lives and attitudes.

**Lord God, renew your Church and begin with me. Heal our land, tend our wounds, make us one, and use us in your service, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.**

A prayer from Kenya

'Working with Christian Aid has helped us to keep issues of justice from disappearing off our youth ministry agenda when it is clear that this is a central theme of scripture. Christian Aid has enabled us to engage with issues of injustice in a passionate, but also intelligent, way with our young people.'

Duncan Stow, Leeds Youth Cells Network

'Prayer and campaigning for situations of injustice to be changed is a vital part of the Christian's responsibility. It is connected with God's call to live out and proclaim the gospel. It is good news for the world's poor people, but it is also good news for our friends. SPEAK is a network of students and young adults who campaign and pray about situations of injustice, through which we aim to share our faith in an all powerful, all-loving creator God.'

Louise Donkin, project coordinator at SPEAK



Christian Aid/Brenda Hayward

SPEAK campaigners join the call for trade justice for the world's poorest communities

SPEAK, The Crypt, St Peter's Church, Northchurch Terrace, London N1 4DA



'For me, supporting the work of Christian Aid is essential, as it is literally a matter of life and death. I use music as an expression of what is important to me and these issues are at the top of the pile. It's not about being a nice Christian, it's about being a human being and seeing fellow humans being oppressed in ways they shouldn't be. But as a Christian I feel it is vital that I am doing something to make a difference in this world.'

Niall Dunne, Transition Band

Niall Dunne, a member of Transition Band and a Christian Aid volunteer in Bristol



Martin Parkes