

Session 4

Shopping ethically

‘The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.’
(Proverbs 11:1)

If we choose wisely, it is now easier than at any time in the last 50 years to buy products that have reached the shops without people in the developing world being exploited. This session asks what are today’s ‘dishonest scales’, and how our Christian faith should affect the way we shop.



Rosie Lembusi has been farming coffee in Uganda for 35 years. If you drink Cafédirect coffee you may have tasted her produce. Now at the age of 50, Rosie can be sure for the first time in her life that she will be paid a fair price for her beans. She has 100 coffee trees and worked hard for three years to be certified as an organic farmer producing a sufficiently high-quality crop to qualify for the Gumutindo fair-trade cooperative. Because the cooperative guarantees the price she will receive, she is not so vulnerable to fluctuations in the market price, and she now earns 500 shillings per kilo more than she used to. (500 shillings is the price of a pint of milk in the UK.) Cafédirect also pays 200 shillings per kilo into a fund for projects that will improve the welfare of the whole community in Gumutindo.

Rosie Lambusi washing coffee beans before pulping them, at the Gumutindo Coffee Cooperative, Uganda, which sells its coffee to Cafédirect and other fair-trade outlets

4.1

Introduction*

As a game, find out whether, by taste alone, members of the group can distinguish between fairly and unfairly traded goods. Put some easily edible products on a table. One plate should contain a fairly traded version and the other its equivalent. Do not label the plates, so that it is not evident which is which when members of the group make their guesses. Choose from the many that are available in supermarkets – chocolate, bananas or biscuits are easiest – but you might adapt the game to feature flowers or drinks.

When you have had some fun and declared a winner, reveal more details about where the products were bought, how much they cost, and from which country they originate. Have a conversation about people's experience as consumers of fair-trade goods, broadening it to take in other aspects of ethical shopping.

*For information about the full range of products carrying the Fairtrade mark, visit the Fairtrade Foundation website at www.fairtrade.org.uk (You may find it useful to print off a list in advance – it will also come in handy for 'Our response'.)

In 1992, Christian Aid helped set up the Fairtrade Foundation which exists to ensure a better deal for marginalised and disadvantaged producers in the developing world. The Fairtrade Foundation awards the Fairtrade Mark to products that meet internationally recognised standards of fair trade.

Between 1999 and 2004, the proportion of the UK population that understood the Fairtrade Mark rose from 12 to 39 per cent. By the end of 2004, there were more than 400 products available carrying the Mark, with sales of Fairtrade products running at more than £100 million a year and growing at an annual rate of more than 40 per cent. Sixty-eight towns, cities and villages have now achieved Fairtrade status (meeting five specified targets set by the Fairtrade Foundation), with many others working towards this aim.

Worldwide, Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (of which the Fairtrade Foundation is the UK member) is working with 370 producer groups, representing five million producers and their families in 45 countries.



4.2

Worship

**Glorify the Lord with me;
let us exalt his name together.
This poor person called, and the
Lord heard him;
he saved him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the Lord encamps
around those who fear him,
and he delivers them.
Taste and see that the Lord is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge
in him.
Fear the Lord, you his saints,
for those who fear him lack nothing.**
Psalm 34:3,6-9

Choose from the following, depending on the time available:

- Read and reflect on the words of the psalm, inviting the whole group to say the words: 'Taste and see that the Lord is good' together.
- With the tastes from the introductory game still in your mouths, thank God for the goodness of his creation in which a million tastes and smells enrich our lives. Invite everyone to name their favourite taste gratefully before the Lord.
- Sing songs that focus on the goodness of God. Numbers 6, 16 and 19 from the list on page 30 may be particularly appropriate.

4.3

Word

1

Read Leviticus 19:9-18, 30-37 aloud. At the time when these laws were written for God's people, what would have been the impact on poor people if verses 9 and 10 were obeyed? What might you suggest as an equivalent law for today's world, which would have a corresponding impact on those who are trapped in poverty now?

2

Ask the same questions as you look, one at a time, at verses 13, 15, 33-34 and 35-36.

3

Which verse from this passage was quoted by Jesus, and how did he apply it in Mark 12:28-34? What did Jesus add to the command during the course of his life and teaching?

4

What connection do these verses in Leviticus have with the concept of fair trade?

***The Act Justly video**

Part four of the *Act Justly* video, which deals with fair trade and trade justice, is particularly appropriate to show in this session.

If you have more time...

Read Zechariah 7:4-12. Why do you think the four groups named in verse 10 were picked out for special treatment? Verse 10 speaks of God's anger. What do you think is making him angry today? We discover from verses 5 and 6 that there is a time for feasting and a time for fasting. How can we know which is which?

Ugandan coffee farmers' incomes plummeted when international agreements to maintain stable prices ended in the 1980s.

'Cafédirect came five years ago and through their training there has been a tremendous change. As a result of the increase in quality, Fairtrade farmers receive 2,000 shillings per kilo as against the 1,500 shillings that other farmers receive. But only a very small number of farmers are producing Fairtrade coffee.

The government must play a role to get markets for sales, and farmers must produce the best quality possible. Christian Aid is doing tremendous work for us by using their convincing language to help us in our plight. Ordinary people can help us by supporting our products.

I grew up a Christian, and have always believed that the Bible teaches us that we should serve others first. Giving good service to other people is my pride. The Bible tells the strong to lift the weak. Christians in the UK can help us by buying our produce and introducing it to their friends.'

Sam Magona, Cafédirect Uganda

Coffee beans at the Gumutindo Coffee Cooperative, Uganda, which sells its coffee to Cafédirect and other fair-trade outlets



Christian Aid/Roger Allen

4.4

Our response

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

1
Organise a social evening serving fairly traded products – not only to the group, but also as part of your evangelistic outreach to friends and neighbours.

2
Identify a fairly traded product that you would enjoy, but is not currently available in your nearest supermarket. Write a letter to the manager of the store, asking him or her to stock it. And then, of course, urge your friends to buy it so that the shop can see that stocking it is a good decision.

3*
Find out about the Fairtrade Towns initiative by visiting www.fairtrade.org.uk
Discuss how your group could get involved.

4
Pray by name for local shops, asking God to develop a commitment to fair trade among managers or other decision-makers who work in these shops. Pray for a willingness in shoppers (particularly ourselves) to consider the impact of their and our purchases on people in the developing world and on the environment. Then go on to pray for successful harvests for farmers in the developing world who are able to benefit from fair-trade initiatives, and for millions more to be incorporated in fair-trade schemes, as the market expands.

Seeds we bring to you
Fields we bring to you
Hoes we bring to you
Knives we bring to you
Hands we bring to you
Ourselves we bring to you
Will you bless us, O Lord!
Kenya, source unknown

‘I love to hear the stories of how fair trade has made a difference to people’s lives. It encourages me to continue in my efforts, however small they may seem... If we want to live out the command to love our neighbour as we love ourselves, we have to question the injustice of our trading systems and actively work for change.’
Catherine Hardcastle, Hexham Community Church, Salt and Light

‘Fairly traded food is so good, both for the taste buds, and for the ethics, and it is a great way to show others about putting our love for Christ into action in our everyday lives, even in something as mundane as shopping.’
Helen Harrison, Thornbury Baptist Church, South Gloucestershire
Fairtrade Network

Andrew Tucker, a volunteer from Ebenezer Evangelical Church, Bristol, raising the profile of Fairtrade products in a local supermarket



Stewart North