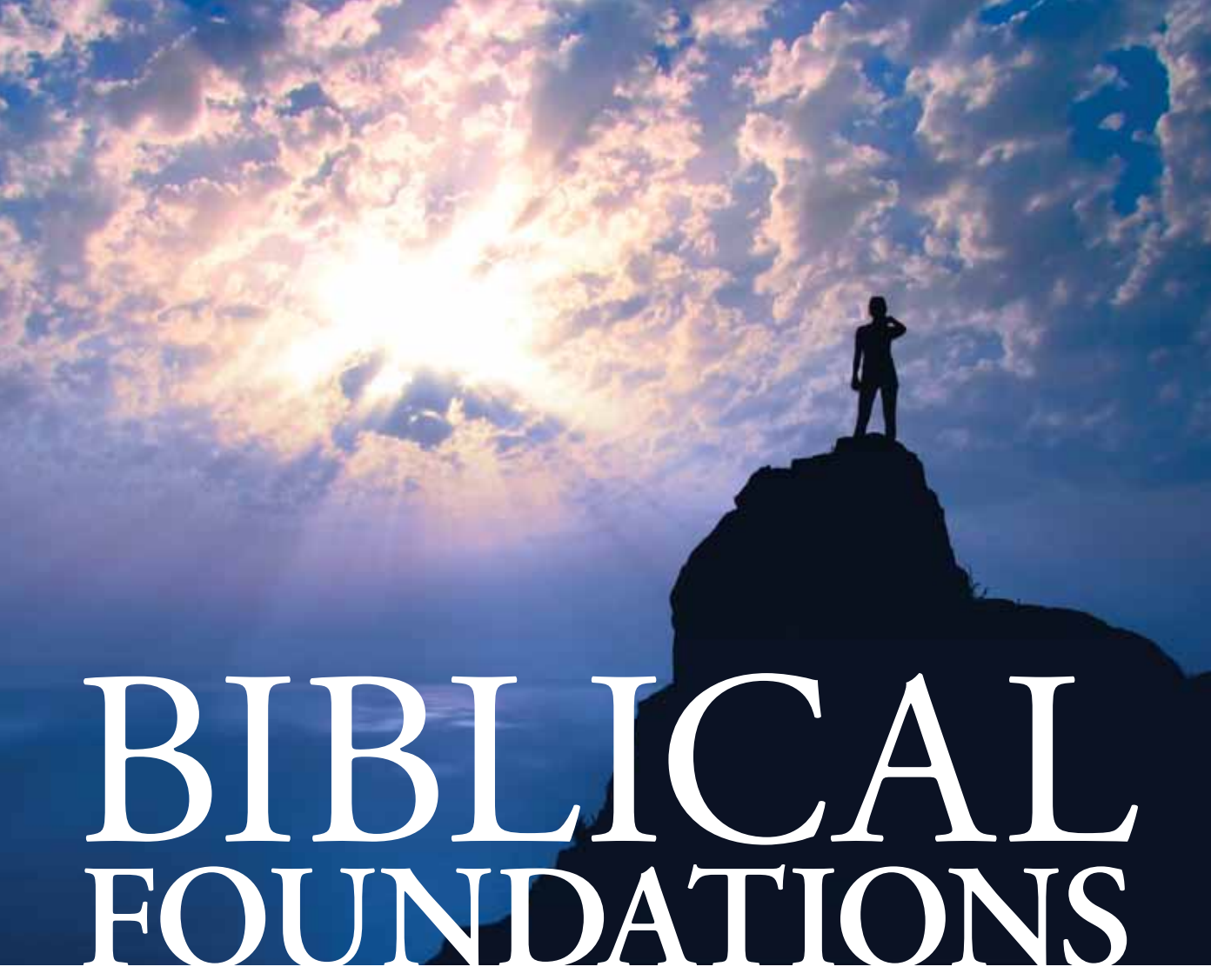


BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN WORKERS

World Vision®

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN WORKERS

John West

© World Vision International 2011

ISBN 978-0-918261-24-3

Author: John West

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form, except for brief excerpts in reviews, without prior permission of the publisher.

Published by World Vision International, 800 West Chestnut Avenue, Monrovia, California 91016-3198 U.S.A.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised Edition) of the Bible, copyright © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

Series Editors: Tim Dearborn and Clare Scott. Editor in Chief: Edna Valdez. Senior Editor: Rebecca Russell. Production Management: Katie Klopman, Ann Abraham. Copy Editor: Joann Slead. Design Management: Rebekah Roose, Daniel Mason. Layout: Richard Sears. Proofreading: Audrey Dorsch.

Foreword

As World Vision staff, when responding to the deep needs of those affected by natural or human-made disasters, we naturally engage in matters of faith. At times, not only are we overwhelmed by the material needs we face, but also by the spiritual needs. Therefore, providing resources for spiritual resilience and long-term well-being is a vital dimension of our staff and community partner capacity building.

In *Biblical Foundations for Humanitarian Workers*, John West encourages all of us to take a fresh look at how we approach the most formative influences of faith on our humanitarian work – what he refers to as the Humanitarian Faith Imperative. John uses an analogy with which he was familiar in his youth, growing up in the farmlands of Australia. We are to move out of the 'ruts' in which we may find ourselves, the favourite texts and themes to which we return time after time, like sheep grazing along the same path through the pasture. If we don't get out of our ruts, we are missing out on the lush pasture on either side of the familiar, comfortable track. John's approach encourages each of us to look deeply into the foundations of our faith, to go beyond our usual grazing areas, to find our own answers to questions like 'Is God a humanitarian?' and 'Is it possible to claim to love God and then make a choice about whether to care for the poor?'

Using language that is grounded in good humanitarian practice, the aim of this book is to build the capacity of all World Vision staff to understand how faith shapes our interactions with people and affects the well-being of entire communities.

We invite you to join the diverse and dynamic conversation that World Vision workers have been engaged in for more than half a century now regarding the intersections of faith and humanitarianism. John's years of experience in World Vision's humanitarian operations have given him great insight into the often sensitive subject of the role of faith-based organisations in emergency response and other dimensions of disaster management. Material used in this book (much of it under its earlier title of 'Biblical Humanitarianism') has been tried and tested over a number of years with World Vision staff across the Partnership, particularly when John was leading HEA's (Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs) capacity building in Africa. Since 2009, staff attending trainings for WV's Africa HEA Regional Response Team and the Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Disaster Management Team have been engaging with John and the Coordinator for Christian Commitments in HEA, Clare Scott, to further develop the material for individual staff use outside of workshop settings.

Readers can now work through the four modules in this book at their own pace, individually or in groups, with plenty of encouragement to share reflections or insights with colleagues and team members. Most questions are equally suitable for either individual

learning or group discussion, and it is hoped that individual readers will find others who are interested in studying the material, either on a regular or ad hoc basis. There is also plenty of commentary and background material, together with suggestions for further reading and 'Digging deeper' to get the most out of subjects covered. Staff who would not usually consider themselves to be 'humanitarian workers', such as those in advocacy or community development programmes, or those who are not usually deployed to the field, are also invited to explore this material and see how it is relevant to their work and context.

It is my personal prayer that this resource will strengthen and inspire all our staff as we bear witness to the unconditional love of God, especially those who have been called to work in some of the most challenging situations in the world. In so doing, may we enable children, their families and communities to experience the life in all its fullness for which we pray.

Dan Kelly, Partnership Leader
Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs
World Vision International

Contents

The Humanitarian Faith Imperative

Biblical Faith and Anthropology in Humanitarian Work

Biblical Faith and Community – Sociology for Humanitarian Workers

The Humanitarian Worker's Voice

Conclusion

How to Use This Study

This series of modules has been designed for individual readers to explore the biblical foundations of the work of humanitarian assistance. The material can be easily adapted to accommodate group discussion and study, but we've chosen to address the individual who is working through the readings, reflections and exercises on his or her own.

As you read, you may wish to see whether one or more of your colleagues would be interested to discuss the material with you. If circumstances allow, why not create a group? See the ideas for group leaders in Appendix 1, 'Notes and Tips for Group Facilitators'. Many of the exercises and reflections are easily adaptable for group discussion, and the readings can be split amongst group members.

Whether you are working individually or in a group, to help you explore each topic thoroughly, we've included the most useful biblical references, along with relevant questions. If you are studying this series on your own, you may find the number of texts in some sections overwhelming to attempt in one sitting. Feel free to reference only the primary texts in your first read-through, and perhaps savour other texts throughout the week or later as you re-read or refer back to material that is especially meaningful to you. You will need to go at your own pace.

The best way to track your exploration, thoughts, ideas and creative responses is to keep a **personal journal**. Some of you may do this already. If you don't regularly keep a journal, consider starting one, even if only for this series of *Biblical Foundations for Humanitarian Workers*. Of course, there are many excellent reasons to keep a personal journal. For ideas on how to utilise a journal specifically regarding this study, see the following section, 'Some Notes on Journalling', before beginning this study.

You will need to have a copy of the Bible to work through this material. Although some passages referred to are included in the text, to include all references would have made the manuscript unwieldy. The best exegesis (a technical term for analysis and interpretation of the sacred writings of various faiths) explores the context of the story or truth being studied. This is where a copy of the full Bible will help. If you have internet access, you can also use one of the many online Bible sites, such as http://bible.oremus.org (which gives the text of the New Revised Standard Version), or http://www.biblegateway.org or http://www.youversion.com (both of which have a large number of versions of the Bible in a variety of languages).

Your feedback on the content of this material would be greatly valued and can be forwarded to your Christian Commitment or Faith and Development colleagues.

Some Notes on Journalling

Much has been written about keeping a journal, so you can do considerable exploration of this topic in your own time. Here we want to simply outline a brief checklist to get you going if you are new to the practice.

What is so great about keeping a journal? People who enjoy journalling can cite a wide range of benefits, but the simplest and probably most important benefit is that it is an essential tool for reflecting and learning. Journalling brings together knowledge from analytical reading and from your real-life experience. Journalling can help move learning from the abstract to the concrete.

Here are a few pointers:

- **Keep it simple.** Get a pen and paper/notebook, or keep an electronic journal if you prefer …then just start writing. Keep a little pocket notebook for thoughts, ideas and diagrams that come to you at the strangest moments, then add those into your journal.
- **Don't worry about grammar.** Just write and write. Don't edit yourself before you even get the words out. Getting language right or perfect is not the point, at least not until you are re-reading and re-thinking. First, just write.
- **Be candid.** This probably means that your journal is better kept private. You need to be honest with yourself without thinking that someone else is going to be reading what you write. (At the same time, be wise about how you express yourself, especially in sensitive or restricted contexts.)
- **Be regular.** The more regularly you write, the more useful your journal becomes.
- **Create your agenda.** Develop your own triggers for ideas: for example, think about things from a professional point of view, from a family point of view, from a discipleship point of view, etc. Professionally, you could establish a simple framework such as a set of questions to consider:
  - What did I do well?
  - What could I have done better?
  - What will I do next time?
  - How could I do things differently or even better next time?

- **Think like a journalist.** One thing journalists tend to do well is say things concisely. You don't need to go on for pages. Most journalists are trained to start their articles by pointing to a few important pieces of information, right at the beginning, and then develop thoughts more broadly later on. Keep your focus on important priorities, rather than on drilling down to details that can be added later. Also, in order to generate ideas that you can revisit later, try using the journalists' 'Five W's and H' approach – this means noting Who, What, Why, Where, When, and How, if this information is important.
- **Respect your time and space.** Locate your own space and identify a time that works best for you …and keep it in your schedule.
- **Write by hand.** OK, so we included electronic journalling above… use a computer if you must. However, handwriting engages your brain in a different way from typing, and is better for getting in touch with creativity and feelings.
- **Whatever process you try, be sure it is one that you enjoy.**

Welcome to the Journey!

Because our focus of study is biblical foundations for the humanitarian worker, references to biblical texts are woven into themes, stories and ideas. Four modules are constructed around these themes and concepts. There is a flow of thought from beginning to end, so there is benefit in going with the flow. However, it is perfectly fine to pick and choose, jumble up the order, or stop and dig deeper as you wish.

Respect each passage for its own value and context. Keep placing varying perspectives and snapshots of history as pieces of 'the big picture'. Don't skip opportunities to write down your own personal reflections before tackling scriptures and related texts. If you have a group to share this journey with, you'll find it a great encouragement and an opportunity to grow leadership skills in putting 'the vision' of World Vision into words.

Our study attempts to bundle biblical references into themes. You will find sections divided and indicated with the following symbols.

Reflection – if discussing in a group, individual reflection should precede group discussion to add value.

Exercises – for further individual consideration or group discussion.

Commentary – commentary, quotes and ideas, along with provocative thinking, are included to help you along the way. Add to these your own thoughts, stories and quotes.

In some sections you will also find a few questions and suggestions **'For the professional'**, to consider from the perspective of your professional humanitarian responsibilities. Don't be confined to these suggestions. You will have your own application and experience. In a few sections, you'll find special tips for **'Digging deeper'**, adventures suggested for the most determined readers. And where you are being introduced to some new techniques for study or reflection, we've given you some **'How-to'** notes.

It is your choice as to how far, how fast and how deep you plunge into each section. Whilst sections are designed to provide in-depth exploration, you can choose to focus on fewer, selected questions, to deal with in a shorter amount of time.

'How to' get the most out of this journey

1. Whenever you can, read the scripture verses in the context of the passages in which they are set. Not only will you discover other fascinating material, but this habit will give you a more accurate understanding of the verses being studied.
2. If you are reading through this study with a group, it is best if each reader goes through the **'Reflections'** individually, prior to any group discussions. This will maximise time together and help everyone get the most out of the discussions.
3. There will not be enough space to write all your notes in the margins of this book. (It would be poor stewardship for us to publish blank space for writing.) So we strongly suggest keeping a notebook or personal/professional journal to record significant insights, goals and questions for discussion. See the previous section, 'Some Notes on Journalling', for advice regarding this.
4. Regarding Bible texts, start by asking, 'What does this passage teach us about God?' Then consider the question 'What do we learn about the relationship between God and humankind?'
5. The **'Commentary'** sections are not designed to replace the many excellent detailed commentaries which are available. They are intended as guidance for both individual study and group discussions.

Module 1

THE HUMANITARIAN FAITH IMPERATIVE

Introduction

World Vision's approach to disaster management is grounded in several obligations. These include the principles of impartiality and independence, staff security and beneficiary protection, and sustainability,[1] as well as what is known as the *humanitarian imperative*. An imperative is something that demands attention, an unavoidable obligation. The *humanitarian imperative* is the unavoidable moral obligation and commitment to respond to people affected by disaster. The *Red Cross Code of Conduct*, which sets out 10 principles of conduct for humanitarian NGOs, puts the humanitarian imperative at the top of the list (see text box 'The humanitarian imperative comes first').

This and other imperatives commonly accepted and adhered to by respected humanitarian organisations across the globe are central to World Vision's approach to our disaster management work. As we attempt to live out the imperatives of humanitarianism, we seek to understand poverty and its impact on communities' vulnerabilities and on their ability to mitigate and recover from crises.

There are of course other external obligations which World Vision embraces, including[2]

- *International Humanitarian Law*
- *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*
- *Do No Harm & Local Capacities for Peace*
- *Rights-based Humanitarianism*
- *Human Security*
- *The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership*
- *The People in Aid Code of Good Practice.*

As important as these obligations are, World Vision has identified itself throughout its history as an organisation founded on faith. This study will focus on the role that faith plays in World Vision's and specifically HEA's understanding of and response to the humanitarian imperative – what we are referring to as the **Humanitarian Faith Imperative**.

---

1 'HEA Ministry Guiding Philosophy: Principles and Values for Humanitarian Action', World Vision International. February 2010, 5.

2 See 'HEA Ministry Guiding Philosophy' for more on these obligations and standards.

The Humanitarian Imperative comes first

The right to receive humanitarian assistance, and to offer it, is a fundamental humanitarian principle which should be enjoyed by all citizens of all countries. As members of the international community, we recognise our obligation to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed. Hence the need for unimpeded access to affected populations is of fundamental importance in exercising that responsibility. The prime motivation of our response to disaster is to alleviate human suffering amongst those least able to withstand the stress caused by disaster. When we give humanitarian aid it is not a partisan or political act and should not be viewed as such.

(From the *Red Cross Code of Conduct*, otherwise known as the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*, drawn up in 1992 by the IFRC and ICRC, sponsored by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response)

Opening Exercise A

Note: If you've previously gone through a similar exercise elsewhere, you could skip Opening Exercise A, but be aware that this covers material foundational for good, professional humanitarian work. It is better to make the time to go through the exercise, which provides essential groundwork for considering the faith imperative.

Introductory foundations for starting our journey:

A. Why is it necessary for World Vision as an organisation to agree with and adopt the humanitarian imperative?

B. List some of the other standards and obligations to which World Vision is committed and what you each know about these standards. (If you are not familiar with some of the standards, why not do some research? Share your learnings with any colleagues who aren't familiar with them.)

C. The humanitarian imperative is the first principle listed in the *Red Cross Code of Conduct*. What are the other nine? (For reference – we do want you to succeed after all – check out the *Sphere Project Handbook* or the IFRC website.[3])

---

[3] See *The Sphere Project Handbook* at www.sphereproject.org or the *Code of Conduct* at the IFRC website: http://www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/code-of-conduct/. The Code of Conduct can also be found on www.wvcentral.org.

D. Select two of the 10 principles and note what you do (or would do) in your work to ensure that World Vision is acting in accordance with these principles.

E. Where do you find *The Humanitarian Charter*? There are three principles in the charter. What are they? List some scripture stories, truths and principles that apply to the three principles.

Opening Exercise B

Note: This exercise includes two inter-related parts. Part I takes a new look at essentials of the story of the 'Good Samaritan'. Part II applies further considerations for today's contexts. (If you are studying this as part of a group, time considerations may require that readers go through Part 1 individually and then do Part II as a group.)

Part I: 'Who is my neighbour?'

Mark 12:28–34
Matthew 5:43–48
Luke 10:25–37

Read the mini-reflection below on the story of the Good Samaritan:

A scribe heard the people arguing and, hearing the answers that Jesus gave, he was impressed. So he decided to weigh in with a powerful and genuine question of his own. 'Jesus, what is the most important of all the commandments?' (Mark's account).

Jesus recognised a genuine heart and responded, 'The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength' (Mark 12:29, 30).

'The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these' (Mark 12:31). Jesus' answer resonated powerfully with the scribe, so Jesus fed back to him immediately the outcome of his integrity and thoughtful worldview, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.'

And that silenced everyone.

Religious thinkers in Jesus' time reduced the commandment 'love your neighbour' in Leviticus 19:18 to an abstract philosophical debate.

The religious system had construed the fundamental law of love as an argument and concluded that what God really intended is that you can love your neighbours – those you count as friends – but you should hate your enemies! What a contrast to the point Jesus

> 'So he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God."'
>
> *Luke 16:15*

makes at the beginning of his public ministry as we have it in Matthew 5:43–48. Jesus' measure of our love for our neighbour is quite the opposite – 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'. This reminds me of a very memorable saying, **'You love Jesus as much as the person you love the least.**'

So Jesus flips the issue on its head. This time, a lawyer, a man careful with his words, seeking to catch Jesus out, asks, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' (Luke 10:25). This is a strange question for a theologian to ask a layman. Why would he ask this question, other than to test Jesus? Test Jesus for what? It seems that the lawyer's motive is to see whether he can expose Jesus as naïve, in contrast to his own theological 'sophistication'. But Jesus' wisdom and insight proved to be a threat to the authorities throughout his public ministry.

Jesus is more interested in what is in the heart. Using one of the best learning practices, Jesus takes the lawyer to the next step by asking him another question, based on what the man already knows and on common ground between them. 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' (Luke 10:25–28). Jesus is essentially saying, 'You are an expert on the Torah, how would you answer you own question?'

The man answers the question correctly and Jesus acknowledges this publicly. But Jesus then adds a proviso, 'Do this and you will live,' a direct reference to Leviticus 18:5 designed to speak to the heart and intellect of a theologian. The lawyer who sought to catch Jesus out is now himself being tested.

But the lawyer was smitten. He felt the need to justify himself, coming back to Jesus with a philosophical question. 'And who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10:29–37).

So Jesus tells him a story. This story goes way beyond 'It's good to help other people'. His story is also about excuses – about self-justification – about letting oneself off the hook – about racial and community prejudice – about 'right' theology as an excuse for lovelessness – about active, compassionate and unconditional love – about the neighbour being people like me.

We know the story, and you can read it for yourself. It's what Jesus does with the story we need to examine – his point in telling the story.

Jesus' 'bang' ending is very poignant. The lawyer and Jesus asked very similar questions, with extremely different meanings. What were they?

The lawyer asked, '…And who is my neighbour?' Fair question! Jesus asked, 'Who proved

to be a neighbour?' Both questions belied completely different worldviews, theologies and sets of values.

What was the lawyer really asking? The question behind the question was, 'What are the limits to the duty of my loving? Who is in and who is out of the scope of those I must love? Who do I have to love and who don't I have to love? Who do I treat as a friend?' The concept of neighbour had been defined by theologians as those who are friends and those who are not, divided along cultural, ethnic, faith, political and economic grounds. Those who were 'in' were defined as 'friends', or in other words as fellow countrymen. Those who were not 'in' were given other labels such as 'Samaritan', 'renegade', 'informer', 'Gentile', 'sinner' – people who should be pushed into the ditch and not pulled out. 'I do not have to love these people. They are not my friends.' God's law is reduced to a legal, technical question. A Samaritan, for example, was racially and legally impure and definitely not to be loved.

The question Jesus asked was very different, even though the words sounded similar. The lawyer: 'Who

Digging deeper

Several related passages consider this idea of 'neighbour':

Matthew 22:34–40

Mark 12:28–31

Luke 10:25–28

Matthew 19:16–19

Matthew 5:43–48

What do you make of these different approaches? Are they different stories? Are they different incidents? Are they contradictory?

How do you explain the differences?

'How to' do exegesis (analysis and interpretation of sacred writings)

Here is one approach to good exegesis. Put together different witness accounts to make a coherent story. Add in the local context and culture of the times. Try to understand what was going on in the heads and hearts of the people in the story and what the storyteller was trying to get across. Of course this works best when our modern imaginations are guided by the accumulated wisdom of the ages. Refer to dictionaries and commentaries where you can.

When you use the internet as a reference, remember that many sources may be quite old, or be quite popular and trendy, or come from a narrow theological history. Also, what is listed first in a search may not be the most reliable source. Read carefully. There is much more and greater wisdom than what you will find on the internet.

do I treat as a friend?' Jesus: 'Who acted as friend? Who acted as a neighbour?' Jesus' question is not who is in and who is out.

Jesus' question is **'Who am I a neighbour to?'**

And how much must I love my neighbour? 'Love your neighbour as…'! This is not a multiple-choice question. **It is a commandment, an imperative to love.**

Now read the account in Luke 10:25–37.

After reading Luke, consider the following questions:

A. What does the story of the Good Samaritan mean for the humanitarian worker?

B. How do you see it relating to the humanitarian imperative?

C. Look carefully at the context. How does the passage immediately preceding this passage (vv. 17–24) guide us into thinking clearly about the Good Samaritan story?

D. What does Jesus teach about the limits to love?

E. What did it mean to the lawyer?

F. What else did Jesus teach about love in Matthew 25:31–46?

Part II: Faith choice? …Or faith imperative?

If concern and tangible physical care for the poor is a faith imperative, what choice do we have?

Is it possible to claim to love God and then make a choice about whether to care for the poor? Is it possible to claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ and at the same time be even passively neglectful of the poor? And what is the minimum standard or 'pass mark' for caring? How much do you have to love your neighbour for it to be 'enough'?

Do we have a choice?

The short answer is 'Of course we have a choice!' But each choice carries consequences. We can choose to be care-less, even by neglect. But if that is our choice regarding people's needs which are brought to our attention, then can we claim to love God? On the other hand, we can choose to be careful (full of care) but that does not necessarily mean we love God!

One of the must-read books for all Christians by one of the 20th century's heroes of the faith is *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer passionately argues against the temptation to accept what he calls 'cheap grace'. 'Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheap jack's wares.'[4] This means we can be tempted to make a choice for faith based on all the 'benefits', without any understanding or 'counting' of the costs.

---

[4] D. Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship* (1995), 35.

Jesus makes a number of costs clear up front. For example, 'Take up your cross and follow me'. Is that what you chose when you decided to follow Jesus? Is it what you signed up for? In the end, 'cheap grace' is no grace at all, because that is not the grace Jesus offers.

The alternative to cheap grace is what Bonhoeffer calls 'costly grace'. 'Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has.'[5] The choices we make by intent or by default carry consequences.

What are the consequences of the choices we make about how we relate to the poor?

The biblical exploration that follows is a journey into that world of choice. Even though giving care is an imperative, nobody is saying we must care for the poor. It's still our choice. But the scriptures that follow provide a compelling case for choosing to care. And in doing so, we express our love for and allegiance to **the God who cares**.

Our humanitarian imperative is driven first and foremost by the very nature of God. We care because God cares! It is God's nature to care, deeply and without end. If God has breathed God's own life into us, then there is reason for us to imitate God's love and care. In the same way that God creates and upholds the universe, God cares for the oppressed. 'Caring and loving' is who God is.

So Jesus' story about neighbours is the foundational piece to the bigger picture of God's heart for the poor.

In this section we scratch only the surface of passages that refer to how God feels about the poor, the suffering, the widow, the orphan, the oppressed, the oppressor, and what God wants us to do about them. When you put these sacred imperatives all together, what is your conclusion?

Consider the following questions.

A. What motivates you to do humanitarian or development work?

B. What called you to this journey and has brought you to this point in history?

C. In five years' time, what change do you want to see in place as a result of your effort and commitment?

---

[5] Bonhoeffer, 36.

Remember

It is very easy to forget. Sometimes it's a good thing to forget. At other times forgetting is not a good thing. Here the people of God are being told to remember what they have come from and who brought them release and hope. They should never forget that.

Deuteronomy 26:5–9; 5:6
Exodus 3:7–8
Exodus 6:5–8
Exodus 20:2

Reflection

1. What do we learn about God from these passages?
2. What is the basic story here?
3. List key issues identified about the way people were being treated.
4. How did God feel about their situation?
5. How did the people feel?
6. What did they see as the solution?
7. The Israelites regularly remembered what Yahweh did for them. In what ways do your family, church and maybe team regularly celebrate God's care and intervention?
8. What is the context of the Deuteronomy 5:6 and Exodus 20:2 passages? Why would this reminder in this context be important?
9. How did Jesus and his early followers deal with the issue of oppression? See Luke 13:31–35; Luke 22:25–27; John 19:11; Luke 1:50–53. Also see the 'Jesus Manifesto' in Luke 4:18–19.

Exercises

A. Identify experiences where you believe God intervened in your life personally, or in the life of someone in your family, your team, your friends or your faith community.

B. Why might the memory of those experiences be important?

C. How do these passages guide us in the way we talk about God and God's work in the world?

D. Agree on a definition of oppression. Where do you see oppression where you are working as a team? Or elsewhere in the world?

E. How does God feel about that and what does God want us to do about it? See also Psalm 103:6.

F. What is the cost of opposing oppression? What is the cost of not opposing oppression? What are the sensitive issues we must manage?

Commentary

This is the story of the exodus, starting with the sojourn of the children of Israel in Egypt and their utter despair at the hands of oppressors.

Keywords that describe their plight might include

- refugees
- oppression
- slavery
- hard labour
- land of promise and production.

National memory of what happened in the past leads to a proper and humble celebration and planning for the present and future. The children of Israel were constantly reminded of where they came from and who intervened to bring hope and opportunity. 'Remember! Do not forget!' Remember that your place in the world is not because of any political, scientific or historic prowess. It is for and because of God's grace. Approach God and your neighbour with that humility.

> 'The best prophet of the future is the past.'
>
> *Lord Byron*

Let's look at these Bible passages to ask, 'What does this passage teach us about God?' And, 'What do we learn about the relationship between God and humankind?'

Deuteronomy 26:5–9. At the annual harvest festival, the Israelites read this passage as a liturgical celebration of God's freeing them from slavery and ending economic oppression.

Deuteronomy 5:6 and Exodus 20:2. These two passages are the preamble to the Ten Commandments, the heart of the entire Jewish Law. Before establishing personal and communal boundaries for behaviour, Yahweh wants to be continually remembered as the liberator of the oppressed. The exodus is the eternal symbol that the Lord of the universe is

at work liberating the poor, setting free the captive, lifting the downtrodden and correcting oppression. Why? The underlying message: 'Go and do likewise!'

Oppression is the experience of being crushed, degraded, humiliated, exploited, impoverished, defrauded, deceived and enslaved. Oppressors are described as cruel, ruthless, arrogant, greedy, violent and tyrannical; they are called 'the enemy'.

Jesus grew up under an oppressive regime and lived in an oppressed country. The Zealots were 'freedom fighters'; Herodians and Sadducees went along with the status quo; Essenes withdrew to the desert; the Romans ruled harshly for profit and political dominance; Pharisees debated questions of private morality. Jesus disappointed them all, renouncing violence, exploitation, apathy and moralist philosophy – ultimately these are all dehumanising exercises. Jesus' history-shattering entrance amongst the humanity he loved so greatly was the way of sacrificial love.

For the professional

1. What is the relationship between memory of past events, lessons observed and the future? Is this relationship important? If so, why? What difference does it make to the way you work?
2. In what ways do these passages help you define the purpose of your ministry and the priorities you set?
3. What do you learn about leadership from these passages?
4. How does this insight guide you in the work of advocacy?

Sodom's Sin: Failing to Care

For the following readings, read the Amos passages first, then identify the recurring theme. Note your ideas in your journal. Do the same for Isaiah, and then the Jeremiah passages. What do we learn about God in all these passages?

Amos 2:6–8; 6:1–7; 4:1–3; 5:10–15
Isaiah 10:1–4; 1:21–26
Jeremiah 5:26–29; 7:5–7

Reflection

Amos

1. Who were the cows of Bashan? Isn't Amos being a bit disrespectful? What is it that these 'cows' have done?
2. In 5:10–15, name each complaint that Amos makes against these people. What is the fruit reaped by what they have sown? What is the significance of the 'gate'?
3. What is the antidote to this inhumane behaviour? In this context, what is meant by 'good' and 'evil'? What is the outcome if there is justice?
4. Why do you think Amos uses such strong language and imagery? What parallels can you draw or have you seen in your own experience? What language and images would you use to communicate these truths?

Isaiah

5. What do we learn from the way the prophets communicate God's truth? Does this model apply to us, especially in humanitarian contexts? How do you think the prophetic ministry relates to advocacy today?
6. To restore things to the way God planned, what action was necessary by the people and their leaders? What do we need to do to avoid such a painful cure?
7. List the charges Isaiah makes against the nation. What are some current examples of these charges?
8. As you compare these ancient societies with contemporary society, what conclusions do you draw about human society and human nature …and God?

Jeremiah

9. In 5:28, what was the unique charge Jeremiah raised against the people?

Exercises

A. Based on your readings of the Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah passages, note what you think are the main themes running through these passages.

B. Complacency – what is it and why is it a problem? What effect does complacency have on the way we work? What are causes of complacency? How can we inoculate ourselves against complacency?

C. Consider this quote:

'What hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor but the silence of the bystander.' (Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate)

- Do you agree?
- Note where you have seen or experienced this.
- Do you see this in your work experience?
- What action is required of us?

D. Good times lead to complacency. How can we use opportunities during good times to ensure we don't become complacent and presumptuous?

E. What will you do in your team to encourage and strengthen other team members?

'Stop telling God how big our problems are, and start telling our problems how big our God is.'

Source unknown

Commentary

Some suggested keywords/concepts to get you started:

- ill-gotten gain/plunder – sourced from the poor
- complacency
- at ease in their own comfort and self-centredness care-less of what others suffer and how God and others feel about their profligacy
- (add your own).

These passages come from a time of great upheaval. The Israelites were to discover that they too could become comfortable and complacent, although they could hardly recognise it, let alone admit it. Yahweh's passion for justice cuts both ways. When the children of Israel were oppressed, Yahweh's justice led to their freedom. However, when they became

the oppressors, Yahweh's justice led to their being almost annihilated and the remnant being taken into captivity. The 'people of God' are subject to justice the same as everyone else.

Why did Yahweh allow the destruction and captivity of Israel? Christians tend to think the reason was because of their 'spiritual' problem of idolatry and that is true. But we discover in these passages – and many others – that their care-lessness, their exploitation of the poor and complacency equally sent them into captivity. How might these sins be related?

Remember that the prophets identified not only what people did, but also what they didn't do, what some might call 'sins of omission'. The prophets' voices are a constant reminder that when we make a choice to do nothing, we sometimes do an injustice. Doing nothing is a choice.

But there is always hope. God continually provides a way forward. Nevertheless the Israelites continued to oppress and ignore the poor. Consequently, Jeremiah persisted in warning that God would remove blessing and protection from Judah, allowing the Babylonians to destroy the nation. In 587 BC Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and the people were taken into captivity.

(As noted at the start of this study, always read the context of the passages. Not only will you discover other fascinating material, but this habit will give you a more accurate understanding of the passage being studied.)

Complacency

A problem is recognised, but nobody believes things will ever change, so nothing is done, and those who are not oppressed assume things will stay as nice as they are.

Complacency is a feeling of calm satisfaction with our own abilities or situations, preventing us from trying harder, or aiming higher, or going deeper.

For the professional

1. Good times foster a false sense of security and almost inevitably lead to complacency. Complacency blinds you to risk. How can you as a professional ensure that you don't entrap yourself in complacency? Just as importantly, what kinds of strategies and activities are required to ensure that communities you work with don't become complacent?
2. How do you see the idea of risk-taking? What balance should there be between being secure and taking risks? What is the outcome of not taking any risks? What was Jesus' security plan? In Matthew 14:22–33 and Mark 6:45–51, what was the apostle Peter's approach to risk-taking?
3. Consider the wisdom of 'speaking out' against injustice when you see it. What are high-level issues you must consider when you are obliged to 'speak out' or act against oppression and injustice. What are the high-level guiding principles that will enable you to act with integrity?

The Focus of Ministry

The first and last word

Think about these two questions before reading the scriptures listed below.

1. What was the first public speech Jesus gave, not including anything he may have said as a child in the temple? (We don't have that recorded.)
2. What was the last public speech Jesus gave before his crucifixion, to a group larger than his inner circle of followers?

The two passages below give clues to the answers.

Luke 4:18–19
Matthew 25:31–46

Reflection

1. What was the consistent and recurring theme of Jesus' first and last messages? What was at the heart of what he was saying and what he is saying still?
2. Who are the 'poor 'that Jesus refers to? Is this a spiritual euphemism for 'sinners in need of salvation'? Is Jesus referring to the actual poor and oppressed? Or are they only those poor in the household of God? Who was being referred to in the original Old Testament text (Isaiah 61:1–2)?
3. How does the action list in Luke 4 compare to the Matthew 25 passage? What is the consequence of not doing likewise?
4. From the story of the sheep and goats, what is the basis on which people will be separated?
   - people's character
   - their beliefs
   - their behaviour or actions.
5. List the behavioural criteria by which God will judge the world, including believers (Matthew 25).
6. Ask yourself, 'If I weren't being paid to work for a humanitarian organisation, what would I be doing for the poor, oppressed, hungry, naked, thirsty, imprisoned and persecuted?'

Digging deeper

List stories in Jesus' ministry that correspond to his mission statement in Luke 4.

Exercises

A. So… given our readings and reflection, how important to God is caring for and empowering the poor?

B. What activities have I planned for today that will help achieve Jesus' Manifesto (Luke 4)? List these activities.

C. How do you explain what appears to be Jesus' special concern for the poor, oppressed and vulnerable? What is the difference between this and 'preaching the gospel'? What distinctions and importance does Jesus put on the two notions of preaching and ministry with the poor?

D. What is the consequence of not doing the things listed in Matthew 25?

Commentary

> At the supreme moment of history, when God took on human flesh, the God of Israel was still liberating the poor and oppressed and summoning his people to do the same. That is the central reason for Christian concern for the poor.[6]

Compassion is the very nature and heart of God.

In many ways, the reading in the synagogue (Luke 4:18–19) could be regarded as Jesus' Manifesto – his mission statement. The mission of God Incarnate included preaching the good news to the poor that the captives will be released, the blind will see and the oppressed will be set free. The next three years were to bear witness to that mission.

The story of the sheep and the goats sits within a very significant context. From Matthew 23, Jesus is introducing his followers to the idea that he will suffer a horrible death. In Matthew 23, Jesus' message has become straightforward and confrontational. 'Woe to you…' is the tone of his public denouncements of the religious and political system and leaders. His 'security plan' now makes him totally vulnerable to the anger and plotting of those who see him as a threat. He starts talking about what the future holds.

In Matthew 24 he introduces his followers to a string of shocking possibilities. To paraphrase Jesus' words, he says, 'I am going to die. Not only am I going to die but when I have been buried, three days later I will rise again. Then I will be with you for a short while and then I will be leaving you, and it is necessary to do so, for you have a particular role to play. Not only am I then going to leave you, but at a time that not even I know, I am going to return again.'

Jesus is saying to not get caught up in the signs that might indicate when he will return, but focus rather on how you account for your time and your investment between now and when he returns (Matthew 24:36). Just be sure that he will return and we will all be called to account for our choices… so be ready.

Jesus then tells four stories that spell out how he expects his followers to spend their time, what investments to be making and what his ministry priorities include.

This final address is his last set of instructions before he is crucified. His message? **'What to do between now and when I come back again.'** It's as if Jesus gathers his followers together at this last opportunity and says, **'Look, here are the really important things to stay focused on, and listen carefully because you will be held to account.'**

---

[6] R. Sider. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1997).

The four stories outline what we should focus on:

1. Leadership in the household of God (Matthew 24:45–51).
2. Being attuned to the heart and mind of God in prayer, understanding the Word of Truth and fellowship with other followers (Matthew 25:1–13).
3. God equips every one of us with gifts – how we invest that gift in eternity is our stewardship (Matthew 25:14–30).
4. Our ministry priority is to serve Christ – by humbly serving those in need. Our performance assessment is based on this (Matthew 25:31–46).

How Does God Feel About the Poor and Oppressed?

Psalm 10:14, 17, 18
Psalm 146

Reflection

1. Psalm 10 begins with despair. What caused this despair?
2. But the psalm ends in hope. What was it that turned despair into hope?
3. Psalm 146 is a psalm of praise. The psalmist was giving voice to people's gratitude. What were they grateful for?
4. How would you describe God's relationship to the poor and oppressed in these psalms and many other passages?
5. If we show compassion for the poor because God does, why do non-believers show compassion? Is compassion shown by people who do not profess to have a faith of any less value than compassion shown by people of faith? Are Christians the only ones who demonstrate compassion for the right reason?

Exercises

A. These two psalms express strong feelings – negative ones in response to injustice (Psalm 10) and positive ones of rejoicing in God's acts of justice (Psalm 146). Identify feelings you have when you see people in poverty, hungry, displaced, injured and traumatised.

B. Fill these blanks: 'When I feel _____ , I want to _____'.

C. If you are considering the previous question in a group discussion, bundle similar responses together. How does the group analyse the trends?

D. What might be some appropriate ways of channelling that emotional energy?

E. Do you have some creative response (poem, story, drawing, photograph, etc.) to your learnings?

Commentary

What kind of scripture are the Psalms? Earlier in this module, we looked at historic texts (Pentateuch), prophetic texts and the incarnation stories.

In the Psalms we have a ringing endorsement of what we find in other passages. In one poetic breath, the psalmist is jubilant in the God of Jacob because God is both the creator and sovereign of the universe and also the defender and provider of the oppressed. The poor seem to have a special place in the heart of God.

Just as a reminder, the humanitarian imperative is driven by the nature of God. It is God's very nature to care. Since God has breathed God's very own life into us and we reflect God's image, then it is only natural that we reflect and imitate God's values and actions, including caring for those who are in distress. This truth is central to right theology. It is not the only concern of theology, but it is one of the pillars of a right understanding of the very nature of God.

Concern for the poor, social action and advocacy are not what some would call 'pre-evangelism' activities. These actions are 'good news'. Some would reduce these to good things to do before 'real' evangelism gets done. But in Luke 4, we see that Jesus announces justice, compassion and liberation for the poor as the 'good news', in the same way that it is good news that he provides salvation through his cross.

For the professional

1. Professional humanitarians face a world of feelings regarding poverty and oppression likely to be much deeper and more intense than most of your friends' and family's, because this is your full-time occupation. For those currently 'in the field' it may be close to a 24/7 occupation. Sometimes this puts you on the outside because others do not understand or because you can't easily let them share your burden. These feelings are both your own, internally, and the vicarious feelings you experience when faced with the distress of those you seek to serve in a crisis. These feelings are both an opportunity and a threat to your health. How do you manage? What are your personal strategies for coping? Or, are you expecting to burn out sometime soon?
2. Do you keep a journal? If not, give it a try. Speak to someone who does and get some ideas and advice on setting one up. It is a simple, and very rewarding, tool for organising thoughts and plans, and is in addition a time-proven coping mechanism. Those who keep a journal find it a tremendous aid in dealing with high and low moments and everything in between. You can find many ideas and journal resources online. See some suggestions at the start of this study in the section, 'Some Notes on Journalling'.

Digging deeper

The following three books make great references, if you can get hold of copies. Re-read frequently, as needed.

a. *Psalms for People under Pressure* by Jonathan Aitken (London: Continuum, 2004).

b. *Ministry in Disaster Settings – Lessons from the Edge* by Stephen Robinson (Australia, 2007). www.emergencyministry.com.au.

c. *Stress and Trauma Handbook – Strategies for Flourishing in Demanding Environments*. Editor: John Fawcett (World Vision International, 2003). (Note: This book is not easily available to buy, but try asking your Staff Care colleagues if they have one.)

God Identifies with the Poor

What would you say is the difference between taking care of the poor and identifying with the poor? If there is a difference, how would you express that difference?

Proverbs 14:31; 19:17
Matthew 25:31–46
Matthew 8:20–22 (cf. Luke 9:58–62)

Reflection

1. Consider the context of the two verses from Proverbs above, then paraphrase them in your own words. (Paraphrasing is restating information from a text into your own words, yet still reflecting the text's intended meaning.)
2. What is the underlying universal truth in these passages? Jesus becoming human demonstrates exactly the same truth. In what ways did Jesus live this truth?
3. What does that mean for us? What would you say is the difference between sympathy and empathy?
4. What are the implications of the Matthew 8 and Luke 9 passages? What is the point of the story about Jesus having nowhere to lay his head? And why was it followed with the clear instruction to 'Follow me'?
5. In our day, what social status do we apply to having nowhere to lay your head?

Exercises

A. How would you now answer the opening questions above the readings?
B. If you are discussing this module as a group, share your paraphrases from the second reflection question.
C. List ways in which God identifies with the poor.
D. How would you say the modern church rates in identifying with the homeless, poor, mentally ill, widows, orphans, abused, oppressed, immobilised, prisoners, refugees and immigrants?
E. Identify some approaches to ensure that you and your colleagues don't become smug and self-righteous as a result of being passionate about taking care of the poor.

F. How would you rate World Vision's corporate identification with the poor? Give examples of where it is working well and not so well. What do you think World Vision should do about it?

Commentary

The creator and sovereign of the universe not only intervenes in human affairs to ensure that the poor and oppressed are cared for, but also identifies with them. Jesus' life was not just a ministry but an act of identification.

This theme carries through from the Old Testament to the New, and Jesus becomes the model for our relationship with the poor. Standing in human shoes, Jesus says that as we address the deepest need of the poor, '…just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:40).

If this is true, be careful never to turn that identification with the poor into romanticising either poverty or the poor. We have no indication in scripture that identifying with the poor is a reason to say that poverty is the state in which God planned for creation to live. There is more to suggest that what God planned for each person in creation is health and prosperity. The idea of 'prosperity' in the Christian scriptures is worthy of some study.

What is the biblical view and standard of prosperity? How would you describe Jesus' actions and attitudes towards wealth? We are challenged to seek the welfare, health and prosperity of the city.

Whilst not romanticising the poor or poverty, we must also recognise that the poor seem to have a very special place in the heart of God.

For the professional

1. What line(s) do you draw between your personal life and your professional life? What are your plans and tactics to manage the struggle between commitment to a life-saving job with your very real needs for stress management and personal well-being? Ministry in disaster settings can and will take a tremendous toll, not only on you, but also those who love you.
2. In his famous quote, 'For you always have the poor, but you will not always have me,' Jesus challenges humanitarian arrogance (Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9). Whilst it is impossible for us to balance all things in this life, Jesus does provoke us to be cautious about thinking we are indispensable. Bryant Myers, former World Vision International Vice President for Ministry Strategy, once explained the challenge this way: 'Too many Christian activists are ruining their health and destroying their families while justifying the zeal because of their commitment to the poor. In the name of the poor, activist workaholics suffer from poor health and burnout, and they damage their spouses and children. This is not a gospel stance. This is not what Jesus asks us to do.'[7]

Walking in Others' Shoes

Incarnating the Good News

Not only does God feel deeply and passionately about the poor and about injustice, God identifies closely with the poor. Not only does God identify with the poor, but even more deeply walks in the shoes, lives in the homes of the poor, shares their homelessness, suffers the most traumatic impacts of injustice and oppression – without bitterness or arrogance.

2 Corinthians 8:9
Matthew 8:20
Luke 9:3; 10:4
Matthew 25:31–46

[7] B. Myers. 'Will the Poor Always Be With Us?' 5 May 2003, http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/1720.htm.

Reflection

1. What do these passages teach us about identification with the poor? Read the passages, note key message/s and note the contexts in which they sit.
2. What is the principle in the context of 2 Corinthians 8:9 (read 8:1–13; then go even broader and read 7:2–8:24). With what are you generous… money, time, talent, things? What are you less willing to be generous with? What are things you have that you could share to bring some equity and identity with the poor?
3. Matthew 8:20 follows through on the theme but with a twist. What is that twist? Does this mean we have to be poor? If following Jesus as a disciple means identifying with the poor, what are the implications for your lifestyle? Does this mean we all have to be homeless? If it doesn't, then what does it mean? Does this mean you can't be wealthy?
4. Luke 9 and 10 seem to take us to another level. Why do you think Jesus gave these radical instructions to the disciples? What was the intention? What do they mean for us in our work? What do they mean for World Vision as we discern how we can make the best possible use of the wealth of resources available to us?
5. How does Matthew 25:31–46 help answer these questions?
6. What would you say are the costs of being empathic? And what do you think the rewards might be?

Exercises

A. Recall or write in your journal about your encounters with poverty: personal experiences, family upbringing, housing, schooling, community context. Identify the worst things about being poor as well as any good things.

B. Do we have to be poor to identify with the poor? Why? Why not?

C. What are the differences between sympathy and empathy? Outline a comparative chart listing what kinds of things you do to be sympathetic and things you do to show empathy.

D. Consider implications of the following statement for your World Vision team:

> Human beings are valuable. Secular and religious people alike agree to this. Additionally, World Vision believes that people are created, sacred beings, in relationship with a loving and all-powerful creator-God. If every human life is sacred because we are made in the image of God, if each person is valuable because God cherishes us and intends to give us a future and a hope, then a Christian initiative to help manage stress in humanitarian work must do more than promote survival. Beyond protection, we must create space to grow, flourish and develop. Hope is central to World Vision's stress and trauma initiative, despite the reality of pain and loss, of grief and suffering. We do not believe it is sufficient merely to train people to cope with such processes. Survival of suffering is the first step; flourishing and growing in healthy communities built on foundations of mutual respect and honour are the ultimate outcomes of a comprehensive stress and trauma management strategy. [8]

Commentary

It is helpful when studying faith texts to extract the key phrases or messages to help focus on the real meaning. Here is a starter list of key messages from these passages:

- Jesus was rich
- for our sakes he became poor
- he had no place to lay his head
- (add your own).

2 Corinthians 8:9. Compare this passage with Philippians 2:5–8. We find here the ultimate demonstration of walking in others' shoes. This helps us to understand the difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is when I express feelings for your world from my point of view. Empathy is seeing your world from your point of view – walking in the other person's shoes, as we say. More technically, sympathy is 'feeling alongside' the other person; empathy is 'feeling from inside', as if you were the other person.

Luke 9:3; 10:4. There likely are several reasons Jesus sent the disciples on their mission without purse or extra clothes. One reason is certainly that this condition would promote empathy and interdependence. It is an opportunity to become more intimate with what God sacrificed to come to us, as well as to experience other humans' situations. It is one thing to

---

[8] J. Fawcett, ed. *Stress and Trauma Handbook* (2003), 2–3.

share in the suffering of others from our own comfort zone. It's quite another to experience their suffering with them. As part of his disciples' learning journey, Jesus was keen to take them out of comfort zones.

Jesus not only shared with the poor, but went deeper. He became poor: '…but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Matthew 8:20).

The apostle Paul was very familiar with this notion (Hebrews 2:17–18; 4:14–16). It is because Jesus suffered and was tempted like we are that he can come to the aid of those who suffer. We cannot shake our fist at a faceless and unfeeling God and scream, 'It's all very well for you, you don't know what it's like to be us!' No, we are accompanied by a God who knows very well what it is like to be us, more deeply than we know ourselves. God entered this world to live amongst us. This is the central meaning of 'incarnation'. True empathy carries great rewards, but comes at great cost. What might those costs be?

In the spirit of Matthew 25, Jesus invites us to work with him in incarnating the gospel in our time – being Christ to others by entering their world and seeing the world from their point of view.

As already noted, we strongly recommend *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a life-long text.

For the professional

1. Here's a conundrum: How do you stay true to what appear to be opposing truths? On one hand, being fully empathetic and compassionate and on the other, avoiding what we have come to know as 'compassion fatigue'. History is littered with deeply compassionate humanitarians, pastors, counsellors, good caring people who burned themselves or loved ones out addressing other people's needs.
2. Another dimension to this is that it is possible to be technically focused on getting the 'job' done, without any understanding of the world of those you seek to serve. This has an obvious upside, in that we can remain detached from the suffering of others as a way of protecting ourselves. But there are downsides to this approach also. What are they?
3. An excellent reference on these issues is the World Vision *Stress and Trauma Handbook* (see bibliography), where you can find many practical suggestions as to how to manage this kind of dilemma, as well as complex responses to common humanitarian experiences of stress and trauma. (As mentioned before, you might want to ask your Staff Care colleagues if they have a copy of this book.)

Grace, although free, comes at great cost. 'Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.'[9] **Although true grace is free, cheap grace is no grace at all.** The costly abundant grace demonstrated by Jesus always involves identification with those who don't have access to resources that we can help provide.

Delighting God

'…For I delight in these things…'

It is fascinating to think about the notion of God being 'delighted'. What goes through your imagination at that idea? In human parlance, we might imagine being excited, enthusiastic or animated.

Let's take a closer look at the idea of worship. Clearly some circumstances do not delight God, even though we might have the longest, loudest and most professional (or alternatively the quietest and most reflective) worship services. Our worship might impress us, but it doesn't necessarily impress God. So what is it that delights God? What is it that God 'loves' to see? Might there be a link between our humanitarian work and what thrills the heart of God? What is the balance between 'acting our size' and being the most humble of organisations?

Isaiah 61:8
Jeremiah 9:23–24
Proverbs 11:1
Amos 5:21–24
1 Corinthians 1:26–31
James 2:1–7

Reflection

1. What is the central, recurring theme in these passages?
2. In Isaiah 61, how do verses 1–7 help you understand verse 8?
3. Is the feeling of 'delight' mutual for you?
4. What delights the Lord? And conversely, what does the Lord not delight in? How does this help us understand the humanitarian imperative?
5. Amos uses a river and stream analogy to describe what thrills God. What does this analogy teach you about God and what God expects of us?

[9] Bonhoeffer, 36.

Exercises

A. In the context you work in as a team, what would it mean to 'boast about this…'? (Jeremiah 9:23–24).

B. What are we to boast about? And what are some ways you might go about that?

Commentary

The kingdom of God has been described as an upside-down economy. Remember that the early Christian community was predominantly made up of the poor. In context, it is very natural to wonder at God's choice of the 'foolish' to confound the 'wise'. In fact it seems that the poor and politically oppressed were special instruments in establishing the universal community of believers. (Note that Jesus' aims tended towards restoring community, rather than restoring individual wealth or even political power, as the Zealots historically sought, which is one reason Jesus confounded many in his own refugee community.)

We cannot claim as universally true that God always chooses the poor, the disadvantaged, the refugees or the prostitutes to achieve divine purposes. But there are many, many examples where God does this. Why? Maybe it has something to do with the way some boast and gloat over power and the capability of the wealthy and powerful. Maybe this is why Jesus came as a refugee baby raised by a carpenter in a little known town, rather than as an emperor or presidential candidate. God places value on things that are often opposite to what we strive for. It is an upside-down way of thinking.

Our boast was never intended to be in our competence, knowledge, size, power or income. Our boast is in the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23–24). Our temptation is to depend on the things around us, on our education or technical expertise, or to demand attention because we are big, maybe even the biggest. But is that what delights God?

Are You Ready for More Independence?

For the remainder of this module, you'll find fewer exercises, and no 'For the professional' sections, to avoid needless repetition. As you'll see, there is still plenty to explore.

We continue to invite you to identify your own professional applications and reflect on these in your journal.

You will also find less commentary. Half-way through the list of faith imperatives, we invite you to take on more reading and analysis for yourself. There is enough guidance in the preceding sections to develop your own insights and applications.

'How to' do good research

How can you gain unique and exciting insights? Here are two keys:

1. **Commit to thorough research, consistent reading and exploration**. Avoid using the internet as your primary research tool, as you will consume time finding many articles, but few will go deeper than discoveries you can explore yourself using original source materials from the Bible and from humanitarian and historical sources noted in the bibliography. We don't want to discourage you in any way from going deeper, but we don't want you to waste time on tangential or inferior material either!
2. An enquiring mind **consistently seeks to see the world the way the original actors in a story saw it**, whilst also finding ways to communicate discoveries to people now, who may have no background in faith texts.

Oppression and Neglect

God opposes oppressors and will hold them to account

Scan the readings to identify the key teaching in each, then take a bird's-eye view to locate the recurring theme.

Isaiah 61:8
Jeremiah 9:23–24
Proverbs 11:1
Amos 5:21–24
1 Corinthians 1:26–31
James 2:1–7

Reflection

1. What bad stuff is noted in these passages? Name specific behaviours. How does God feel about these and what will God do about them? What are alternative behaviours?
2. Scan the passages again to build a profile of God's character. In other words, list characteristics of God you see here.
3. What do you think all this says about how God feels about the poor and the rich?
4. Name situations where you see these same behaviours today. Think about current contexts you work in. (As noted near the start of our study, be wise about how you express yourself in sensitive or restricted contexts. Some insights may be better written on your heart instead of on paper).
5. Do these insights influence your or your team's thinking about advocacy and justice?
6. What should the church be doing about these issues? More importantly, list things you are going to do.
7. Overall, what choice do you have? What scope is there for you to walk away or ignore these insights?

Neglecting the Poor

When was the last time you made a poor person feel bad, or even oppressed someone? Perhaps you didn't pay a house maid or night guard properly? Maybe these specifics don't apply to you, but perhaps you have walked past people as if you didn't see them, as if you didn't have time, as if they didn't exist or their deep needs offended you.

Luke 16:19–31
Ezekiel 16:49–50
Isaiah 1:10–17; 58:3–7
Amos 5:21–24
Mark 12:38–40

Reflection

1. What was Jesus' intention in telling the story of 'The Rich Man and Lazarus'? What meanings do you see? What are implications for the rich and the poor? What would

Lazarus's message have been to the rich man's family if it were possible for him to return to earth?

2. Review again why Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. In Ezekiel 16:49–50, what was God's charge of guilt on Sodom? What sin(s) was the Sodomite community charged with? Was it oppressing the poor? No! What was it?
3. How might this guide us in shaping our prophetic ministry in our day? What key message should we be delivering? How might we deliver that message creatively and engagingly?
4. In Isaiah 1:10–17, God addresses the faith community. What is the problem here? What on earth can be better than the act of worship? Compare Isaiah 58:3–7.
5. What is it that offends God? What would God rather see? What is it that pleases God? Is this saying there is something wrong with worship? No, it is not. So what is the problem? What does this mean for our modern-day faith community?

Being Friends with the Poor

Yahweh gave the Israelites unambiguous instructions on how to treat strangers and refugees. What implications are there for us today?

Exodus 22:21–24
Luke 14:12–14; 6:33–36

Reflection

1. In Exodus 22, what were Yahweh's instructions? What was the rationale God provided? Compare this with Deuteronmy15:13–15. What New Testament principle reflects the same instructions? For the humanitarian worker, does this mean taking your work home with you? Are we getting out of this too easily by being paid to do it? Does it require of us an 'extra mile' or two or even three? In what ways could we apply this, above and beyond the call of paid duty?
2. What is the context of Luke 14:12–14? Read the sections surrounding the passage. How does this context help us to understand giving hospitality and lending to the poor? How does this passage compare to the clear and unambiguous instructions in Luke 6:33–36?

3. What might be the impact of this behaviour on our witness to Jesus Christ? Should we do it no matter the return?

Evidence of God's Love

Right theology is not the evidence of faith. Even 'the demons' believe and can quote scripture. Does that make them beings of faith?

1 John 3:16–20
James 2:14–25

Reflection

1. How do we know what love is?
2. How do we know the love of God is in us? What is the evidence – what are the indicators of God's love in us?
3. What does the term 'brothers and sisters' mean? Who does it include and who does it exclude? Family only? Fellow believers only? Compare the story of the Good Samaritan. Who is included and excluded in Jesus' teaching there?
4. What then is the evidence of faith?

Pure Worship/Religion

As you read, try to capture the key truth or idea for each passage.

James 1:26–27
Cf. Deuteronomy 10:18

Reflection

1. What is the context (verses 19–27) of James 1:26–27? What is the key truth?
2. What then is true – really true – religion?
3. What does the person who is 'blessed' look like? What are the characteristics? Draw from the whole passage, not just a single verse.
4. What does this truth teach us about witness?
5. In your journal, note three or four areas of your life in which you want to become a doer, rather than just a reader, of God's word. If you were to do these things, in what way would it give you more freedom?
6. In what way is this truth, from the time of the early church, reflected in the ancient scriptures we looked at above?

Commentary

The word here translated usually as 'religion' in verses 26 and 27 is more commonly translated elsewhere as 'worship'. It is useful to use this translation in this passage also and perfectly legitimate to do so.

Read the verses from James again and replace the word 'religion' with 'worship', 'worshipper' or 'worshipping'. For example, 'If any consider themselves to be a true worshipper…'

What is true worship?

Impartiality

In the accumulation of truth from all of the passages in our readings (and more), it seems that God holds a special place for those such as the poor, oppressed, widows and orphans, ensuring that they have special access to justice. As you read, consider how you might explain this in the light of these four passages.

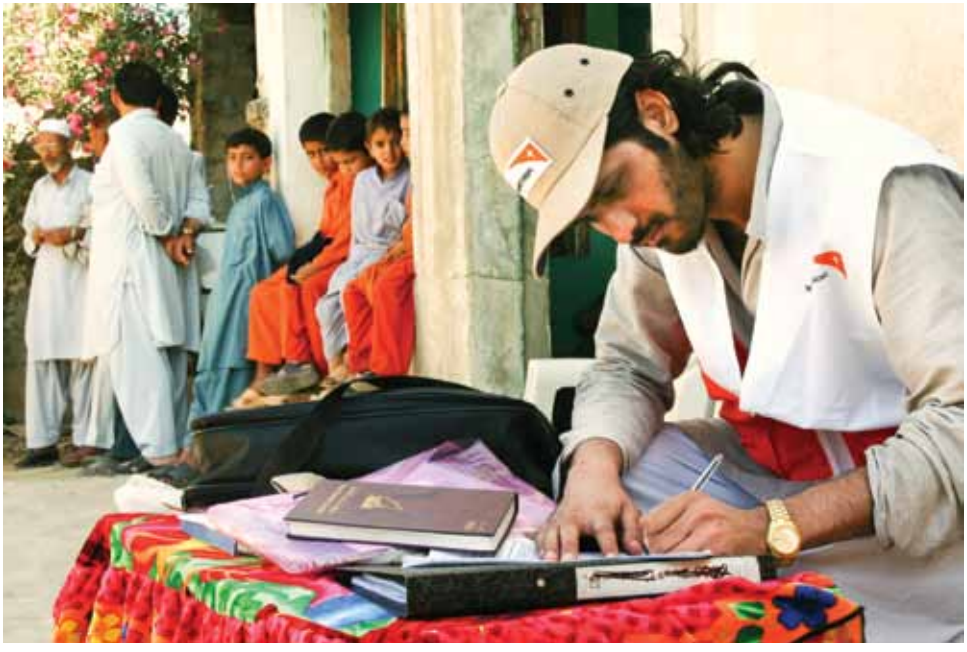
Leviticus 19:15
Deuteronomy 1:17; 10:17–19
Exodus 23:3

Reflection

1. Do these passages present opposing views of truth?
2. Write a brief paragraph explaining how you reconcile these two apparently contradictory truths. What part does ambiguity play in this scenario?
3. What motivation does God give for being fair, just and impartial?
4. What state of mind or attitude do you need to develop to ensure that you are impartial and yet particularly alert to the needs of the poor and oppressed? How will you develop that?
5. What does impartiality actually mean? Distant? Dispassionate? Free from bias? If God is impartial, what does that impartiality look like?

Module 2

BIBLICAL FAITH AND ANTHROPOLOGY IN HUMANITARIAN WORK



Introduction

At the very heart of humanitarianism is an understanding of what a human being is. Otherwise what is the word 'human' doing in 'humanitarianism'?

This module on biblical faith and anthropology is designed to help humanitarian workers see where their work in human society sits both theologically and philosophically, in particular through the discipline of anthropology. (We take a look at the humanitarian imperative from a sociological perspective in the next module.)

We start with opening exercises for individual readers to consider on their own, or for use by groups to introduce team discussions and activities.

Opening Exercise A

The purpose of this opening exercise is to get you thinking deeply about the subject and, if you're studying this with some of your colleagues, talking, debating and perhaps even arguing (in a friendly way, of course). Our purpose here is not about getting right answers. You will find plenty of opportunity to explore deeper meanings throughout this module, and to draw conclusions from your own study of scripture in the following readings and reflections. Do not take a short-cut past deep thinking to get to quick answers before you've struggled with the issues being presented.

Consider the following questions:

A. What is anthropology?

B. What then is 'biblical anthropology'?

C. What is a human being?

D. What difference do the definitions above make to the way we work and behave as humanitarians?

E. Does God exist? Do we believe God created humans in God's image? To explore or understand what a human being is, we must first understand our own assumptions and conceptions about God. These assumptions come from many sources: reading; sermons; conversations; childhood experiences; the community, culture or faith of our upbringing; and adult persuasion.

Take 10–15 minutes to write in your journal every title, idea, concept or description of God of which you can think. Just quickly brainstorm what comes into your head. Be prepared to compare your ideas with others if you are going through this study with a group.

(As a side challenge, try to find out which characteristics on your list are feminine in the original biblical language.)

At the end of your list, note answers to the following questions:

A. How do you feel when you see the list you just created?

B. What difference will your list and how you feel about it make in your work today? Be candid.

C. How will one or two thoughts about who God is drive how you complete those tasks or discourage you from those tasks? Get very specific. Think of what is on your to-do list for today.

D. Read Romans 1:20–25 and Hebrews 11:1–3. If you have a Bible that provides cross-references, read those passages also. In the two primary references, God is revealed in the created order. What do you learn from these passages? Write down how you personally respond to them.

Opening Exercise B

Read the boxed sidebar on God's attributes. Using your journal notes from Opening Exercise A, identify which characteristics of God are 'communicable' and which are 'incommunicable'.

A. Take 10 minutes to reflect on the question 'What difference, if any, does this insight make to the way I do my work and the way I live my life?'

B. If you can, share some of these thoughts with your colleagues. What insights do they contribute to your own thinking?

The question 'What is a human being?' can be answered only by first answering the question, 'Who

Communicable and incommunicable

Those of you who have studied theology (or medicine) will be familiar with this terminology, which is in fact quite simple.

Theologically, this concept relates to Genesis 2:7 in which we see God breathing the breath of life (God's own image) into the first humans. When God breathed into these beings we call 'human', God breathed something of God's own being into us.

But wait a moment! There are characteristics such as 'God is unchanging' that we cannot claim as part of human nature. Exactly!

Yet characteristics like 'God is love' clearly are part of human nature. So, there are aspects of God's nature that God chose to share with us – we call these communicable. And there are characteristics God cannot share with us – we call these incommunicable.

Digging deeper

Here's something to think very deeply about.

> Whatever I say to describe God – who God is, or what God is like – will always be completely inadequate, if not downright false! God will always be greater, more loving, more holy and even frightening, more humble, more merciful and gentle, etc., than anything human language can conceive.

This is much more than a quirky and interesting philosophical consideration. It is a very fundamental issue in good theology (or bad theology for that matter).

No matter who we are, we can almost always be certain our perception of God is too small, and does not do God justice. It is true to say that 'God is love'… but God is far more than that – far greater! I have a mental framework or worldview about 'love' and God cannot be confined by the words and concepts I construct to try to understand God. God will burst right out of any limiting boundaries I place on those concepts.

The problem is we, as people of faith, have developed concepts of God that are inadequate or incomplete descriptions of a 'god' we have made in our own image. And we communicate those concepts to others, who do not share our faith, without always admitting that our own ideas about God are limited.

Imagine having a discussion with an atheist, who says 'I do not believe in God'.

The atheist has in his or her mind a particular conception of who or what 'god' is or might be. Whatever mental images an atheist has built up about God cannot adequately resemble the Almighty God of the universe. Why would anyone want to believe in a god like that?

So, how do you respond to the atheist's statement? Well, you know what – I probably wouldn't want to believe in that person's concept of god! You might decide to answer by saying: 'I don't believe in the god you don't believe in either.'

So, what is the meaning of this for our work as humanitarians? If we can't properly conceive of God, can we know God?

In our reflections on the faith foundations of our work, we need to consider how we might come to know God better. And in coming to know God better, we may just come to know – and to serve – human beings better.

is God?' Being human necessarily incorporates those aspects of God that God has chosen to share with us by breathing into us something of God's own nature.

Most of the great faith texts (including the Bible) speak to at least four ways in which human beings reflect the image of God. We explore these in the sections that follow. (Of course, there are more than four communicable attributes of God breathed into human beings at creation, but we will look together at four.) It is also important to remember that these communicable attributes are still being breathed into human beings – for that is the work of the cross and the on-going work of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Exercise C

Consider the quote below from *Like Father Like Son*, by Tom Smail.[1] As you read, answer the following questions:

A. What do you think it means?

B. Do you agree with the statement? Or, only to some degree?

C. What is *imago Dei*? Why is this idea so important?

> …Genesis is not about our origins but about our relationships, to God who made us, to the other people who are with us, and to the environment of the world around us; and its revelational and anthropological authority lies in its exposition of God's purposes for us in these relationships. That purpose, far from being impaired, is enhanced and exposed by its emancipation from functions and concerns that are alien to it. To quote Ray Anderson…
>
> > It [the concept of *imago Dei*] is the foundational concept for understanding the biblical teaching concerning the nature and value of human personhood. In taking up the question of what the *imago Dei* means for human personhood, we address an issue that touches virtually every other tenet of Christian belief. The essential nature of human being is determinative for the understanding of the kind of redemption God has wrought for human beings through his Son, Jesus Christ, who is the true image of God.[2]

---

[1] T. Smail. *Like Father Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (2005), 41.

[2] R.S. Anderson. *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (1982), 70.

The Creation Story

Think about your own knowledge of the creation story. Note down from your memory and life-learning what the creation story teaches us about

- God
- human beings.

The creation story is foundational to the work we do as humanitarians. It provides a theological base for understanding what we do. (For those interested in the theological terminology, there are several theological frameworks that help us understand God's work in human nature and society. These commonly referenced frameworks include but are not limited to salvific theology (i.e. relating to salvation), creation theology and evangelical theology. They are not mutually exclusive, but can be discussed as different perspectives of the same truths. We mention them here so that you can do some more research on your own.)

The creation story helps us understand the nature of human beings.

Genesis 1:24–31
Colossians 1:15–19
Genesis 2:7–25

Reflection

For our purposes, we will focus on the human part of the creation story.

1. In Genesis 1:26, when God says, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness…', what conclusions do you draw from this statement?
2. What does this say about God?
3. What does it say about human beings?
4. What does it mean to you, to be created in God's image?
5. In what ways would you say you are created in God's image?
6. How does this affect the way you feel and think about other people?
7. What light does the passage in Colossians 1 throw on this notion of the image of God?
8. Read the Genesis 2 passage through twice. First, get an overview. On the second reading, note the following (as in the example in the text box to the right):
   a. the overall story, especially all references to human beings

b. insight about the setting and occasion

c. any questions about behaviour and/or responsibility

d. new commitments it triggers for you today. (How might this affect the way you do your work now? Be very specific about the actions you do or will take.)

Commentary

The image of God marks us out from all other living creatures, which would seem to imply that all other living creatures, although created by God, are not made in the image of God. Genetically, our nearest animal relative is the chimpanzee, but as a being, we belong to another world.

(It would be instructive to do a comparative study with animals as a way of defining differences between humans and the animal kingdom.)

God's own identity is the more important dimension to understanding the image of God.

The more we understand of God, the more we understand about what it is to be human. God reveals himself in nature, in scripture and in God incarnate: Jesus.

So we find that the image of God in humans both distinguishes us from all other animals and at the same time shows our family semblance.

Example for Genesis 2:15

The story: God placed Adam in the garden to work it and take care of it.

Insight: The garden was for a purpose – to be worked and be productive, but just as importantly, it was to be cared for, presumably for sustainability. Cease to care for it, and the garden will cease to be workable.

Questions: What has happened to the garden? Where is it now? Is the whole world effectively the garden that God has placed us in now?

Today: I will encourage my colleagues not to waste paper; I will find ways of helping beneficiaries I am working with to see the world differently, etc.

Love: God is Love

Love, as you know, is one of the most discussed subjects in human society. But what makes it such an important issue for the humanitarian? What practical difference does such a seemingly touchy-feely subject make to the way we engage in humanitarian assistance? Isn't our real work just a matter of getting resources together and providing assistance as appropriate?

Genesis 2:18
1 John 4:8–16

Reflection

Human beings have been created as social beings, in the image of God, designed to be in relationship with each other, 'male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27).

1. There was one thing in creation that God thought was 'not good'. What was it?
2. So God took corrective action. Why?
3. What was wrong with man being alone?
4. Find passages in the New Testament that show very clearly the love relationship within the Trinity. For example, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'. John's Gospel is a good place to start. If you're meeting with a group, share these passages next time you meet.
5. God is Love (1 John 4:8–16). Love is the nature of God, and God breathed it into us to make us human. This is a rich study in its own right, but take a bit of time to carefully and thoroughly explore this passage. Write down every aspect of love, relationships and faith that come to you as you read and re-read this passage.
6. What difference does this truth make to our work corporately and to you as an individual? What difference will you make as a team member reflecting the nature of God's breathing in you? Be very specific about your personal plan. Don't whip yourself, just make a difference.
7. Think about this from an anthropological point of view: if we have been created in the image of God to be in loving relationships, how then did the 'Christian West' come to be so 'individualistic'?
8. What is the impact of this relational truth on things like networking, social relationships, community work and culture?

Commentary

Man was alone because he was neither pure spirit, as God is, nor pure animal, as other creatures are. Man was a bit of both, distinct from the rest of creation, lonely and isolated. There was no way the human male alone could in any way reflect the true nature of the Trinity.

A part of man could relate perfectly well with his environment and the animals, a part could relate perfectly well with his God, but God saw that the male needed one who was 'bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh' – of kindred spirit – and so it was that woman was created. And out of the merging of the male and female – body, soul and spirit – the third member of the human trinity was to spring, a child. The woman was not just to be in orbit around the man, but a fitting cooperative agent with him in the work of God in creation.

Just as God's love extends beyond the Trinity, this loving human relationship is intended to extend to the broader community of human relationships. We will see this more as we study the next module on biblical foundations in sociology for humanitarian workers.

We were created to live in relationship, interdependent and co-productive with others. For this is the very nature of God.

For the professional

For further developing your professional point of view, it may help to establish a checklist of key life-changing questions these studies raise. Examples could include the following:

1. Is the community we are working with becoming more loving and dynamic in their relationships with each other than they were before we started?
2. Am I becoming more loving, enabling and supportive of my colleagues?
3. What have I done in the last week that diminished a friend or colleague in some way? What will I do to become more loving?
4. What have I done in the last week that has built and strengthened my teammates?

Creativity: God is Creator

The constructive nature of being

Similar to love, creativity is at the heart of human nature. Use of the term 'creativity' incorporates not just the creative attribute we would ascribe to artists, but also the broader sense of being constructive and productive. This stands in contrast to being destructive or unproductive. God breathed into humans that very creative spirit. Let's explore what this means for us as individuals and for the work we do. When did God finish God's creative work? Has God ceased being Creator? What is the significance of humans being imbued with attributes of God such as creativity?

Genesis 2:19, 20
Isaiah 40:28

Reflection

1. God is Creator (Isaiah 40:28). What does this tell us about God?
2. What was one of the first tasks given to humans?
3. Got it? Naming the animals, right?
4. Think of something you have tried to name. A child? A pet? A product? A community? An idea? Where did the ability to do the naming come from?
5. In what ways does human creativity differ from God's? In what ways are they the same?

Commentary

One of the first tasks given to humans was to name the animals (Genesis 2:19, 20). 'Naming' takes enormous creativity if you want a name to mean something or to signify something important.

For the people of the Bible, a name was chosen carefully and was significant in that it related to the nature of the person being named. In other cultures, names are thought to carry a blessing or to deflect a curse. There are people in our own times who will live with a child for some time and get to know the essence of the child's character before deciding on the name.

Elijah wasn't given his name just because it sounded good, but because he was to proclaim in the heathen context of King Ahab's reign 'My God is Yahweh', which is precisely what the name Elijah means.

Humans created to reflect the image of God fulfil that destiny by being creative – in the widest sense of the term.

People of faith, of all people, should have opportunity to be most creative. For that is part of the role of the Spirit of God, to breathe into us again the image of God, including God's creativity.

For the professional

1. What is creativity? You could develop a number of professional perspectives on this question.

   Examples could be: Creativity is a lifestyle of finding new solutions to old problems. Or, seeing old problems in new ways. Or seeing new problems in old ways.

2. As a professional humanitarian worker, how do you develop creativity in yourself?

3. Just as importantly, how do you develop a culture of creativity in communities with which you partner?

   Creativity applies to our programmes also:

   a. Is this community more creative now than when we started working alongside it? How would we measure that?

   b. Is this community seeing challenges, solutions and opportunities more creatively now? Or have we just provided people with our own solutions, ones that we can get funding for?

Sovereignty and Responsibility: God is King

Monarchs of our own destiny

Ever felt like a victim? Some people choose to fall prey to being a victim. 'Woe is me!' Everything is always someone else's fault.

Others choose to refuse to be a victim. They see that whatever the circumstances, they are still in charge of their own destiny. 'I may not be able to control what circumstance serves up to me, but I can control what I do with it.'

In this section we take a look at what sovereignty means for us as individuals and what it might mean for communities we work with.

Genesis 1:27–30
2 Samuel 12:7
Psalm 47:5–9
1 Timothy 6:15–16
Psalm 8:3–8
Jeremiah 2:7
Isaiah 24:4–6

Reflection

Humans were given responsibility to work with God in governing the created world. As the Bible presents it, God is the King of Kings, Supreme Ruler, and we have been charged to harmonise with God in exercising God's sovereign and loving rule.

You could call this 'stewardship', but the language of 'take charge' and 'dominion' is stronger than stewardship, although this language certainly includes it.

(Be careful not to turn this principle of sovereignty into an erroneous theology that humans are therefore entirely responsible for their salvation regardless of God's grace. We are not, here, talking about salvation but stewardship/delegated authority and the image of God.)

1. In Genesis 1:27–30, the first humans were told to go and 'have dominion/rule' over the world. What does this actually mean?
2. What do you think 'dominion' means?
3. What happens if you assume that 'dominion' means you can choose to do as you like? If your choice is destructive, do you have dominion?
4. What is in scope and out of scope for that governance?
5. What do the passages in 1 Timothy, 2 Samuel and the Psalms demonstrate about the nature of God?

6. Is this characteristic a communicable or an incommunicable attribute of God?
7. Who has the right to confer kingship?
8. What is the relationship between justice/oppression and the health of the created world?
9. What conclusions do you draw from Psalm 8:4–6? What linkage can you make with Ephesians 1:22?
10. Paraphrase (i.e. write in your own words) the meaning and impact of Isaiah 24:4–6.
11. What is the price humankind pays for making god in our image, rather than us being regents or rulers made in God's image?

Commentary

Humans have been given the task of working with God in governing the world of created things… the environment, human society, animals, etc. (To take this idea deeper, see the next module on faith foundations in sociology for the humanitarian worker.) You could say that humans were created as God's regents on earth.

We were told, 'take charge' or 'have dominion'. There is no room to interpret this imperative as permission to rule like a dictator, doing violence to creation – rather we are to partner with God in keeping the garden. God delegated responsibility to us, and therefore we will be held accountable as delegates. 'Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible…' (Genesis 1:28 *The Message*).

It seems that the intention of 'dominion' here is close to the idea in Titus 1:5 in which Paul instructs Titus to 'set in order' the church in Crete. The term is a jewellery term which means to set different precious stones in the right places to create a beautiful piece of art or functional jewellery.

We possess delegated authority to act and decide, and in this way we reflect the image of God's sovereignty. We act sovereignly in God's place where God has delegated us to do so, and are responsible for decisions we make and actions we take.

We do not rule over a perfection we call Eden. Whilst God saw that what was created was 'good', this is a world that is still being created and chaos is being turned into order. The whole of creation is groaning to be reconciled and brought back into order, and it is our job to work with God to make it happen. Creation can hardly wait for the wholeness (glory) that comes through our redemptive partnership with God (Romans 8:18–23).

What do you think is meant by the reference to 'reconcile to himself all things' in Colossians 1:19–20 (what the Lausanne Covenant refers to as God's 'Cosmic Mission')?

For the professional

Sovereignty and responsibility. Stewardship. What does all this mean for the humanitarian?

1. First, what does it mean at the personal level? Who is in charge of your life? Are you a victim or a vanguard over your circumstances?

   Agreed, in many cases you can't control your situation, but you can control how you respond to your circumstances. (Strongly recommended reading: *Man's Search for Meaning* by Dr Viktor Frankl.) So, when things go wrong, is it always someone else's fault – 'If only they had done their bit'?

   Or regardless of blame, do you take responsibility and seek solutions? Who is in charge of your life?

2. Secondly, is the community we are partnering with more in charge of its destiny now? Or have people become more dependent?

   Has the way we work with people enabled them to be regents in their own world, using their circumstances as an opportunity rather than an excuse?

3. How else would you apply this gift of sovereignty in your work, programmes and relationships?

Realists Who Love the Truth: God is Truth

Man and woman were placed in an open and transparent relationship with God and with each other – even to the point that their nakedness was 'unknown' (a non-issue) amongst God and themselves.

Truth and light were meant to have been part of human nature. Instead we distort truth to make ourselves comfortable, in the process destroying trust in each other and seeking position and power over others rather than seeking the light of transparency and truth. In this section, we explore the central need for truth in the human heart and its importance in human society.

1 John 1:5–10
John 8:12, 32
James 1:17–18
Genesis 2:8–17, 25; 3:8–13
1 Corinthians 4:5
Ecclesiastes 3:11
1 Samuel 2:3
2 Peter 1:5–6

Reflection

What is the function of light?

Primarily, light shows things for what they are. Light enables us to see things clearly, to see and 'name' things for what they are, to speak the truth.

Track the logic of the following questions:

1. What does the passage in 1 John 1:5–10 teach us about God? Look carefully at verse 5. Can light and darkness co-exist?
2. It seems that the apostle John had a particular affinity to the concept of light and darkness. In his gospel statement, how does this add to the understanding of 'light' and truth? What other passages can you find that 'throw light' on this?
3. James has another point of view. He introduces another title for God. What is it? What is the meaning of that title? What is meant by the term 'word of truth' in verse 18?
4. How do you put this truth – God is Truth – alongside the creation story in Genesis 2:8–17 and 25?
5. What point is the story making by stressing the fact that these humans were naked? Was it meant to be a justification for nudism or was it something much deeper? What was the point of this piece of information?
6. In Genesis 3:8, we find that transparency had disappeared, closed down. How do you explain what happened to that transparency?
7. What does the passage in 1 Corinthians 4:5 add to our understanding about truth and light? What does it teach us about God? And what does it demonstrate about human beings? What does this highlight about transparency and hidden motivations? How does that make you feel?
8. What does the reference in Ecclesiastes 3:11a add to the picture?

9. What practical things could you do to help yourself and your colleagues to be realistic? For example, could you encourage questioning and debating within the team? Many other ideas are possible. Explore them and commit to ones you think will work best.
10. Read 1 Samuel 2:3. How would you relate 'knowledge' to truth and light? Is there a relationship? How would you relate this to the passage in 2 Peter 1:5–6?

Commentary

In that first garden, the crucible of human society, when man and woman were in harmony with God and each other, there was no defensiveness, nor any need to be furtive. The relationship between the humans and with God was such that there was nothing to hide …until …

The point is not that they didn't have any clothes on; it's they had nothing to be ashamed of. Why? Because they lived in the light. The truth was plain for all to see. There was nothing to hide …until … They even walked in the presence of God naked …until …

This transparent relationship stands in direct contrast to what we see in Genesis 3:8f. What happened to shut out the light and truth? Adam (a collective noun for human beings) and Eve believed the lie that they would be 'like God' – something supposedly even more impressive than the 'likeness' they already experienced (Genesis 3:1–7). They were seduced by the lie and separated themselves from God and immediately started blaming.

Truth and light, designed to be at the heart of human existence, were destroyed …and the light went out!

Jesus, his disciples and the body of Christ's followers, of whom we are a part, have been charged with switching the light back on. Look at other passages about light and darkness, including John 1:4; 9:5; and 12:35.

Everything about God is in the light! There is nothing underhanded or deceptive. 'There is nothing deceitful in God, nothing two-faced, nothing fickle. He brought us to life using the true Word, showing us off as the crown of all his creatures,' (James 1:17–18, *The Message*). God created light and truth, so being created in the image of God, we are invited to live in that light.

For the professional

Truth. Transparency. Honesty. Integrity. Genuineness. Congruence.

Instead of living in the light as we were created, we choose to distort truth to make life more 'comfortable,' or so we think. In doing so, we create darkness, or as some would say… politics.

1. At the personal level what secrets can you successfully hide from God? What is the effect of being furtive and holding personal secrets away from those who are close to you – your spouse or other close family members?
2. What impact does being less than transparent have on your relationships? What impact does it have on the rest of your team at work? What would you say is the difference between 'blabbing' and 'transparency'?
3. Have you filled your mind and life with an abstract idealism that removes you from being realistic? Or have you become so cynical that it has distorted your view of truth? Cynicism may appear to be very clever, and is certainly the stuff of great humour, but there is nobody so deeply sad as a cynic.

   Understandably, humanitarians find it very easy to slide into cynicism, but beware, it is a lie.
4. At the programmatic level, what does 'being the light' really mean? Is this community more able to handle truth now than when we started our journey together? Can people talk more freely and transparently about their vulnerabilities and their strengths?

Putting It All Together

Exodus 34:6–7
John 7:18; 8:54; 11:4 and 40; 12:23; 12:28; 13:31–35; 14:11–17; 15:8; 17:1–5 and 22–24

Reflection

1. What is the essential role of the Spirit of God? Is it, more than anything else, to breathe into us again the image of God – to re-create, to re-birth in us the very nature of God?
2. What are the fruits of the Spirit? Does this list sound familiar? These fruits are in fact the very nature of God.
3. Read Exodus 34:6–7, and look at the story around it.
   - Why did Moses want to see the glory of God?
   - When Moses saw the glory of God, what did he see?
   - Glory is behavioural, not philosophical or metaphysical.
   - What is the glory of God?
   - Those behaviours are the very nature of God, the fruits of the Spirit.
4. Consider what you've read in John. At the cross we see humans at their most human.
   - We see Jesus as man crucified and suffering the most ignominious human death.
   - We see the oppressors at their most inhuman.
   - We see the perplexed, not yet seeing things the way God sees them.

   Yet on the cross, we see the ultimate expression of God's glory. Summarise John's eyewitness account and note each time the glory of God is mentioned.
5. Compare your list. We see on the cross (compare with Exodus 34:6–7)
   - compassion
   - grace
   - slowness to anger
   - boundless loving-kindness
   - the full truth
   - inclusiveness to all
   - forgiveness
   - justice.

Are these not the very nature of God… of which we are partakers?

Commentary

We are most truly human when we are 'partakers of the divine nature' by being

- loving
- creative
- responsible
- full of truth.

We are least human when

- Instead of loving, we lust, resent, hate and manipulate.
- Instead of being creative, we become destructive, inept, flat and colourless.
- Instead of governing appropriately, we misunderstand authority and do violence to ourselves, others and the world for which we are responsible.
- Instead of living in the light, we distort truth to make it comfortable and parade our self-centred arrogance.

In doing so we condemn ourselves to being something less than we were created to be.

DME: As If Eternity Matters

Our framework of human nature informs our framework of humanitarian endeavour.

In World Vision, this is what inherently guides the design and monitoring of our efforts (DME being the customary initialism referring to standards and indicators utilised in 'design, monitoring and evaluation'). We ask of our programmes and policies 'What are true indicators of transformation and development?'

If our humanitarian endeavour is established and guided by love, creativity, responsibility and truth, then our chances of successfully partnering with God and with each other are great. Not to do so is to dehumanise ourselves, our partners and those we seek to serve.

2 Peter 1:4–11

Reflection

1. What do you think is meant by the phrase 'participants in the divine nature'?
2. How would you paraphrase this?
3. How do you know you are a 'participant' in the divine nature?
4. List qualities of this nature that you share.
5. Discuss together what each of these qualities means.
6. In your private study journal, list each of the qualities, and outline what action you will take to apply each of them – today. We are, after all, encouraged to 'make every effort' to support our faith with these qualities.

Commentary

What is the 'incarnation'? Why was incarnation necessary? Couldn't God have provided salvation in any other way? (Be careful how you answer questions regarding what God can do and cannot do!) If God could have chosen to provide salvation, reconciliation and redemption for creation in any way possible, why choose incarnation?

What can you or I do with the insights we've gained throughout our study?

- Apply it to our own self-discipline and thought.
- Apply it to the way we relate to those we love and work with.
- Develop a high-level framework for design, monitoring and evaluation that's as practical as it is evocative.

For the professional

Our success in saving and rebuilding lives and livelihoods is ultimately measured by what of God has been breathed into our programmes, policies, partnerships and, more particularly, the communities we claim to support.

1. What might be some indicators or signs that our humanitarian work is being successful? As you think about the community/communities in which you work, ask, 'What and how much of God is being breathed into this community through our presence?'
2. Do our current monitoring and evaluation tools help us to get a measure of *imago Dei* (the image of God) in our humanitarian programmes, particularly in terms of the attributes of God we have been looking at – love, sovereignty, truth, creativity?
    a. Are the people of the community we are working with becoming more loving and dynamic in their relationships with each other than before we started?
    b. Are community members more in charge of their own destiny now than before?
    c. Are they more realistic and more able to handle truth now than before?
    d. Are they more creative and able to solve their own problems now than when we started the journey together?
3. If in your experience the answers to the last four questions (2a to d) are more 'no' than 'yes', what would you change to try to establish God's image in your programmes? And how would you know whether it is established or not?

The Role of Faith in Shaping our Humanitarianism

The following text was written for 'HEA Ministry Guiding Philosophy' and based primarily on a paper entitled 'Preliminary Reflection on a Theology of Relief' written by Paul Mikov, a member of the Global Centre HEA team at the time. The ideas contained in the text are firmly rooted in the Christian scriptures although, since it was written for an external as well as internal audience, it does not contain specific Bible references. As you read through the text, make a note of the Bible verses or biblical concepts that come to mind.

World Vision's faith foundations and identity shape the perspective of humanity that is fundamental to our holistic approach to human transformation. At the core of all World Vision's work is our belief that human beings are created by God and uniquely bear God's image or likeness. As God is a spiritual being, so we too are spiritual beings. In consequence, our human construct includes spirituality amongst the various 'pillars' that define what it means to be human and that must be sustained and supported if people are to enjoy life in all its fullness. Along with physical and mental health, support for family, community and cultural identity, economic sustenance, freedom and self-expression, security, safety and protection, shelter, food and water, World Vision recognises the need to acknowledge and support people's spiritual well-being through our humanitarian programmes.

We believe that our understanding of humankind sets a high bar for humanitarianism, in that we are each accountable for doing what we can to meet needs across the entire spectrum of what it means to be human.

Belief that women and men are created in the image and likeness of God bestows immeasurable dignity and worth on every human being, regardless of race, creed, economic status, gender, age or ability. For World Vision, impartiality in our humanitarian operations is not a goal to which we aspire so much as a fundamental characteristic that stems from our core beliefs.

Being made in the image of God confers a commonality on all people that is central to our motivation as humanitarians. This identification infers a responsibility, an imperative to act to relieve the pain and suffering of our fellow human beings.

HEA's commitment to a biblically-defined human construct drives us to actively engage in the humanitarian movement for accountability and transparency. Our programmes systematically seek to interpret our view of humanity in HEA policy and practice, making ourselves accountable and transparent – not only to our donors, peers and the communities with which we work – but ultimately to our Creator and Sustainer.

God's loving concern for all creation is demonstrated throughout our holy scriptures and, ultimately, in Jesus Christ. The example of Jesus Christ speaks to Christians of the complete identification of God with humanity, in our joys as well as in our pain, and of the belief that life is stronger than death. The Christian Scriptures, and Jesus Christ's life on earth, make clear that God's will aims at total well-being, the definitive and comprehensive good of every person. Those who believe in the God of the Bible cannot take God and God's will seriously without taking seriously humanity and humanity's well-being.

As we seek to follow Jesus Christ's example, our acts of compassion in a humanitarian emergency become tangible expressions of God's presence and care, as we bring comfort and hope to those afflicted by hopelessness, suffering, futility and even death. Love expressed in action is the final measure of a person's belief, and love must be the ultimate reference point from which our humanitarian actions are rightly judged.

'HEA Ministry Guiding Philosophy', Feb 2010, 8

Reflection

1. How much does this quotation reflect your own understanding of the role that World Vision's Christian identity plays in shaping our humanitarian work in disaster management and emergency response?
2. Are there other factors related to faith that have motivated you and your colleagues in the work that you are doing?
3. People sometimes say that they can't tell the difference between World Vision and any other humanitarian organisation, whether secular or faith based. Why do you think our faith foundations do not always show in the work that we do or the way that we do our work? How can we ensure that our approach to our work is distinctive whilst still being sensitive to the context in which we are working?

Module 3

BIBLICAL FAITH AND COMMUNITY – SOCIOLOGY FOR HUMANITARIAN WORKERS

Introduction

Many say, 'What on earth is the world coming to?' We say, rather, 'Look who has come to the world!'

The world we live in is intensely worrying. Changes we can't keep pace with, conflicts that kill and maim people – mostly civilians – social divides and intolerance, self-destructive approaches to our environment, and other sensational ills that saturate global media.

Yet the same world has never before held so much promise and we are faced with great opportunities. Technology puts us more in control of our own world and of our communications throughout that world. Unprecedented access to learning puts our own destiny more within our control.

How do these threats and promises shape our ministry? What does it all mean for the children and communities with whom we partner?

What kind of society does God dream of for children and communities? How will these communities interact with the future, and what kind of society do they want to build?

If you find yourself asking these kinds of questions, then consider yourself a sociologist – albeit maybe a novice. You are hereby invited to enjoy the exploration of some faith-based insights that can help you develop some very useful perspectives.

Welcome to Module 3 in *Biblical Foundations for Humanitarian Workers*. The first two modules explored key issues of the humanitarian faith imperative, and anthropology's intersections with faith for humanitarian workers.

In this module we will look at the work we do as part of a humanitarian organisation from a sociological perspective. We'll also examine sociological dimensions of our work from a biblical perspective, given World Vision's Christian identity and history.

So come on a journey with us… consider yourself a student of both faith and sociology.

From a faith-based humanitarian perspective, God has placed humans in society, where a range of practical and emotional relationships are designed to reflect the nature of God as a relational God. This module explores God's dream for that society. It's practical application informs and shapes our thinking about ministry, which includes community development, managing vulnerabilities and shocks, and developing a voice for truth – absolute, relative and contextual.

Sociology is the study of human society. Every text and dictionary definition will start with something like that and add some variations. If sociology is the study of human society, then the natural question for a person of faith is, 'What is God's dream for society?'

The scope of that question, as with sociology itself, is very wide – ranging from casual interactions between two individuals to marriage to complicated international relations.

Here is a list of topics worthy of some study, especially from a faith perspective. In this module we can only tackle a few, and even fewer at some depth:

- God's dream for human society
- life-course
- family, marriage and relationships
- sexuality and gender
- work
- economic relations
- power and authority
- education
- property and wealth
- race and ethnicity
- governance and politics
- crime and deviance
- cities and urban life
- communications, media and social networks
- community organisation
- environment
- religion and faith
- nations
- conflict, war and terrorism.

Opening Exercise A

Your first journal assignment is to map the sociology of coffee or tea drinking. If you want to do a bit of thinking beforehand, research the internet on the topic of 'Sociology of Coffee or Tea'. That is the exercise.

Our purpose is to start the process of thinking about 'ministry' sociologically and, conversely, to look at sociological dimensions of humanitarian ministry from a biblical point of view.

In your journal or on a notepad, 'map' all sociological linkages to coffee or tea you can think of – it doesn't matter if you don't like coffee or tea. You could think in terms such as

- ritual
- symbolic value
- drug/stimulant
- interdependency
- international, social and economic relations
- social and economic development
- colonialism.

The easiest way to do this is to create a 'mind map' (see Appendix 2) with the word 'coffee' or 'tea' in the middle and all the words from the above list around it. Then get brainstorming

– write down all the words which you associate with each idea on the list. If you're struggling to get started, here are some questions to help you with your sociological thinking:

- What societies are involved with the production, distribution, selling and consumption of coffee or tea?
- How do those societies relate to each other?
- What is the impact of those linkages?
- How have coffee or tea shaped the people and societies involved?
- What is the place of complex international commodities such as tea or coffee in society? (These are often termed 'hard-wired commodities' because they are central to the economy from households to the commodities exchange.)
- What are the sociological issues buried in this statement?

Part One: Finances

Economic Relations

Jubilee – equity for all

Recent history shows that justice has become more important than charity. We saw justice as the banner for the 'BandAid' efforts in the 1980s. We've seen it more recently in the 'Make Poverty History' campaign that began in 2005. Justice was a key catchphrase for the musician Bono, who in his address at the US National Prayer Breakfast in 2006, said,

> It's not about charity, it's about justice.
> And that's too bad.
> Because you're good at charity.
> Americans, like the Irish, are good at it.
> We like to give, and we give a lot, even those who can't afford it.
> But justice is a higher standard.
> Africa makes a fool of our idea of justice; it makes a farce of our idea of equality.
> It mocks our pieties, it doubts our concern, it questions our commitment.

At the heart of justice is the economic relationship between all people, but especially between those who have resources and those who have less or little.

> By making wealth our goal, we have succumbed to the idolatry of mammon about which Jesus warned so strongly (Matthew 6:24). Rather, the ultimate goal of economic policy ought to be enriching the quality of relationships within a society.[1]

> 'It is justice, not charity that is wanting in the world.'
>
> *Mary Shelley (1797–1851)*

When healthy economic and social relationships are the primary concern of a society's politics and culture, then prosperity would normally follow (see Deuteronomy 28:1–14).

Leviticus 25:10–24
Ezekiel 45:8–9; 46:18

[1] M. Schluter and J. Ashcroft. *Jubilee Manifesto* (2005), 217.

Reflection

Read the passage above from Leviticus 25, then tackle these questions:

1. What is the name of the economic mechanism described here?
2. What is the principle? What do you think God is trying to achieve?
3. In an agricultural society, what is the relationship between wealth and land?
4. Whose land is it really?
5. If the Year of Jubilee had been practised, in what ways do you think the history of the world would have been different ...especially in the Middle East?
6. What are the underlying truths to this radical principle?
7. Verse 23 gives the reason behind land not being sold in perpetuity. What is the reason? How should that affect our decision-making and behaviour?
8. How do you feel about this principle?
9. How can we apply Jubilee to our work and our generation?

Exercises

A. Some historians suggest that the Jubilee was never in fact practised. Why do you think this might be? Feel free to do a little research.

B. List some ways that Jubilee can be put into practice.

Commentary

Yahweh is intensely interested in economics. When the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, every family was granted tenure of suitable land and resources for productivity on an equal basis. At least that was the idea. The service functions (priests, etc.) who could not produce for the community were to be supported by various taxes, five different ones in all. Over the years, families who for whatever reason lost access to their land would have their original allotment of land restored to them at the next 'Year of Jubilee', an economic institution which God instructed the Israelites to create. The principle is that the land would be returned to its original owners or families every 50 years.

Digging deeper

Here are some important and useful links to information about a campaign related to the principle of Jubilee:

http://www.jubilee2000uk.org/

http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk/

http://www.jubileeusa.org/

http://trans.worldvision.com.au/Stir/Content.aspx?topicID=421

To learn more, briefly research any of the following topics:

A. Gather information on the rationale behind the Jubilee 2000 campaign and subsequent similar campaigns (such as 'Make Poverty History') looking at international debt reduction.

B. Develop a profile of the way the campaigns have been designed and managed. (If you have an advocacy specialist nearby or on your team, seek their assistance. But do your own research – you'll learn more!)

C. Using your journal, formulate your thoughts on the rationale and mode of operation of the debt-reduction campaigns.

   1. What can we learn from the campaigns?
   2. What can we use from the operational experience?
   3. What is at the heart of the concept of debt-reduction campaigns?
   4. In what ways might debt reduction be both similar to and different from biblical concepts of Jubilee and sabbatical?

D. How can these principles be applied in your own family or community, and your work or ministry? Think about debt, equity, land, environment, micro-financing, rights, God, etc. Map out some ideas and propose some actions you or your team could accomplish.

There are a number of reasons why land changes ownership – disability, death, debt, poor management. It seems that God does not want these disadvantages either to lead to ever-increasing extremes of wealth and poverty or for one generation's issues to disadvantage future generations. The solution is to establish an economic institution to ensure that no family would permanently lose its land. Land, of course, is a primary opportunity to produce resources and prosperity. This also enables families to function as dignified, contributing members of their community (Leviticus 25:10–24).

When property was sold or claimed for whatever reason, the new 'owner' was to take on ownership for the balance of the 50-year cycle… not in perpetuity (Leviticus 25:16).

Leviticus 10:25–28 could be said to illustrate the priority of equity over property rights. Would you agree? The original family's right to be productive is more important than the interim owner's right to earn profits from the land.

In fact, the absolute owner of the land was God. The people of Israel were stewards. This economic principle provided a regular opportunity to redistribute property on an equitable basis (Ezekiel 45:8–9; 46:18).

Here is the idea of people being made in the image of God (covered in the section of this book, 'Faith and Anthropology for the Humanitarian') being demonstrated in practice. God was giving God's people a model to follow that would demonstrate the characteristics of sovereignty and responsibility in practice.

In Leviticus 25:9, the Day of Atonement was celebrated at the start of Jubilee. Reconciliation with God is the door to reconciliation in the community.

Interestingly, historians cannot find evidence that The Year of Jubilee was ever practised. Religious lawyers were intricately enmeshed in the letter of the law, yet they were able to turn a blind eye to this particular and very explicit law. Why do you think this is so?

The fundamental principle at stake here is equity. This is not charity or philanthropy – as good and as important as those are.

Paul Mills gives a very helpful description below.

> Leviticus 25 describes in detail the ways in which a leasehold market for agricultural land was to operate (vv. 14–16, 27), so enabling a family access to the capital value of their asset if they were in need and without relatives to provide financial support, with the future rents from the land until the next Jubilee acting as the limit to one's ability to consume now.[2]

[2] Schluter and Ashcroft, 22.

Economic and Environmental Well-being

The radical 'sabbatical'

The Old Testament is rich with very specific economic and environmental institutions, supported by principles and practise in the New Testament and church history. 'Sabbath', or 'sabbatical', is one of those significant practices. The key question here is how does this guide us in the way we live and do our work?

Exodus 23:10–13
Deuteronomy 15:12–18
Deuteronomy 15:1–6, 9–10
Leviticus 25:2–7, 39–40
Exodus 21:2–6

Reflection

Look at the passages above, then use these questions to form your own ideas:

1. What is the economic and environmental mechanism here called?
2. What is the principle involved? And what purpose does it serve?
3. Who are the people affected, and what economic factors are affected?
4. If this mechanism is practised, what social, religious and economic impacts would result?
5. What does this principle teach us about God?
6. Scan Exodus chapters 21–23 to get the context. What are the recurring themes? How does this help us understand the Sabbatical Principle?

Commentary

We are familiar with the notion of someone 'taking a sabbatical' – a practise very common in the academic community and in some Christian denominations, at least for clergy or pastors. We may also be familiar with the Jubilee 2000 Campaign, from the exercises and the 'Digging deeper' box in the previous section.

But what is really the idea behind a sabbatical? And how can it guide us as humanitarian workers?

In the sabbatical year, land was to lay fallow, debts (including mortgages) were to be cancelled, and slaves and bondservants were to be set free.

The sabbatical year addresses several important issues:

- a celebration of God as the Creator – who owns all land, of which we are occupiers
- land reform – resting a precious resource for future production
- release of bonded servants
- cancelling of debts
- an opportunity to reboot the whole social, religious and economic structure – every seventh sabbatical was the Jubilee. Absolutely every person would again be a free citizen!

God set the stakes extremely high – there were severe consequences for not observing these instructions. Check out Leviticus 26.

So, how do we apply this principle of fresh starts in our development and humanitarian work? Can we?

Tithes

Giving for central services and common good

Tithing is what you do at church on Sunday, right?

Well, partly right. It is what you do… or at least tithing is what scripture teaches, although in actuality only God knows who truly tithes.

But what is the purpose of tithes? Is it to keep priests in bread and butter? Is it to finance an evangelist's jet-set lifestyle? Is it to build new buildings where God doesn't live?

Sure, these are provocative questions, but they need to be asked. What we need to understand is, Why did God bring tithing into the economic order?

Deuteronomy 14:28–29
Deuteronomy 26:12–15
Ruth 2
Leviticus 19:9–10
Deuteronomy 24:19–22
Leviticus 27:30–32
Numbers 18:21–32

Reflection

Read the passages above, using these questions to help you think as you read:

1. What is the economic and environmental mechanism here called?
2. What is the principle involved? And what purpose does it serve?

3. Who are the people affected, and what economic factors are affected?
4. If this mechanism is practised, what social, religious and economic impacts will result?
5. What does this principle teach us about God?
6. In Deuteronomy 24:22, the community was instructed to 'remember' their own 'slave-hood' (they too had been aliens/foreigners, orphans, widows). Why was this 'remembrance' important?
7. How many tithes were there? On the surface, you might think there was one. If you read the passages carefully, you will see there were tithes for various purposes. Are they all the same tithes?
8. In Leviticus 19, what strikes you about the intentionality when harvesting? Who were the beneficiaries? Look at surrounding verses. What phrase is repeated frequently? 'I am…'. Why is this important?

Exercises

A. What is the relationship between tithing in the scriptures and modern-day giving to churches and charities?

B. What is the connection between rigorously following this practise and 'prosperity'?

C. What is the meaning of the phrase, 'The tithe is the Lord's'?

D. What is your view on the Mosaic law of economics (all the passages above) as different from either the 'capitalist–free-market economy' and the 'Marxist-socialist economy'?

E. Where would you find faith rationale for either a capitalist or a socialist approach to economics?

Digging deeper

A brilliant example of how this economic principle is put into practise in more recent times can be found at: http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/mission/features/20993-god-and-guinness.

1. There is much more to this story than what is told in this one article, so do some more research on it or, if you are in a group, ask one group member to do the research and report back.
2. What was Guinness's motivation?
3. Why do you think the story provokes argument about beer rather than recognising God at work?
4. What impact socially and spiritually do you think the Guinness policy had on society, employees and families?

Commentary

Tithing and 'gleaning' were established in the Old Testament to prevent crippling poverty in the community and oppression of aliens/foreigners in the land.

Tithing, of course, means one-tenth (10 per cent) of earnings or production. Gleaning refers to collection of produce that has been dropped intentionally or unintentionally during harvesting.

There is evidence to suggest that in ancient Israel there were as many as five different tithes. Some were specifically for the running of the temple and support of priests. Other tithes were specifically for the poor, widows, aliens/foreigners, refugees, etc. God gave Israel an economic framework in the form of the law, so that the community would know how to live in peace and with justice.

Digging deeper

Another recommended resource is *The Spirit Level – Why Equality is Better for Everyone* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (UK: Penguin Books 2010, with revisions, including a chapter responding to critics). This is not a theological or faith text, nor is it a socialist or capitalist treatise, but a well-researched proposition that everyone is better off in an equitable society. Perhaps this is what the Bible envisions when it talks about 'prosperity'.

The romantic story of Ruth (see particularly Ruth 2) is a well-known example of the economic institution of gleaning put into practice. Gleaning in Boaz's fields was Ruth and Naomi's primary source of survival and hope.

Ronald Sider observes, 'The Laws on gleaning did not guarantee hand-outs; Ruth had to work hard for the grain she received. But they did guarantee poor people the opportunity to acquire basic necessities.'[3]

Does this economic framework have any credibility in modern times? As with all of these ideas, economists disagree. And of course, the capitalist-vs.-socialist debate still rages.

[3] Sider, 73.

New Creation Economics

Ancient values for a radical new era

So, are all the social and economic rules and policy that we have looked at so far just for people of the old covenant made with Yahweh?

Or do these principles somehow establish the platform for radical economic norms in relationships of the new creation?

Jesus came to fulfil the law: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.' (Matthew 5:17)

Jesus came to make the law more meaningful, more applicable than ever before. Where does this leave us? How did the first believers interpret the social and economic heart of God? What do we do with this today? Of course, these passages apply to much more than just economics, but include all of God's law.

Galatians 6:15–16; 3:6–9 **1 Peter 2:9–10**
Matthew 5:17–20 **Romans 8:4**

Reflection

Read the texts using these questions to help form your own ideas:

1. What is the recurring theme in all these passages?
2. In Galatians 6:15–16, what does the term 'Israel of God' mean, and who does it refer to? What is the 'rule' the passage refers to, and what will happen to those who follow the rule?
3. In what way is Abraham's belief relevant here (Galatians 3:6–9)?
4. There are some ancient descriptions of people and culture in 1 Peter 2:9–10. Where do these terms come from? How do they apply now? What are the responsibilities that go along with moving out of darkness into God's marvellous light?
5. Matthew 5:17–20 is very explicit teaching by Jesus. Study this passage. What does righteousness mean to Jesus, and how is it measured? Consider that the law is an expression of the nature of God.
6. In Romans 8:4 Paul writes to the community at Rome underlining that our role is to fulfil the requirements of the law. How do we do that? Remember that the role of the Spirit is to breathe into us the nature of God.

Commentary

In the new creation, everything is new. The people are the people of the future. Your ethnicity, your religious heritage, your cultural and religious divisions all count for nothing in the new creation (see Philippians 3:4–7). The community and people that live by the rule of the new creation will have peace and mercy. That is the promise.

Jesus came not to bring in a new law but to breathe into a new creation the very breath of life. Even Abraham's belief, or faith, was not in the law but in a promise and in the God who made that promise. And so it is with us.

God gave the law so that the community would know how to live together in peace and justice. Was that purpose rescinded in the new creation? 'And embedded in the civil law of the Old Testament are principles that both guide the church and inform our understanding of economic justice for society.'[4] Be sure you read the surrounding verses in all the passages. In the Matthew 5 passage, for example, Jesus is outlining the fact that righteousness is the basis for entering the new creation, not keeping the law. What follows (verse 21 onwards) is how to practise the new righteousness.

You discover that the new righteousness is not a state of euphoria, not a heightened state of religious perfection, not a pious face during worship, but a set of behaviours. It is practical stuff like forgiveness, reconciliation, friendship, real affection, integrity, letting your yes be yes, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, giving your coat as well as your shirt, giving to the one who asks to borrow, loving your enemies.

That is righteousness… even perfection (v. 48). How do you rate?

If these were our community norms, what kind of community would we be?

So being a new creation society is the foundation of economic relationships and social and community development.

[4] Sider, 73.

Common Wealth

New creation economics in practice

What is the first picture we have of the new community of disciples left behind by Jesus?

Exactly. It is the picture of the disciples putting into practise the values and teachings of Jesus and the laws he came to fulfil – the commonwealth of disciples.

'There was not a needy person among them'. (Acts 4:34)
Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–37; 5:1–11; 6:1–7

Reflection

Read the passages above, using these questions to help form your own ideas:

1. Who were the players in this drama of the early community of faith?
2. List social and economic principles you can identify from these passages.
3. If you wanted to describe what this new community of followers was like, what descriptive terms would you use?
4. What effect did this young radical community have on surrounding society?
5. Why do you think it had that effect?

Local Passion, Global Concern

Special relief funds

The early community of disciples demonstrated a passion for caring for those suffering from drought, famine and poverty. The story of the early disciples in these readings and others shows that economic relationships amongst the community of followers were just as high a priority to them as they had been to the ancient community of Israel… or as they ought to have been.

Acts 11:27–29
Romans 15:22–28
Acts 21:13; 24:17
Galatians 2:10
2 Corinthians 8:9
1 Corinthians 11:20–29

Reflection

The readings include classic references to stories of the early disciples putting into practise what was always in the heart of God. Read, then spend some thought on the following questions:

1. What was the geographic location and time scale of these stories? Who were the collections for?
2. What do you observe about how these funds were managed?
3. Is the modern community of believers practising the same thing? If so, in what ways? If not, what are the main differences between then and now? Why do you think it might be different?
4. How much was it worth to Paul to deliver relief to the poor and suffering internationally? (See Acts 21:13 and 24:17.) Why do you think this was so important to him?
5. List all of the things you observe about sharing and financial fellowship in the early community of disciples.
6. What do you think is the wider impact of this economic sharing? What does it bear witness to?

Exercises

Read the article below from Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. Then consider the questions below.

> **Models to Follow and Avoid**
>
> How do we apply biblical revelation concerning the year of jubilee, the sabbatical year, tithes, and gleaning to today's situation? Should we try to incorporate these mechanisms into modern society? Are these laws, or the basic principles behind them, applicable to the church at all?
>
> God gave Israel the law so that they would know how to live together in peace and justice. The church is now the new people of God (Galatians 3:6–9; 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9–10). As Paul and other New Testament writers indicate, parts of the Mosaic law (the ceremonial law, for instance) do not apply to New Testament believers (i.e., the church). But there is no indication that God's moral law has ceased to apply (Matthew 5:17–20,

Romans 8:4). And embedded in the civil law of the Old Testament are principles that both guide the church and inform our understanding of economic justice for society.

How then do we apply the laws we have discussed? Should we try to revive the ones in Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15?

Certainly not. The specific provisions of the year of jubilee are not binding today. Modern technological society is vastly different from rural Palestine. If Kansas farmers left grain standing in the corners of their fields, it would not help the hungry in inner-city New York or rural India. We need methods appropriate to our own civilization. It is the principles, not the details that are important today.

The history of the prohibition against charging interest illustrates this.

The annual rate of interest in the ancient Near East was incredibly high – often 25 per cent or more. 'It is not hard, therefore, to understand the reason for a law that prohibits charging interest to fellow Israelites (Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 23:19–20; Leviticus 25:35–38). According to The International Critical Commentary, this legislation reflects a time when most loans were not commercial but charitable. Commercial loans to establish or extend a business were not common. Most loans were needed by a poor person or by someone in an emergency.' The texts on interest make it clear that the well-being of the poor is a central concern: 'If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them.' (Exodus 22:25 NRSV) The legislation on interest is part of an extensive set of laws designed to protect the poor and to prevent the creation of a class of desperately poor folk with no productive resources.

Failing to understand this, the Christian church attempted to apply these texts in a legalistic way. Several church councils wrestled with the question. Eventually, in 1179 at the Third Lateran Council, all interest on loans was prohibited. But the results were tragic. Medieval monarchs invited Jews, who were not bound by the church's teaching, to be money lenders. This practise resulted in intense anti-Semitism and in casuistic schemes developed by theologians to circumvent the prohibition.

This misguided preoccupation with the letter of the law and the resulting adoption of an unworkable, legalistic application helped discredit, or at least obscure, the important biblical teaching that the God of the poor is Lord of economics – Lord even of interest rates. It also contributed to the modern mentality that views loans and banking – indeed the whole field of economics – as independent and autonomous. From the standpoint of revealed faith, of course, such a view is heretical. It stems from modern secularism, not from the Bible.

This history warns us against wooden application of God's living Word. But we dare not let past mistakes end in timid silence. These biblical texts demand that Christian lenders count the borrower's need more important than their own maximisation of profit.

> In applying the biblical teachings on the year of jubilee, the sabbatical year, gleaning, and tithing, then, we must discover the underlying principles. Then we can search for contemporary strategies to give flesh to these basic principles.
>
> The texts we have examined show that God wills justice, not mere charity. Therefore, Christians should work to eliminate poverty among believers. At the same time, Christians informed by the biblical understanding of economic justice will search for effective structures in the larger society that enable every family to have the basic capital needed to earn a living. There is an implication here that private property is so good that God wants everybody to have some![5]

In your journal, respond to the following questions:

A. What do you agree with and disagree with in Sider's article?

B. What other questions does it raise for you?

C. List some ideas for how you can put this into practise in your humanitarian work and your personal life.

D. Read the quote below, from Aristides, a second-century philosopher reporting to Caesar on what he found in the Christian community. What would a philosopher write about the community of disciples today?

> Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from [the one] who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. They observe the precepts of their Messiah with much care, living justly and soberly as the Lord their God commanded them.
>
> – Aristides[6]

---

5 Sider, 73–75.

6 http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/aristides-kay.html.

Commentary

In these last two sections, we have seen the early community of disciples at work, putting into practise and fulfilling what was laid down as sound economic principle in ancient times. Times were different, and applications don't look identical between the ancient instructions and the early church's expression of those principles, but the *motivation* and the *outcome* were the same.

From the ancient scriptures to the new community of Jesus' disciples, we see revealed that God's heart for the community is shown in transformed economic relationships. Gentiles in Corinth were now part of the people of God and were responsible to share with Jews suffering in Jerusalem. These are redeemed relationships. God was in Christ reconciling all things, and to us has been given this ministry of reconciliation – emotionally, socially, psychologically and economically.

Part Two: Ruling and Reigning

Governance

What is the purpose and function of civil leadership? And, by what criteria will leaders be measured?

Psalm 72:1–4
John 18:36

Reflection

Think about the idea of national and community governance.

1. List the concepts and words that come to mind. Even better, try to put this in a 'mind map'. (For details about how to do this, see Appendix 2)

   Many of us find politics remote and uninteresting, regarding it as the preserve of middle-aged men and women in parliaments and assemblies.

   Whether we like it or not, all our lives are touched in real ways by what happens in the political sphere. Governments may influence even quite personal activities, and in times of war can order or expect us to lay down our lives for causes they decide are necessary.[7]

> **Governance –** those, elected or not, who make decisions that impact the whole of a society. Governance is not just about 'government' but also includes powerful institutions including banks and financial institutions and other corporations.

2. How does your government impact you personally, your family and your community?

[7] Giddens. *Sociology* (2009), 988.

When we think about governance, a wide range of issues and concepts immediately become important – things like

- politics
- sovereignty
- citizenship
- law
- nationalism
- power
- authority
- authoritarianism
- democracy
- socialism
- party politics
- politicians
- globalism
- global governance
- social movements
- social unrest.

The term 'government' refers to a political apparatus in which officials enact policies and make decisions. 'Politics' is the means by which power is used and contested to affect the scope and content of government activities.[8]

Essentially politics and governance are about the way humans live together in what we call society.

So why are we looking at such a contentious and substantial subject in a study on faith foundations? Because, as we shall see, faith scriptures have a tremendous amount to say that challenge the ways we think about governance and civil leadership.

Digging deeper

Here are some questions and ideas to ponder while we journey through the faith foundations of national and community leadership – governance:

- What does the Bible say about structural evil (or social sin) and redemptive structures?
- What do all the passages we have examined instruct us about
  - international trade issues (prices, trade barriers, national sovereignty, foreign aid, debt, international monetary arrangements, etc.)?
  - consumption of non-renewable resources?
  - food consumption patterns?
- What do we do about unjust governance?
- What is it to God, if we are unjust managers?
- What is the antidote to the poison of evil structures?
- What about laws that, instead of empowering and protecting, tyrannise people?

God not only liberates us from the powers but God also liberates the powers themselves.

- What is the role of the prophet in challenging the system and the 'governors' who put the system in place?

[8] Giddens, 1025.

Caution

Note right at the start that this is not an exercise in using faith or scriptures to justify any particular political arrangement or ideology such as monarchy, capitalism or socialism. Scripture does not set out to prescribe political ideology – that is a human construct. Nonetheless scripture speaks clearly regarding principles, values and ethics that apply to and speak to any civic structure and institution in any age. We are not told what form of government is right or wrong, but the Bible does speak to the forms that exist about right and wrong.

A second important issue to consider is use of the term 'the kingdom of God'. We cannot avoid the term; it is clearly a concept taught by Jesus – repeatedly. The problem is that in many cases this reference is taken to mean something quite different from what Jesus intended it to mean. The problem underlines the fundamental problem of communication – 'What I heard is not what you said!' To many people, 'kingdom' language immediately conjures up images of political systems, and is often confused by their contexts of interactions between state and church. With Christ however, the kingdom of God is no longer a political entity (John 18:36).

This requires us to be careful about how we use 'kingdom' terminology. We need to engage at the level of meaning, not at a level of titles and handles. It takes more work for us to ensure that what we are really saying is, in fact, what is understood.

Recommended resources for looking at governance issues a bit further

Jesus and Politics: Confronting the Powers. Alan Storkey. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It. Jim Wallis. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2005).

Jubilee Manifesto: A Framework, Agenda and Strategy for Christian Social Reform. Edited by Michael Schluter & John Ashcroft. (Leicester, England: IVP, 2005).

Government Leaders' Job Description

The basis of authority is justice, not power

Psalms 72 and 82 spell out very clearly the role and responsibilities of the king. In a sense they describe the role of all government leaders. But the foundation upon which the king's authority is built is likewise clear. Scripture '…ultimately locates all authority, including political authority, in God. …All those who wield political authority do so on behalf of God and are accountable to God for the use they make of that authority.'[9]

Psalm 146 spells out performance criteria in a very striking way, based on what God will hold civic leaders accountable for.

Psalm 72, particularly verses 1–4, 12–14, 15–17
Psalm 82
Psalm 146
1 Kings 3:9
Jeremiah 22:13–17

Reflection

Just what is in the heart of the King of Kings, the Prince of all rulers? Psalm 146 lists things that are very close to the heart of God. What are those?

God shows a particular tenderness for those who, for some reason, are vulnerable. And God expects these sensitivities to be at the centre of every leader's heart.

Exercises

A. Using these passages and others you locate, draft a job description (JD) for a king/prime minister/president. Of course your JD can be generalised to apply to anyone in position of authority and providing civic leadership.

You could construct it in a traditional way:

1. job title
2. reports to
3. purpose and function of the role
4. roles and responsibilities

---

[9] Schluter and Ashcroft, 142.

5. personal qualities
6. qualifications
7. performance criteria.

B. How would you write a job description for yourself, based on these criteria for leadership?

Commentary

Monarchy is not very common these days, and where monarchies do exist they are mostly what are called 'titular heads', that is, in name only. But in ancient times, the king was the government. What held true for the monarchy in ancient and medieval political systems holds true for all modern civic leaders, whatever the system of government, even autocratic systems.

> 'Sooner or later, man has always had to decide whether he worships his own power or the power of God.'
>
> *Arnold J. Toynbee*

The passages listed are a wonderful and clear exposition of what is required of ancient and modern leaders.

In Psalm 72 we see

(1) the foundation of governance

(1–4) true justice outlined – attitude and performance

(5–7) the effect of good governance

(8–11) the extent of influence

(12–15) true justice developed

(16–17) the effect of good governance

(18–20) the glory – the ultimate outcome of good governance.

Poets gave voice to the hopes and aspirations of the people and, along with the prophets, sought to speak the mind of God to their society and the culture.

Psalm 82 is a prayer or petition for good governance and civic leadership, especially given that all rulers are 'children of the Most High', and ultimately are accountable to the One who 'holds judgement'. Of course there is much interesting discussion around the term 'You are gods…' (v. 6). Take that one up for private study, but don't let it divert you from the central theme of good and bad governance as God sees it. This psalm, though brief, makes it

very clear what kind of leadership is acceptable and unacceptable, and the consequences in each case.

Solomon too was concerned primarily about his ability to provide good and wise leadership. He knew he was accountable to the ultimate Judge and prayed for wisdom and insight.

We find other kings who are classic case studies of bad governance. What distinguishes between the good and the bad, from God's point of view?

Jeremiah spoke very clearly to Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, King of Judah. Jehoiakim was building himself a very nice palace, thank you very much – a big roomy house, with enormous upper rooms, this ancient marvel even had windows – a palace panelled with cedar wood and painted bright regal red.

But God had a question for Jehoiakim: 'Are you a king because you compete in cedar?' (Jeremiah 22:15), i.e. compete against other monarchs.

Jehoiakim's father, Josiah, was an effective leader. He was king not because of where he lived (which is what Jehoiakim seemed to prize) but because he was righteous and did justice. 'Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well.' (Jeremiah 22:15–16)

In contrast, Jehoiakim deposed his younger brother after three months to serve as a tyrant king and puppet, first to Egypt, then to Babylon and then (when the fortunes of war shifted back) to Egypt again. Through all of this he built his palace on the backs of slave labour. Jeremiah 22:17 gives a very clear picture of Jehoiakim's character. He was upset by the denouncements of the prophets Jeremiah and Uriah: he hunted down and murdered Uriah and frequently tried to silence Jeremiah. Such was the price the prophets paid for speaking the mind of God.

Just as in ancient communities, bad governance throughout history has triggered self-destructive consequences. Kings and other rulers, who rule for selfish intent, may reap immediate rewards but become infamous in history, and many suffer ignominious demises. Where do you observe this even in our day?

Decision-Makers and the Powerful

It's not just about kings and queens

Scripture's admonitions to ancient monarchs also apply to our politicians today, even if they are elected.

Many people today find politics remote, dry and boring. But politics is much more than dull or interminable games played by governments in parliaments and assemblies to achieve their ends. Sure, politics includes traditional governments, but it also includes social movements and networks determined to achieve particular objectives.

Isaiah 5:8–11, 18–23 **Amos 2:6–7**
Isaiah 10:1–4 **Psalm 94:20–23**
Amos 4:1–2 **Amos 5:10–11; 6:4–7; 8:4–6**

All our lives are touched in some way by what happens in the political sphere, locally and globally. All political life is about power: who holds it, how they get it, how they use it …and lose it.

In our day, most of us live in what we call nation-states. These nation-states usually have some form of government (parliament, cabinet, civil servants) ruling over a geographic territory backed by a legal system and capability to use military and/or police force, if necessary, to enforce policies. Three fundamentals of nation-states include sovereignty, citizenship and nationalism.

Governance stories we see in our faith texts apply just as much today as when they were written.

Power and authority

The next piece of the governance puzzle is to understand 'power'. The meaning of power is the subject of many books and writings. It is at the heart of theory for much sociological dialogue. Consequently there are many definitions of power. We can examine these later.

> 'The only real struggle in the history of the world ... is between the vested interest and social justice.'
>
> *Arnold J. Toynbee*

Power can be looked at from various angles: coercive power or power that has authority.

Then there are different kinds of authority: traditional authority (e.g. tribal leaders, institutional leadership) and what sociologists call charismatic authority, the kind of authority given to leaders because they help people to understand and manage their world.

Our faith stories in fact have much to say about power and authority. Here we will explore just a little of the responsibility that rests with decision-makers, social opinion leaders, and those with power and authority.

Passages listed in this section refer to people of influence within a community, whether decision-makers or public opinion formers. The questions below are intended to help us understand how the faith texts relate to our work and context today.

Reflection

1. Take each of the Amos and Isaiah passages and try to rephrase or paraphrase them into today's concepts. (For some help on how to write a paraphrase, see the brief section immediately below.) It helps to give each passage a two- or three-word title. For example, a title for Isaiah 5:8–11 might be 'Consumption and Accumulating Wealth'. It's worth thinking through these questions first to help you get a picture of what is going on in each passage.
2. Isaiah 5:18–23: What is the prophet saying to leaders in the community who shape opinion and set the social and political agenda?
3. Amos 2:6–7: Institutionalised oppression – what is wrong with what these oppressors were doing? List forms of oppression identified.
4. Amos 5:10 and 15: Refers to 'the gate'. What was the special place of the gate? Who would you normally find at the gate? What took place at the gate? What is the modern-day equivalent? Compare also Isaiah 29:21 – what was going on there?
5. Psalm 94 and Isaiah 10: Law-making to benefit whom? What was going wrong here? What are the consequences to the oppressors?
6. Amos 4: Who are the 'cows of Bashan'? What are they doing wrong? What are the consequences for them?
7. Amos 5, 6 and 8: The 'powers that be'? Who are these passages talking about? What are they doing wrong, and what will be the consequences? There's nothing wrong with their actual behaviour, so what is the problem? Where does worship sit within their order of priorities? How does God feel about that?

'How to' write a paraphrase

Paraphrasing is restating information from a text into your own words. Unlike a summary, a paraphrase does not condense information by just providing an overview. Instead a paraphrase should be of similar length to the original text, and should be in your own words yet reflect the text's intended meaning.

Commentary

Who are these 'powers' that make decisions for our societies, communities, businesses and our families? How do they work?

There has been a tendency to interpret the 'powers' referred to in scripture as inhuman spiritual powers, and in some ways that is still correct. But that is not all these 'powers' refer to. For a fuller and fair-handed exploration of who and what these 'powers' are, we recommend Walter Wink's *The Powers That Be*, particularly Chapter 1. One conclusion Wink draws is that, 'What people in the world of the Bible experienced as and called "principalities and powers" was in fact the actual spirituality at the centre of the political, economic, and cultural institutions of their day.'[10]

With leadership, however it is gained, comes extra responsibility. It seems that God is especially concerned about how leaders treat the vulnerable and so their behaviour is scrutinised. They are held accountable for their performance and care for the vulnerable.

This means that there is both a visible and invisible dimension to principalities and powers. It is misleading to assume that when we talk about 'powers' we are only referring to the invisible spirit world. In many ways a more accurate understanding is far more sinister and subtle.

In the Amos 2 and Isaiah 5 passages, a recurring theme involves consumption and accumulating wealth, and power gained by leaders at the cost of those they oppressed to get what they wanted.

Isaiah 5:18–23 refers to the opinion leaders. 'Woe to them…' because they ought to speak to and on behalf of the community. To gain their way, they abuse their power by trying to convince others that falsehood is true – they call evil good and good evil. These same

[10] Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (1998), 24.

civic and commercial leaders in Amos 2 abuse their position and privilege, and there is a consequence for their activities.

Amos 5 refers to 'The gate'. The gate is the place where judgements are made. Civic leaders sat at the gate to listen and judge. The gate was also a place where prophets would make pronouncements. It was an 'evil time' when governors abused their power and wealth. Of course, people also tried to corrupt those sitting in seats of power – doesn't that sound familiar? But part of the problem is that the powerful were also corruptible.

These issues also played out in the poetry and other literature of the time. In Psalm 94, we find tribunals of the powerful making civic decrees/laws to undermine justice, intentionally perverting the course of justice for their own gain. In Isaiah 10, lawmakers make laws to dehumanise the poor and needy and to enhance their own power and wealth. But they are warned that one day they will be held accountable.

The 'Cows of Bashan' Revisited (Amos 4)

It's hard to think of any stronger condemnation. This term is no compliment, even though the actual cows of Bashan were the most prized cattle in the area. Bashan is on the east side of the river Jordan and was one of the kingdoms conquered by Moses and the Israelites before entering the Promised Land. Bashan is referred to several times in the Old Testament. You could do some further research to understand what kind of area it is.

The area was well known for its prime grazing land, famously producing well-fed and fat herds and flocks. Bible students wiser than we are discuss whether this is an accusation solely against the women of Israel and Samaria as a gender-specific issue, or whether it is a more indirect reference to both genders behaving like spoiled wealthy oppressors, becoming fat off the backs of the poor. You do your own research and form your own opinion.

To paraphrase, what seems most important is that 'you were supposed to recognise that, as the wealthy in Samaria, it was your responsibility to protect the poor, the vulnerable and release the oppressed. Instead you have become the oppressors. And with the oppression you have become fat and lazy, demanding that others serve you.'

Consequences for these oppressors will be horrific.

Be very careful how you interpret this 'cows of Bashan' passage. It is not a passage railing against overweight people. Nor is it an indictment of those who 'drink'. It is not about how women treat their husbands or superiors.

The point of the passage is far more important than issues just mentioned. You will find that some commentators abuse principles of interpretation to make the passage say something not intended.

The point is that these 'cows' don't care about those in God's creation who are in need. All they can think about is their own selfish desire for luxury and pleasure. They have forsaken compassion and mercy, and choose to be oppressors instead, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

If these were women, they may not even have been directly involved in oppression. But demands they made on their husbands may have driven others to greater injustice.

They may also have used their influence to manipulate others for their own ends, whether male or female, or to assault the dignity of workers in their spheres.

It's their right, isn't it? No, it is their choice and there will be dire consequences.

Amos and the 'Powers that Be'

'The powers that be' is a phrase used in some cultures to refer to those in positions of authority who exercise their power wrongly but who cannot be challenged. In the book of Amos, these powers are seen to hate those who speak the truth, to denigrate and hate people of integrity. People of truth are a threat to wrongful power, dominance and profligacy. (Remember that governance is not just about 'government' but also includes powerful institutions including banks and financial institutions and other corporations.)

Who will go into exile? What were they doing wrong? All seemed good: They had wealth, so God must have been blessing them. But that is not how God saw those who wielded power and wealth.

A paraphrase of Amos 8:4–6 might start something like, 'When will our worship be over so we can get on and make money, cheat customers, mis-weigh our products…?'

Legislation and Law-Makers

Ancient advocacy: a guide for our time

> Doom to you who legislate evil, who make laws that make victims – Laws that make misery for the poor, that rob my destitute people of dignity, Exploiting defenceless widows, taking advantage of homeless children. What will you have to say on Judgement Day, when Doomsday arrives out of the blue? Who will you get to help you? What good will your money do you?' (Isaiah 10:1–3, *The Message*).

Here we have a significant governance mechanism – legislators and a system intended to bring about justice and good governance. When we look at scripture, we see that when this system is turned to benefit legislators and enforcers, it destroys the very people it is meant

to protect. Again, we find that God feels very deeply about justice, and more particularly about injustice.

Understanding God's heart and mind for legislation and law-making is a key foundation to good advocacy. Applying the same eternal heart and mind of God in our time is the primary guide to prophetic ministry through what we now call advocacy. We work with our Creator towards law-making that sets people and their societies free and empowers all with responsibility to take charge of our own destinies and protect the vulnerable.

We want to take care how we use our faith texts in relation to law-making and legislation. Nowhere does scripture lay out what global standards for specific legislation should be, on any subject – business, education, immigration, sexual relations and so on. But there is clear guidance as to what God thinks about the fundamentals that would influence any legislation. We find guidance in relation to such things as who benefits, what is just, greater equity, care for typically vulnerable community members and preventing exploitation.

Other important dimensions to legislation and law-making are, of course, justice, punishment and reward. In our own time, we tend to use the term 'justice' when we refer to 'criminal justice'. But there is much more to justice than that. God is as much interested in the principle of what we call 'transformative' justice or 'redemptive' justice. Others may call it 'restorative justice'. The Bible speaks much more about a justice that redeems and builds the soul and the community.

Exodus 20:1–17
Isaiah 10:1–3; 1:21–23; 3:13–15; 29:21; 59:4 and13–15
Psalm 94:20

Reflection

Let's start with questions to consider when thinking about law and legislation from a faith perspective:

1. How does a just God relate to human legislation and law?
2. What is the purpose of law? Is it for control or for justice? In what ways is 'law' intended to benefit society?
3. What was the purpose of the Ten Commandments?
4. What does justice mean? What is the real focus of justice – punishment or transformation?
5. What does scripture say about due process?

Let's take a look at some faith references that start to give us a guide for thinking about and planning advocacy.

Of course, organisations such as World Vision have advocacy specialists, and formal advocacy work is managed under their direction and wise counsel. That does not diminish the fact that in some way, we all have a ministry of advocacy. There is a difference between conversations you have at a dinner party and a formal statement representing World Vision's position on an issue or situation.

You could research key words to see what else faith texts say about law and law-making – e.g. laws, decrees, ordinances, statutes, falsehood, or others depending on the version or translation you use.

From your readings listed above, consider the following questions:

1. Exodus 20:1–17

   What was being introduced in this story? …Yes, obvious answer. But why did the people need these laws or statutes? Look for clues in the context.

2. Isaiah 10:1–3
   - Read the passage through a couple of times.
   - Refer to the paraphrase you wrote in the last lesson, or write one now, to place the text into your world. Then consider the following questions: In what ways were the laws 'evil'? Who is affected by evil laws? What modern examples can you identify? What is the consequence for oppressive law-makers?

3. Psalm 94:20

   Read surrounding passages to get the context. What is the key message here? What does it teach us about international relations, alliances, partnerships and law-making? Note: the literal translation of the phrase 'the life of the righteous' in verse 21 is in fact 'soul'. If you use the word 'soul', how does that shape key messages?

4. Many other passages point to injustice based on legislation, or corruption of legislative officials and law-makers. Here are some:
   - Isaiah 29:21
   - Isaiah 1:21–23
   - Isaiah 3:13–15
   - Isaiah 59:4 and 13–15

   What is the injustice in these passages? How does God feel about it? What will God do about it? How do your conclusions guide your thinking about the ministry of advocacy?

Commentary

Social, private, religious and corporate structures can destroy or set free the people they were designed to serve.

There is tremendous value in spending some time thinking about what sociologists call 'redemptive and evil structures'. To some degree, the meaning of these two terms is self-evident.

Redemptive structures

The idea of 'redemption' is two-fold: first, to come back into a right and wholesome relationship, and second, to be set free. Whilst the term 'redemptive structures' is not one you will find in our faith texts, it is nonetheless very much alive in faith. You see this consistently in the way Jesus related to different communities. Even amongst an oppressive group, such as the religious leaders and teachers of the time, Jesus embraced those of genuine faith. And the open structure of the community of his disciples welcomed, healed, set free and spoke truth to all who wished to search for truth.

Much of what we know about the early church comes from secular letters and documents detailing with awe the love and generosity characterising these early church fellowships.

The community of disciples, during Jesus' earthly ministry and also in the early church, was known for its welcoming and open-hearted structure. The earliest fellowships of Christian believers demonstrated such unity of heart and structure that people sought Jesus and his followers from distant parts of the world – so much so that much of what we know about the early church comes from secular letters and documents detailing with awe the love and generosity characterising these fellowships. The loving and redemptive community became the loudest testimony of all to the redemptive power of faith in Christ.

Redemptive structures are those that put people together in ways that strengthen and set free those who are associated with them – whether at work, at home, in our local communities or, most especially, in our faith communities. Look at the way the early church was to be structured in the Acts of the Apostles, particularly the end of chapter 2. Everything – everything – about the structure was to be redemptive in nature.

So, how is your team or department looking?

Read on for some questions that will help you think about how redemptive your team/department's structure is.

Evil structures

The converse idea is what sociologists call 'evil structures'. In essence, evil structures are everything that redemptive structures are not. Evil structures include social, private, corporate and even religious structures, systems and instruments that divide people, that set us up against each other, or that are designed to empower only the few who see themselves as powerful. Evil structures of the religious institutions in his day angered Jesus to the point he physically broke up the temple marketplace that exploited the vulnerable and made a mockery of Passover, using the celebration of release from slavery to instead enslave and exploit. The very temple that God intended to be a blessing as '…a house of prayer for all the nations…' (Mark 11:17) had become host to soul-destroying perpetrators of evil.

The very structures that God intended to empower all people and to set them free had become playgrounds for self-centred leaders, to ensure they became and stayed rich and powerful.

So, how does your team or department look?

- Are members easily heard?
- Is your team put together in a way that brings out the best in each member?
- Are team meetings at a place and time to allow open and transparent communication?
- Do all members share and celebrate each other's and overall team achievements?
- What is the level of trust or distrust in the team and between the team and its leader(s)?
- Are the team and its members holding themselves accountable for performance and outcomes?

We could apply the same principles and similar questions to enabling partners in communities. Are we setting up communities to be more in charge of their own destinies, or are we setting them up for dependency? Are the structures we help to construct 'redemptive structures'?

Conclusion

So you see we have come full circle, back to the beginning questions in this module:

How do we shape our ministry, in light of our world's threats and promises, so that we are participating in and contributing to 'redemptive structures'? What does all of this mean for the children and communities with whom we partner?

What kind of society does God dream of for children and communities? How will these communities interact with the future, and what kind of society do they want to build?

If you continue asking yourself these kinds of questions, you are indeed a sociologist and a humanitarian. In the special 'Digging deeper' section that follows, entitled 'More to consider', you are invited to continue your explorations of faith-based insights that can be applied pragmatically to your work and calling as a humanitarian.

Digging deeper: More to consider

We want to encourage you to take your study of God's heart and mind for society further. As mentioned in the introduction, we cannot hope here to consider all the foundations of faith relating to all aspects of sociology.

We do hope we have provoked you into thinking about everyday life and ministry from a deeper faith perspective. It's up to you now to build and strengthen those foundations.

Here is a list of topics for further consideration (the same noted at the beginning of this module):

- God's dream for human society
- life-course
- family, marriage and relationships
- sexuality and gender
- work
- economic relations
- power and authority
- education
- property and wealth
- race and ethnicity
- governance and politics
- crime and deviance
- cities and urban life
- communications, media and social networks
- community organisation
- environment
- religion and faith
- nations
- conflict, war and terrorism.

Following is a brief exposition of 'property and wealth' as a sample way of tackling these topics.

Digging deeper: A quick sample – prosperity, property and wealth

'In the house of the righteous there is much treasure…'. Proverbs 15:6

'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God'. Luke 6:20

Here is a quick sample of how you could approach your own study.

A. Start with all the questions you have about the topic. Do some online research or other reading to trigger more questions if you like.

B. List related concepts and wor ds. (You might want to try 'mind mapping' here, with the main topic in the centre and your related words around it with other thoughts/ references/questions branching off from it. See Appendix 2 for more detailed instructions.)

C. Then launch your research. Use a reliable, contemporary and trusted translation of your faith texts. If you don't have a concordance at hand, you can do a word search online. Be careful with online sources though. It is better to invest in a modern translation and concordance. Regarding English translations, for accuracy we would recommend any of the following translations of the Bible:

   1. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
   2. The New American Standard Bible (NASB)
   3. Today's New International Version (TNIV)

D. When studying faith texts be 'exegetical' rather than 'eisegetical' – extract the real meaning of the text rather than reading your own meaning into the text – before you apply it to your discipleship and professional life.

E. Always conclude your studies with thinking deeply about how to answer the following questions:

   1. How does this apply to me as a disciple?
   2. What difference will this make to me as a professional?
   3. What action will I take today?

Digging deeper: A quick sample – prosperity, property and wealth (continued)

Sample opening questions and topics for study

- Is it okay to have possessions and property and be wealthy?
- What is the biblical attitude towards property and wealth?
- Biblical rights to property are subordinate to the obligation to take care of 'weaker' members of society.
- Human rights are more important than property rights. Rights of individuals, corporations and nations are subordinate to the right of all people to an honourable livelihood.
- To God, a slave is a person not a piece of property.
- Possessions are dangerous but not innately evil. Poverty and suffering are not inherently good. Never romanticise poverty. The Bible doesn't.
- God created all things. How do we celebrate the goodness of created things but not the objects themselves?
- What things will you take with you into eternity?
- Is prosperity an automatic reward for righteousness?
- Prosperity without justice signifies disobedience.
- What is the relationship between prosperity and wealth?
- What is prosperity?
- Is prosperity maybe what God wants for all people… and not wealth?
- (Add more of your own questions.)

Related terms

- wealth
- property
- land
- prosperity
- wages
- livelihood
- slave
- servant
- possessions
- equity
- (Add more of your own terms.)

Digging deeper: A quick sample - prosperity, property and wealth (continued)

Some Bible references to start with

- Leviticus 25:25–28
- Exodus 21:20, 26, 27
- Deuteronomy 23:15–16
- Psalm 24:1
- Job 41:11
- Leviticus 25:23
- Deuteronomy 10:14
- Luke 12:22–31
- 2 Corinthians 9:8–11
- Matthew 6:24; 13:44–46
- Luke 12:33–34
- Deuteronomy 8:11–17
- James 4:1–2
- Luke 12:16–21
- 1 Timothy 4:1–4
- Deuteronomy 28:2, 11, 15–68; 7:12–15; 6:14–15; 8:11–20
- Proverbs 31:14, 16, 18, 20, 30
- Psalm 112:1, 3–5, 9
- Find more of your own references.

Module 4

THE HUMANITARIAN WORKER'S VOICE

Introduction

What really communicates? When we communicate, is what we think we communicated what is, in fact, received? And even if what we communicate is received accurately, is that any guarantee we'll receive the response we sought to provoke?

Even a master communicator like Jesus could not guarantee the desired response, because he made space for freedoms and choices that include the freedom to respond badly.

John the Baptist and Jesus had very different lifestyles and communicating styles, and consequently appealed to different audiences. Jesus, however, was frustrated because some groups of people refused to respond to either his or John's approach (Matthew 11:15–19).

'For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon;" the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds' (Matthew 11:18–19).

Effective communication is no guarantee that a communicator's message will be accepted. Receivers have their own will, history and experience, and of course they have the right to choose whether they accept the message. Effective communication will bring people to better understanding but will not guarantee acceptance – this is a fundamental principle to grasp.

Jesus was no stranger to this phenomenon.

> Then someone came to [Jesus] and said, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?' And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said to him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these; what do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (Matthew 19:16–22)

The message is what it is!

Our responsibility is to make sure that the truth is understood for what it is. What the receiver chooses to do with Jesus' words is entirely her or his choice.

In this module we look at the communication process and how faith is heard, understood or misunderstood, accepted or not accepted. The word *voice* in this context refers to all

communications of every form, spoken or unspoken – what we sometimes refer to in World Vision as 'witness'.

We will explore a number of biblical passages that help us to examine our own motives, assumptions and methods and to experiment with old and new approaches to having an effective voice of faith.

Opening Exercise

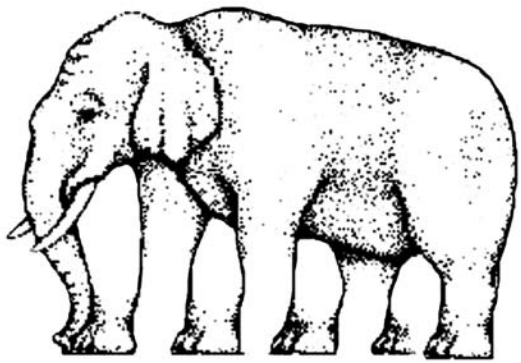
Most people interpret faith texts from within their own culture and impose on those texts the meanings of their own cultural language. Have you ever wondered why there are so many versions of the Bible in some languages? Why there are so many interpretations of the same passages and ideas from the Bible? These are whole-hearted attempts to reinterpret faith texts in the culture and context of the time and place they were published. With all of these translations and paraphrases, does the truth change? No! But our understanding and perspective of the truth does. Our problem is that we tend to think that the way we see the text is the truth. Therein lies the problem.

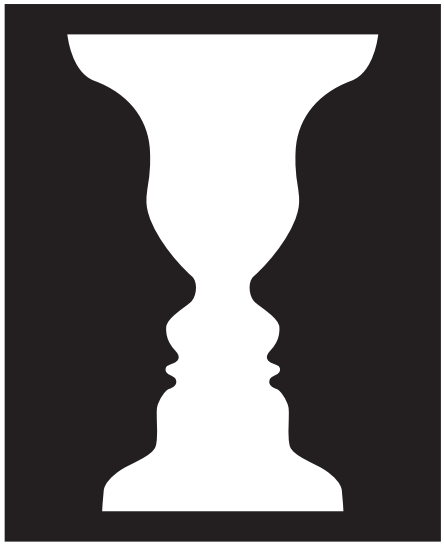
To understand the influence of culture and language on our faith, we must first consider perception and meaning.

Perception

Perhaps you've seen or used these classic perception tests …the ones that ask, 'What do you see in this picture?'

How many legs does this elephant have?





Is this a picture of a vase or of two faces?

Do you see a young woman looking over her shoulder or an older lady looking down?

To all of us, perception is reality. But this creates problems for us. We draw conclusions about each other and make judgements based on our perceptions, as if what I see of you is all there is to you. The way we see things is not all there is to see.

This is a fundamental problem even in very basic forms of communication. We all must challenge our perceptions to see beyond what we think our reality is and to understand that there is more to the truth than merely what we see. The same holds true when we study faith texts. There is much more to the truth than what we see immediately in printed words on a page.

Some of us are members of faith communities in which we have chosen to interpret our faith as articulated by our scholars and community leaders. Others of us are members of faith communities where we are encouraged to research and search for truth in our faith texts and draw our own conclusions. In whatever way truth comes to us, perception drives how we personalise our faith.

How Communication Works …or Doesn't

We tend to think that what we see is all there is to see.
What I say is not what is heard.

Where does our perception come from? Where does meaning come from?

Perception typically comes from or is influenced by our history, our families, our communities, our media, our education… and so on. Over time, we collect information and interpretations of events and learning, and we develop meaning from them. Certain words and concepts take on meanings to us that are almost certainly very different from meanings other people embraced regarding the very same words and concepts. Often this leads to conflict. Sophisticated and sometimes aggressive arguments result. Sometimes anger and hatred erupt.

Perception, interpretation and meaning attached to words, stories, ideas and teachings are key struggles of faith text translators when they try to capture original meanings. Meanings and connotations are dynamic, changing from generation to generation and culture to culture. Like translators, you and I want to understand as closely as possible what was originally meant when a story was told, or a public document recorded. And then we want to understand the ways in which the meaning applies to our own life and the context in which we live today.

Acts 14: 8–15a and v. 18

Reflection

Think about this story in terms of communication.

1. Review all the communication interactions in the story. For example, see in v. 8 the crippled man with all his experience of rejection and loss of hope. In v. 9, he is listening intently. In v. 10, Paul is speaking. In v. 11, … etc.
2. What was said? And what was heard? Were they the same message?
3. Who were the receptors in this communication?
4. What perceptions and meanings did the receptors place on Paul and Barnabas' message?
5. Where did those meanings come from?

Meaning

We cannot examine here all the theories about 'meaning' in communications, but we should look at one of the most common. This passage from D.K. Berlo can help us understand how meanings develop and drive effective or ineffective communication.

> Meanings are in people, [they are] covert responses contained within the human organism. Meanings . . . are personal, our own property. We learn meanings, we add to them, we distort them, forget them, and change them. We cannot find them. They are in us, not in messages. Fortunately, we usually find other people who have meanings that are similar to ours. To the extent that people have similar meanings, they can communicate. If they have no similarities in meaning between them, they cannot communicate.
>
> If meanings are found in words, it would follow that any person could understand any language, any code. If the meaning is in the word, we should be able to analyse the word and find the meaning. Yet obviously we cannot. Some people have meanings for some codes, others do not.
>
> The elements and structure of a language do not themselves have meaning. They are only symbols, sets of symbols, cues that cause us to bring our own meanings into play, to think about them, to rearrange them, etc. Communication does not consist of the transmission of meaning. Meanings are not transmittable, not transferable. Only messages are transmittable, and meanings are not in the message, they are in the message-users.[1]

This is very complex to think through, but essentially it states that meaning is the result of interpretation. Interpretation is determined by what we bring to a situation or interaction, and what we take away from it. What an event means to someone comes from the person's history, frameworks, hopes and dreams. And each of us attaches our own meanings independently from other people.

Here is the fundamental challenge of communication. Our 'worlds of meaning' determine how we use and understand our faith texts; they determine what others hear us to be saying; and how we interpret what others are saying to us. The symbols we use to communicate are unreliable transmitters. Within our own family and familial community, symbols we use may or may not be well understood and shared, but when we step outside of that circle, we tend to face a fundamental problem.

---

[1] D.K. Berlo. *The Process of Communication* (1960), 175.

Digging deeper

The cultural observer – finding shared meaning in cross-cultural communication

What are we looking at when we try to understand others' symbols of meaning?

What are some visible forms of culture and meaning? Physical examples include such things as houses, trees, dogs, furniture, transport and persons. Some are non-physical, per se, but just as observable – weddings, religious ceremonies and rituals, families, words and speaking, gestures, customs related to dress or eating and sleeping. These are building blocks of culture and meaning. Such building blocks are invested with meanings and interpreted by others according to their own learned conventions.

Take an intense interest in the physical and non-physical symbols used by other people, and empathise with the meaning they give to them. Then locate the common ground of meaning rather than make assumptions about the meaning of any symbol.

Think about this

Think of examples where words, even within your language, carry very different meanings. In English, 'I'm crook!' in Australia means 'I am really unwell'. The statement 'She is a homely girl' will get a very different reaction in North America (where it means ugly or unattractive) to what you will get in England (where it means good at caring for the home).

Much more could be explored, but that is not our purpose here. We are simply laying a foundation on which we can build an approach for having an effective voice as humanitarians. This has many implications for us in thinking about humanitarians and aid workers giving voice to their faith.

- Learning to understand someone from another group requires 'standing in their shoes'. This means we must learn the conventions of what meanings they attach to symbols (words, stories, pictures, mythologies, etc.) that they use.
- We carry within us our own culture and cultural habits. Whether we are aware of this or not, it is a critical influence on how others interpret our own symbols of meaning. As a communicator, it is important for us to recognise that our symbols have meaning to ourselves and that to communicate effectively, we must adapt to the intended receptors' symbols of meaning.

- This also involves attitude. What is the communicator's attitude to the receptor? What is the receptor's attitude to the communicator? What is the attitude of either and both to the words, the setting, the language, the body language and the style of the other?
- Especially when we are working in cross-cultural contexts, we need to be something of a linguist, an anthropologist and a sociologist, all rolled into one, with a few other '–ists' as well. And that's what makes having an effective voice such a fascinating endeavour in our work.
- Always remember that meanings lie beyond obvious cultural or linguistic forms (the visible symbols – physical or non-physical). Meanings come not from the thing itself but from what it has been invested with by a communicator or receptor. For example, a table knife is generally interpreted as an eating tool. If it is being used to pry open a bottle or is being used as a weapon, interpretation will be quite different. Whoever owns the knife will attach particular positive or negative meanings to it that may be very different from an observer's sense of the thing.
- Symbols and meaning swing both ways. One symbol or form may have various meanings, all dependent on context – the knife, for example. Conversely, several symbols may point to one meaning – different forms of music will bring different listeners to a similar point of excitement, ecstasy or even worship. The first requires us to work laterally, being sensitive to a range of interpretations and adjusting our communications accordingly. The second allows us to use a range of symbols to create and agree on meaning.

Exercises

Read the passage in 1 Corinthians 9:20–22.

> To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some.

A. What are some fundamentals of effective communication you see in the apostle Paul's explanation of his approach?

B. What principle(s) of culture, symbol, language and meaning do you see in his approach?

C. How does this guide us as humanitarians and development workers?

Think about this

If the same meaning is to be understood by both communicator and receptor, the originating communicator will almost certainly need to change the forms and symbols used. If forms or symbols used effectively with one group are used in a different context, group or with different individuals, then it is probable that received meanings will differ. A traditional older group of people listening to a hip-hop or rock version of traditional or even religious music is likely to receive a very different – or at least more complicated – message than a younger group. Why?

Commentary

Spoken and written languages are the most important symbol systems in human experience. All communication, in whatever form, proceeds via symbols. Interpretation of those symbols is the crucial element in communicating effectively. The problem we face is that there are no symbols which can be universally interpreted as conveying exactly the same meaning.

For example, what are the chances of you not knowing what the symbol is to the right of this paragraph?

This is a well-recognised logo, but it signifies nothing in itself. It has meaning only because it symbolises something other than itself. Most people worldwide would identify it as symbolising a certain German car manufacturer. However, the 'weight' or 'baggage' of this meaning would be different for almost every person you talk to, because they carry within themselves a bundle of associations, positive or negative. The same thing happens with words, in all languages, whether spoken, written or communicated by sign language.

Language is a system of codes agreed to by any community, for as long as the codes provide a sense of shared meaning. Many of us are fluent in multiple language systems. Information and communications technology specialists have a language of their own that is important for their technical operations.

The vocabulary we develop is symbolic, in that each word is a code for something other than itself. The word 'and' does not mean anything in and of itself, but symbolises that two or more ideas are in some way being connected.

One of the first tasks given to human beings by God was to name all living things on the earth. Can you imagine what it would be like to communicate without some kind of code – we would go crazy. But careless use of codes in language makes us go crazy too. Each

word or code symbolises a meaning, and when those meanings are not shared we end up with misunderstandings and worse, sometimes even leading to conflict and violence.

Language is a remarkable thing. Imagine communicating without it. People with impaired vision, speech and hearing nevertheless learn and share significant language codes. We must recognise, however, that what we want to communicate is often severely limited by the language codes and culture in which we have grown up.

The famous storyteller Lewis Carroll, in his book, *Through the Looking Glass*, illustrates just how we use and abuse words to serve different purposes. The extract below gives a glimpse into Alice's world of understanding, meaning and puzzlement.

From ***Through the Looking Glass*** by Lewis Carroll

> 'As I was saying', [said Humpty Dumpty] that seems to be done right – though I haven't time to look it over thoroughly just now – and that shows that there are three hundred and sixty-four days when you might get un-birthday presents – '
>
> 'Certainly,' said Alice.
>
> 'And only one for birthday presents, you know. There's glory for you!'
>
> 'I don't know what you mean by "glory",' Alice said.
>
> Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!"'
>
> 'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument",' Alice objected.
>
> 'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.'
>
> 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'
>
> 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master – that's all.'
>
> Alice was too much puzzled to say anything; so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. 'They've a temper, some of them – particularly verbs: they're the proudest – adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs – however, I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what I say!'
>
> 'Would you tell me please,' said Alice, 'what that means?'
>
> 'Now you talk like a reasonable child,' said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased. 'I meant by "impenetrability" that we've had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you'd mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don't mean to stop here all the rest of your life.'
>
> 'That's a great deal to make one word mean,' Alice said in a thoughtful tone.
>
> 'When I make a word do a lot of work like that,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'I always pay it extra.'
>
> 'Oh!' said Alice. She was too much puzzled to make any other remark.

For the professional

1. For humanitarian workers, what is the alternative to being misunderstood when it comes to our faith? It seems that for many of us the alternative is to say nothing and to keep our faith a private affair. But for some of our partners and communities, that is insincere and worse than being honest. Is silence our only alternative? What other alternatives are available to us?
2. The language I use to convey to others what has meaning to me is critical to successful communication. Think about the faith terms below and find different ways to convey meaning to someone who may misunderstand them.
   a. Start by identifying ways the terms could be or are often misunderstood. To put it more positively, what might be the perception in the mind of a receptor from a non-faith or other faith context, when they hear these terms?
   b. Then write down an alternative term, concept or analogy.

Example: 'bloodshed'. Is this a shed-full of blood? No? How might I better explain this when talking about Jesus' blood when he was whipped and nailed to the cross?

redeem	
Christianity	
church	
the cross	
witness	
kingdom	
being born again	
incarnation	
eternal life	
evil	
God	

Culture, Language and Faith

Everything we say, or hear, has a 'context'

In this section, we take a closer look at how culture and language influence faith. Communication specialists call this 'context'. Humanitarian workers often use the term 'contextualising the message'.

'Human beings only exist as members of communities which share a common language, customs, ways of ordering economic and social life, ways of understanding and coping with their world.'[2]

Whatever we have to 'say', in whatever media we use, we are addressing our message to human beings. For our message to be understood and sensible to a receptor, it must be given in the receptor's language, with symbols that have meaning to the receptor.

The flipside of this principle is the same when we ourselves are receptors. Our own context – culture and language – deeply influences the way we engage with faith texts. Our own faith is shaped by cultural and linguistic lenses we wear from birth. You are probably familiar with the idea of each person holding a particular 'worldview'. The way we view the world is very much shaped by our culture and our language. Based on that cultural context, we make all sorts of assumptions about meanings and values that were not originally intended. Even within a Christian heritage, being born and raised in a particular Christian church denomination creates a different cultural lens from the view of people raised in another Christian tradition.

For example, what did Jesus look like? Why was no sculpted image left behind by Jesus or his disciples? Where did the images of Jesus in art around the globe come from? (Look around within your own context for images of Jesus or do an image search on the internet.) Whether we like it or not, something in our own cultural heritage causes us to paint an image of Jesus in our imagination.

When we communicate our faith in words or pictures, we face a fundamental challenge. Looking at these pictures of Jesus, they tell us more about the artists and their communities than they tell us about Jesus. (Of course, anyone who studies art understands that any given painting or work tells more about the artist than about the subject.) When you look at the long history of Christian art, you can see in depictions of Jesus a kind of self-portrait of an era. In the Byzantine age, Jesus was often depicted as the supreme emperor of the cosmos. In medieval times, Jesus was seen as a figure on a cross steeped in pain and suffering – the

---

[2] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989) 141.

primary focus of that age. The Anglo-Saxon Protestant era produced a long-haired, blond, blue-eyed, handsome adonis. And in the mid-20th century there were Che Guevara-figures of a Liberator Jesus. Which one really is Jesus?

Reflection

Read the passage below from Lesslie Newbigin and then consider the questions following it.

> We must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture. The simplest verbal statement of the gospel, "Jesus is Lord", depends for its meaning on the content which that culture gives to the word "Lord". What kind of thing is "lordship" in the culture in question? The gospel always comes as the testimony of a community which, if it is faithful, is trying to live out the meaning of the gospel in a certain style of life, certain ways of holding property, of maintaining law and order, of carrying on production and consumption, and so on. Every interpretation of the gospel is embodied in some cultural form. The missionary does not come with the pure gospel and then adapt it to the culture where she serves: she comes with a gospel which is already embodied in the culture by which the missionary was formed. And this is so from the very beginning. The Bible is a book which is very obviously in a specific cultural setting. Its language is Hebrew and Greek, not Chinese or Sanskrit. All the events it records, all the teachings it embodies, are shaped by specific human cultures. And, of course, it could not possibly be otherwise. Something which is not expressible in any human language, which is not embodied in any human way of living, which is not located in any specific time or place, can have no impact on human affairs.[3]

What do you think?

1. Summarise the point Newbigin is making here.
2. In what ways might the 'gospel', or central truths of your faith that you have encountered, not be 'pure'?
3. What does the concept of 'lordship' mean to you? What might it mean to the community you are working with now?
4. What about terms like 'father' and 'sovereign'?
5. Write down ways in which your upbringing or faith community context has shaped the way you see and describe your faith, whether your society is largely faith based or secular or otherwise.

---

[3] Newbigin, 144.

Sender

Whatever we do or don't want to say about our faith comes with our own cargo of experience, worldview, culture, etc. The one who is intending to communicate has her or his own set of meanings.

Receptor

The receiver has his or her own cargo of experience from cultural, family, education and ethnic history which gives filters of meaning, even many from within the same traditions.

6. How does this passage from Newbigin help you in thinking about your voice, what you have to say, and how you would say it to whom? Think about the community you are working with at this time as an example.

Commentary

The issue is not just about how we communicate cross-culturally or inter-racially. This is in fact our challenge with every communication of faith, whether with our neighbour or with someone on the other side of the world.

The author of this series once worked with a young woman as a youth worker amongst street people, people who were outside the reach of any church or Christian community or upbringing. Fay (not her real name) came into the team as an enthusiastic young believer, as a result of the long-term support and friendship of some members of the team. She was very keen, very committed, very enthusiastic, very skilled. When the team met together, all were

quite comfortable praying extemporaneously (spontaneously and freely as they felt the spirit leading). After some months, Fay also started to pray out loud in the group in this manner.

However, Fay had a problem with addressing God as 'Father'. That was fine with the group and there was no pressure to do so. But it was something she wanted to do. It took a couple of years before she spontaneously addressed God as 'Father'. Why do you think she had such a struggle to do something she so much wanted to do freely?

As the team got to know Fay and as she became more relaxed and trusting, Fay explained to the leadership that as a small child and in her early teen years she had been badly abused by her father. This traumatic experience etched deep scars into every part of her life. Through patience and love, the team provided a safe environment where she was able to relate to men with trust and eventually to get to a point where she could speak to God as 'Father' with affection. Perhaps more of our colleagues and acquaintances than we realise have had related experiences. But whatever our culture, upbringing, worldview or ethnic contexts, we all carry different cargoes of meaning, especially regarding issues of faith.

So, the filters of communication exist on both sides of the equation.

We often think that the way we see and experience our faith is the pure and unadulterated faith, as if that is all there is and that it is 'the gospel truth'.

Exercises

Think about the common faith symbols, teachings and practices listed below, then identify how you think different faith communities would encounter those symbols, and what each might mean to them. Think in terms of how familiar people are with them, how and in what context they experience them, how these symbols or objects are handled, how people are trained to understand and use them, the different attitudes and beliefs people have about them across different faiths as well as amongst different groups within the same religion, etc.

Include discussion of as many faith communities as possible, based on your local context and experiences in working with different cultures: Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, etc. (You probably won't have enough space to fully develop your thinking here, so perhaps make some brief notes here that you can expand on later in your journal or notebook.)

Faith texts – Bible/Torah/ Qur'an/Guru Granth Sahib, etc.	
Styles of prayer and worship	
Religious pictures, icons or statues	
Use of candles/lamps, incense, prayer beads	
The death of Jesus on the cross	
Death in general	
Rites of passage (such as at birth, adulthood, marriage)	
Food, particularly bread and wine	
Suffering	

Models of Communication

Communication is deeply rooted in God's character, and God breathed that character into us.

Let's take this communication thing to the next level. Let's make it more practical and more biblical.

Our starting point is that God is a God who communicates. God as Trinity communicates amongst the persons of the Godhead – 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness…' (Genesis 1:26). We then see that once humankind is originated, God communicates regularly and in many forms with men and women all over the world through all ages.

Johannes Henrici reminds us that 'Communication is deeply rooted in God's nature, and it is this nature he imparted to humanity when he created us in his own image.'[4] Communication is so much a part of God's nature that it was not enough to be managing humankind by remote control, with interventions on planet Earth when necessary. Rather, God chose to come and live amongst us – what we call the 'incarnation'. This was the ultimate act of communication, but more about that later. God's communicative and relational nature is also reflected in the deepest of human emotions such as love and empathy.

We find, throughout our faith texts, stories of God seeking dialogue with humankind and humankind seeking dialogue with God. Indeed, our sacred scriptures themselves are coded texts of communication of what we believe to be God's heart and mind for creation. So how does God express meaning to an intelligent yet globally diverse audience?

Is the Bible all there is to God and all that God has to say? Consider your answer carefully.

If we say yes, we immediately deny any additional revelation, place a box around God and run the risk of making God fit our image.

If we say no, we have to struggle to distinguish what is and what isn't a communication of God.

Can you see a way forward? The Bible as we know it claims it is sufficient. It may not be all there is to know about God (the heavens declare his glory, and its revelations leave us without excuse), but it is sufficient.

A word of caution here: we run a high risk of oversimplifying the issue simply because we do not have the space here to do a careful or thorough exposition of God's communication with humankind. We cannot answer the question 'What did God really mean?' for every example of scripture and history.

Consider this:

From reading the Bible as lovers of God's word and studying as thorough and curious students, we can find enough to point us to the meanings that God chooses to communicate with us. And we discover on the journey that what God's communication meant to us 20 years ago is different from what it will mean to us in another 10 years. Indeed, it must do or else our spirit stagnates.

Genesis 1
Hebrews 1:1–2
Luke 19:40

---

[4] J. Henrici. 'Towards an Anthropological Philosophy of Communication' (1983), 1.

Reflection

Below is an extensive list of scriptures. Of course, we don't expect you to cover all these verses in one sitting. Look quickly at as many references as you can, and write a word or phrase for each set of references that describes the different ways God has used to communicate something of God's heart and mind to humankind over different eras.

Some passages are bundled so you can scan. Study these references more deeply over time. Of course, there are more ways God chooses to communicate than show up on this list. As additional references are brought to your attention, note them as well.

1	**Genesis 32:22–32** **Luke 1:13–20; 26–38** **Luke 2:10–14** **Acts 8:26–40** **Hebrews 1:14**	
2	**Exodus 19:19** **1 Kings 19:12** **Acts 10:13** **Isaiah 30:21** **Matthew 17:5**	
3	**Exodus 3:2**	
4	**Jonah 2**	
5	**Psalm 19:1** **Romans 1:20**	
6	**Genesis 28:10–22** **37:5–10**	
7	**Daniel 5:5–9**	
8	**1 Corinthians 10:11**	
9	**John 15:26; 16:13** **Acts 10:19; 16:6** **Romans 8:4; 15:16** **Revelation 3:6**	
10	**John 1:1–2, 14, 18** **Colossians 1:15, 19**	
11	**Nehemiah 1**	

12	Nehemiah 10:34 Acts 1:26	
13	Exodus 28:30	
14	2 Kings 5:3	
15	Luke 6:12	
16	Acts 2:14–40	
17	Jeremiah 19:1–12 Hosea 3	
18	The Prophets 2 Peter 1:21	
19	Genesis 9:12–17	
20	2 Kings 22:8–13 Nehemiah 7:73–8:18 John 5:39 2 Timothy 3:16–17 Hebrews 4:12	
21	John 10:38	
22	Acts 2:4–12	
23	1 Samuel 12:1–4 Jesus' parables	
24	Isaiah 6:6–7 Jeremiah 18:1–6	
25	Exodus 31:18 Deuteronomy 10:4	
26	Numbers 22:21–35	
27	Exodus 33:21–23; 34:5–6 Genesis 28:12–17; 32:22–32 Isaiah 6:1–3 Ezekiel 1:26–28 Daniel 3:25; 10:5–6 Revelation 1:12–16	

Exercises

If you have identified a range of ways in which God communicates, reflect on these questions:

A. What overall conclusions do you draw from these passages?

B. What do these passages teach us about God? How important is communication to God?

C. Why do you think God chose to use a particular medium/channel with particular audiences?

D. In what ways was the medium/channel part of the message?

E. What did God do to ensure that the meaning was clear and understood?

F. What other communication models or encounters can you think of or find in these texts?

Commentary

God can use any method and any medium to communicate. In Luke 19:40, Jesus goes so far as to say, 'I tell you, if these [the disciples] were silent, the stones would shout out.' One way or another, God finds a way to communicate, if we want to listen. This is the ultimate in multimedia communication! God is a personal and relational God and at heart is a communicator, whether we bother to listen or not. When we read scripture, we enter that important communication, and responsibility rests on us to ensure we do everything we can to understand and embrace God's 'meaning'. The text is addressed to us and it requires from us a fitting response. The Bible is not primarily a set of propositions we can debate, to agree with or disagree with, but rather a deep insight into the heart of God, a God who calls us to respond.

God has opened the door to a whole range of ways in which God speaks to us and invites us to speak in reply. We too can have a voice! Sometimes that voice is intentional. At other times it is unintentional or inadvertent as we will explore a little later.

In case you are still wondering about the grouping of the verses in the exercise above, here are some clues as to types of communication we see God using in the Bible:

1. Angels
2. An audible voice
3. A burning bush
4. Unusual circumstances
5. The natural created world
6. Dreams
7. Writing on the wall
8. History
9. The Holy Spirit
10. The Incarnation
11. Judgement
12. Casting lots/dice
13. Urim and Thummim
14. Other people
15. Prayer
16. Preaching
17. Prophetic action
18. Prophets
19. Rainbows
20. Scripture
21. Signs and miracles
22. Spiritual gifts
23. Stories
24. Symbolism
25. Tablets of stone
26. A talking donkey
27. Visions.

The Inadvertent Witness

The medium is the message!

You testify to something. You cannot avoid it. The question is, to what do you testify?

Whether we like it or not we all stand for something and, whether we say it or write it or not, someone is going to read us like a book!

Let's explore this a little further. Consider the following quotation from *'You Will Be My Witnesses'*, a document developed by Tim Dearborn, World Vision International Partnership Leader for Christian Commitments. (We highly recommend reading the document in its entirety.)

Witness is inevitable and unavoidable

It is impossible to avoid being a witness. It is as natural and inevitable as breathing and eating. Implicit witness occurs in all relief and development activities. Witness is given to one's beliefs about the power of money, particular geo-political issues, specific cultural values, and the meaning and purpose of human life.

But here is our challenge. Many people would suggest it is acceptable for humanitarian organisations to 'witness' to 'secular' values and motives like charity, generosity, courage, justice and compassion. However, the humanitarian workplace must be swept clean of religious witness, such as to God's transforming love and power encountered in Christ, for the humanitarian 'public space' should be spiritually

neutral. In reality, this is to impose a particular world view – the separation of personal spiritual life from corporate public life – upon the rest of the world. It is thus, in fact, a form of not only witness but also the promotion of a particular 'religious' point of view. The massive resurgence amongst the world's religions in recent decades and the growing emergence of religious expressions in the 'public square' demonstrate that for most people there is no 'spiritually neutral' space. All of life and all of work are rooted in religious convictions.

If a government, donor or community partner were to insist that we not witness in our work, it might as well insist that we stop working. It is impossible not to witness. Furthermore, to suggest that witness should be private and personal rather than corporate and public is to misunderstand corporate influence and the inevitability of organisational witness. Organisations themselves, and not just the individuals within them, bear witness to something. To deny or ignore this is to risk being deceptive and even manipulative in our work.

The reality that witness is unavoidable raises a complex challenge. Aid agencies bring large amounts of power and influence to bear on human lives at their weakest and most vulnerable points. Clear standards must be followed to ensure that no harm occurs in the lives of the recipients through our witness. For this reason, rather than simply privatising religious witness or banning it from humanitarian activity – which is actually to impose a particular world view – the challenge for the humanitarian agency is how to work in ways that witness ethically.[5]

Reflection

Consider – What is it that you witness to?

1. Do you agree with Tim Dearborn's assertion quoted above?
2. In 50 words, how would you summarise the central point being made, to someone who hasn't read it?
3. If you disagree with the assertion, what are the main reasons?
4. Or maybe the issue is a bit subtler than two distinctive options convey; if you think so, what are other options?
5. If you agree with the assertion, what difference does it make to the way we work?

---

[5] Tim Dearborn, *'You Will Be My Witnesses'* (World Vision International: 2011) 7–8.

6. What difference could it make to the way you carry out your work today, and tomorrow?
7. In your journal, write a candid list of your implied (unspoken) messages during your work today – or yesterday. What messages and impressions did you leave behind? What do you think receivers will do with the messages they received?

This is your voice.

Defining the Vehicles of Voice

What are the vehicles of our voice? What is the language of faith? How do we 'say' it? Who do we 'say' it to? And what 'feedback' might we expect?

In this section we take a look not so much at what we say, but how and to whom. We use the term 'vehicles' here to describe different ways and channels of communication available. A 'vehicle' of communication is one that carries or conveys a message. Remember too that we use the term 'voice' to signify all forms of communication sent or received.

By 'language' we are referring to anything that leaves behind a message, intended or not. As we have seen elsewhere, this is often called 'witness' or 'testimony'. Let's use the term 'language of faith' here. Try to take on a broader meaning and get as close as possible to the real meaning of scripture, as you understand it.

The terms 'witness' and 'testimony' are firstly legal terms applied to a faith context. There is nothing uniquely religious about them. Because of history, these terms have taken on meanings somewhat different from their original purpose. The terms may carry some negative connotations that close off opportunity for others to really hear the 'good news' as good news.

> 'You will know them by their fruits.'
>
> *Matthew 7:16*

Consider a range of biblical passages illustrating how faith is communicated. Each sub-section is a theme with a number of passages to study, research and put into practice. Biblical ideas and examples can inspire finding 'vehicles' for our voice. Identify ways we can be a witness to our faith and to all that God is doing amongst us.

We have heard, maybe even quoted, the dictum that 'Actions speak louder than words'. Biblical passages illustrate this very clearly. World Vision's Mission Statement declares that

we 'witness… through life, deed, word and sign'. This section takes a look at 'deeds' as a key communication code to offer deep insight into the meaning of faith.

Luke 17:11–21 **Ephesians 2:8–10**
Galatians 5:13–26 **Matthew 7:15–23**
Matthew 25:31–46 **Exodus 33:12–34:9**

Reflection I

Luke 17:11–21 The ten lepers

1. What is this story about?
2. Why do you think Luke tells this story and places it here?
3. There are many fascinating aspects to this story, but what point in the story do you find useful to guide you in having a credible and effective voice for your faith?

Commentary

The story of the ten lepers

So what is this story really about? Many commentaries on the story focus on the issue of gratitude and ingratitude. Certainly that could be a point of the story, but it may not be the meaning Jesus intended.

The context points to the meaning: What is Jesus teaching the disciples immediately before the story of healing the lepers? In Luke 17:5–6, 'The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."'

Then Jesus tells the strange parable of the servant and the master. The point of that little parable points us to the meaning of the ten lepers' story. Jesus finishes his parable with a very clear lesson, and Luke immediately records the lesson in practice. 'Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!"' (v. 9–10).

Then Jesus, as the obedient servant, heals ten lepers – no obligations on the lepers – he just does it because that is what his Father desires. When he had healed the ten lepers, Jesus did not say to them, 'Hang on a moment, I want to share the Gospel with you and tell you how you can be saved (or born again) before you go.' Jesus let them all go on their way to

be declared clean and get on with life. No expectation of a thank you. No expectation of a community celebration to recognise and honour the healer.

No, Jesus healed the ten lepers without obligation, without strings attached – pure unadulterated service. This was the teaching of 17:7–10 in practice. 'So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!"'

We stand as witnesses to the healing power of God in our health, psycho-social, WASH, education, shelter, food aid and security, and other programmes – not as a service we provide that then enables us to preach the gospel, but because 'we have done only what we ought to have done!' No obligations. No strings.

Reflection II

Exodus 33:12–34:9 The glory of God

This is a passage you may not have visited very often, but it is a pivotal story in helping to understand (or potentially misunderstand) references to the Christian scriptures in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

> 'Show me your glory, I pray.'
>
> *Exodus 33:18*

1. What is the 'glory of God'?
2. Why do you think Moses asked God to 'show me your glory' (33:18)?
3. How did God respond? What was God going to show Moses? Was it a new theological book? A new philosophy? Was it an unbearably bright light? An exciting new worship style? (33:19–23)
4. Why could Moses not look God in the face?
5. Write a list of what you think Moses might have seen when God showed Moses his glory. Anything familiar on that list? Look at Galatians 5:13–26.
6. How do we 'give God the glory'? (Clue: you are entirely on the wrong track if you are suggesting that it's about the way we worship.)
7. Skim through John's Gospel – or do a word-search in John's Gospel – for all references to 'glory'. You will notice that the closer the narrative gets to the crucifixion, the more Jesus refers to glory, seemingly with increasing passion. Why do you think that might be so?
8. If you take what Moses saw up on the mountain and then take a close look at Jesus' crucifixion, might you see the same thing? What do you see?

9. Christ on the cross is the ultimate expression of the glory of God. How does this guide us in expressing our 'voice' of faith? Ultimate glory, it seems, is about behaviour and deeds, not about words and 'doctrines' or ideas.

Matthew 25:31–46 The final performance appraisal

This scripture about the sheep and the goats is the last of five parables/allegories that Jesus gives to his followers before his crucifixion. Jesus is gathering key things his disciples should be focusing on between that moment in time and when Jesus returns to take them to the great eternal vineyard/party/society – wherever God lives. As the last of the five stories, it indicates that there will be some sort of assessment for everyone based on what we have done for Jesus.

1. What is the essence of the sheep and goats story?
2. Are criteria for the last assessment related at all to having 'right' theology? Are criteria about having associated with the right church or faith community? What are these criteria for assessment?
3. Is doing 'good things' the only criteria for assessment? (See the next passage.)

Ephesians 2:8–10 Good works, the evidence of God's grace

Grace, like love, has to be one of the most magnificent encounters in human experience.

1. Which is most important, according to this passage – grace or works?
2. Which is most important according to the apostle Paul? Or according to James 2:14–26?
3. What part does grace play in our lives – here and in eternity?
4. What part do 'works' play in our lives – here and in eternity?
5. God has breathed into us again the same creative breath as in the creation, reshaping us into God's image. According to this passage, why has God done that, for what reason?
6. What is the evidence that God's grace has changed us?

Matthew 7:15–23 A voice that defiles

1.It is very easy for us to be seduced into thinking that we are on the right track, when in fact we are way off. In this passage, Jesus is setting the record straight. 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven…' (v. 21). We can do all sorts of exciting things in the name of God, but that is no guarantee or passport into the kingdom of heaven.

> 'It is what comes out of a person that defiles.'
>
> *Mark 7:20*

1. How do we know the difference between a false prophet and a true prophet?
2. Jesus uses the allegory of 'bearing fruit'. What do you think the fruit is that Jesus is referring to? Compare Matthew 12:22–37, Luke 6:39–49 and James 3:1–18. These specific references are about the ways we use our mouths – what we say. But they are cast in the wider context of doing… what? Even the James reference (3:13–18) moves from how we use our tongue to what happens between what we say and what we do.
3. What then is the evidence that you as a 'good tree' are bearing 'good fruit'? What will people see? What will God see?
4. What is integrity?

Exercises

A. List things that World Vision does through you and your team that could be considered 'deeds'. For example: feeding the hungry and clothing the naked.

B. What is the impact on our 'voice' if there is a clear disconnect between what we say and what we do? What will people listen to?

Types of Voice

The shepherd's voice

Pastoral testimony

In these texts we see imagery of the 'shepherd' denoting something of the pastoral heart of God. The idea of 'shepherd' indicates a range of positive images: guidance, protection, care, healing, etc. What are some others?

Ezekiel 33:29–34:31
Psalm 23:1–6
John 10:3 (1–18)

It may seem unusual to link the idea of pastoral care or the shepherd heart of God with the idea of people of faith having a voice.

(Just a note: the idea of the quality of staff care making a Christian aid organisation distinctive takes us down the wrong track. Many organisations not claiming to be Christian

do world-class staff care. Good pastoral care of staff is not a distinctive. However, poor pastoral care would be a distinctive. A Christian organisation or team that does not have a shepherd's heart for both its staff and beneficiaries is very distinctive… in all the wrong ways. The implied message is that God doesn't care. That God is not the shepherd and doesn't care. And, as a result, we don't seem to care.)

Reflection

Ezekiel 33:29–34:31

> 'Then they shall know that I am the Lord…'.
>
> *Ezekiel 33:29*

1. In 34:1–6, what were the shepherds doing wrong or not doing that they should have done?
2. What was the effect on the people of God? In what way is this similar to Jesus' time in Mark 6:34?
3. What were the consequences for the so-called shepherds (34:7–10)? What was God's feeling towards them? Describe in your own words God's accusation.
4. Ezekiel 34:11–17 describes what God is going to do for the sheep in response to the way they have been exploited. List things God identifies as true shepherd tasks. How can we ensure these tasks are systematically done in our own teams and programmes?
5. What is going on in 34:17–31? To whom is good pastoral care and shepherding a great testimony? Who will notice? When shepherding is done and done well, what message does that send out?

Exercises

A. If you are advocating for better protection policy, but do not look after your own staff or local short-term hires, what does that do for your voice?

B. What are some programmes World Vision does that could be classified as demonstrating the shepherd heart of God? (Possible examples: psycho-social programming, peace-building and reconciliation, staff care?)

C. Apply this personally. What are you going to do to express the shepherd heart of God? What can you do today in your own team or department?

The prophetic voice

Speaking the mind of God to the surrounding culture

What place might the prophetic voice have for the modern-day aid worker? Is the prophetic voice just for special people? Is there a prophetic voice that applies to the everyday workplace?

> 'A prophet is one who knows his times and what God is trying to say to the people of his times.'
>
> *A.W. Tozer*

When most people hear the word 'prophetic', they think of predicting the future. And to some degree, this is an accurate understanding. Yet from Amos to John the Baptist, prophets mostly articulate moral truth. Moral truth often carries very clear warnings of drastic consequences – 'If you do not change your behaviour now, in the present, then down the road a little, there are dire consequences.' Prophetic voices ask tough questions most people prefer to ignore. Rather than predict the future, prophetic voices diagnose the present and point the way to a just and righteous solution.

The word *prophet* means one who speaks on behalf of another. The next question to settle is, What does a prophet speak about? The voice of the prophet is relevant to her or his own people in their own time. We get a clue about the role of a prophet from Jeremiah's story (see Jeremiah 1:5–10). In the Old Testament, the original use of the term we translate as 'prophet' meant *forth-teller*. In New Testament times, Greek use of the word 'prophet' also carried the idea of interpreter/forth-teller (see Hebrews 1:1).

We have either aggrandised the function of prophecy beyond what it really is, or we have relegated it to super-human and sometimes highly suspect 'ministry'. Consequently, we have either made it impotent, irrelevant or a distraction.

We find in the Christian scriptures two approaches to prophecy. One is foretelling – predicting the future. In this respect we tend to lump prophets with astrologers, psychics and fortune-tellers. The other is forth-telling – speaking the mind of God in the present to the surrounding society and its institutions (see this volume's module on 'Biblical Faith and Community: Sociology for Humanitarian Workers'). If you were to tabulate all the prophetic references, you would find the division between fore- and forth-telling at about 30/70. Most prophetic references in Christian scripture are about speaking the mind of God to the present, sometimes with future consequences in mind.

1 Corinthians 14:1–5
Jeremiah 1:1–12
Jeremiah 23:23–32

Reflection

There is much about prophecy in the Christian scriptures. Here we look only at a few passages. Keep reading, until you are satisfied that it is valid to have a prophetic voice in our own time, and can be confident about what form it takes. We suggest that in the context of humanitarian work, the nearest model of prophetic ministry in our day is the ministry of advocacy.

1 Corinthians 14:3 (1–5)

1. According to this passage, what is the purpose of prophecy?
2. When the apostle Paul used the term 'prophet' or 'prophesy', what image do you think he had in his mind? What image do you think his readers or audiences had?

> '…for their building up and encouragement and consolation'
>
> *I Corinthians 14:3*

3. In what way would true prophecy 'build up'?
4. In what ways would a prophetic voice be an encouragement? (Other translations use the word 'exhortation' rather than encouragement.)
5. In what ways would a prophetic voice provide consolation?

Jeremiah 1:1–12

1. Jeremiah understood his primary responsibility as a prophet and he hesitated to take it on. What was it that Jeremiah saw as his primary responsibility and felt was his sincerest weakness?

> '…[Y]ou shall speak whatever I command you'
>
> *Jeremiah 1:7*

2. In verse 12, what was God's primary concern? Was God satisfied?
3. If you take a quick scan of Jeremiah's prophetic experience, what do you observe? Who was he speaking to? When was the message to be applied? What time frame did the warning apply to? What would be the future consequences? Sample passages to look at from Jeremiah's story include: 2:9–13; 8:18–22; 11:1–8; 22:10–23; 25:1–11; 29:1–14; but examine the prophetic voice more closely and draw your own conclusions.

Jeremiah 23:23–32 Not all who claim to prophesy are genuine

1. What is the warning in this passage?
2. Write what you think might be five important principles about exercising a 'prophetic voice'.

Example: There is no authority from God for anyone in simply claiming to be a prophet or specifying that you think you are speaking prophetically. Nonetheless it is legitimate to seek God's mind and heart together, as an individual or especially as a group or organisation, and to speak this in love and humility.

Exercises

A. List things World Vision does, maybe even through you and your team, which could be considered 'prophetic'. Example: statement of clear policy positions on child protection.

B. Here are a few further questions to consider. (Remember that the term 'voice' may signify all forms of communication.)

   1. If World Vision were to embrace without arrogance a 'prophetic voice', what might be the implications?
   2. Can we speak the truth and be friends with the powerful at the same time? If so, how?
   3. In what ways did Jesus model for us the prophetic voice?

Commentary

Frequently, there is a basic confusion between the apocalyptic and the prophetic. Apocalyptic literature, such as Daniel and Revelation, is often mistaken as prophetic. Daniel and Revelation are not prophetic writings in the original sense at all. They are important 'apocalyptic' or 'revelation' writings that treat a single and specialised prophetic theme – the consummation of history.

Some Christians believe ardently – and many others vaguely – that the Bible foretells the course of events in the present and future ages, so that a skilled interpreter can learn from its pages the secrets of history as yet unwritten. Teachers who claim this skill find ready followers among the uncritical, who are led on by naïve curiosity and the fascination of the

mysterious, to fancy that they can pass the forbidden door and gaze on the designs of the Most High. There are many of these indeed, whose Christian graces compensate somewhat for their bizarre ideas and unconscious superstition. But such a use of the prophetic scriptures is actually a revival of the ancient heathen practise of divining the future, heedless of the rebuke: 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority' (Acts 1:7).[6]

Jesus before his death, counselled against being seduced by soothsayers and those who prefer to look for conjecture and the mysterious: 'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father' (Matthew 24:36). There is a future, he says, just be ready! If Jesus himself was not interested in the date, then neither should we be.

Some have taught that at some stage, the prophetic ministry died out. Even respected commentators including W.E. Vine suggest that 'With the completion of the canon of scripture, prophecy apparently passed away.'[7] Vine uses 1 Corinthians 13:8–9 as the basis for the argument, 'but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away…'. However, verses 8 and 9 cannot be read without verse 10. '…But when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.' What a great moment that will be, when we will need nothing else but to look in the face of our heavenly Father and see it all. Until then we need the gifts of prophecy – and other gifts – to reveal the heart, mind and hand of God.

6 R .B. Scott. *The Relevance of the Prophets*. (1944).

7 W. E. Vine, M. Unger and W. White, Jr. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (1997, © 1996).

Different Vehicles to Express Our Voices

From this point on, we look more briefly at some vehicles available to express our humanitarian voice. The following receive much attention in Christian writings and literature, and much is available with some research. You are encouraged to explore them in more detail and apply them appropriately in your day-to-day work.

Preaching/proclaiming

Bringing 'glad tidings' and explaining the good news

Historically, the vehicle of 'preaching' was akin to the prophetic role. There is nothing so delightful and liberating as sharing a bit of good news. And that is the spirit of Romans 10:15. But there are many ways to share good news. Typically, preaching is the vehicle that carries the gospel's good news to a (usually large) number of people simultaneously.

> 'Preach the gospel all the time. If necessary, use words.'
>
> *St Francis of Assisi*

There are some occasions when preaching is appropriate. The first and most important principle of deciding when preaching is appropriate is to consider **when the people invited to listen have freely chosen to spend their time and space exclusively to hear whatever the preacher has to say**. It is not preaching when people are together for another purpose and have no choice but to listen to someone preach – that is proselytism. For example, preaching or giving out religious tracts or brochures whilst crowds are gathering for something like a food distribution is proselytism and is inappropriate.

Mark 6:30–44
Mark 8:1–10
Mark 16:14–16

Reflection

Mark 6:30–44 and Mark 8:1–10 Feed the hungry

Consider the example of Jesus feeding the crowds in these scriptures. On both occasions in Mark's account, the crowd had gathered of their own free will because the people were hungry for great news in the midst of their unbearable political and religious oppression. The second crowd was so enthralled that for three days they listened without eating. In that

context Jesus fed them because they were hungry. Feeding the crowd was never a pretext for getting them to listen.

> 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.'
>
> *Mark 16:15*

Mark 16:14–16

Different translations present some variations on this verse, but the NRSV (quoted above) rightly uses terms like 'proclaim' – in a similar way to our use of the term 'voice' here. What some translate as 'gospel' is, as you know, better translated 'good news'.

1. What ways do you think Jesus imagined his followers over the centuries would use to 'proclaim the good news'?
2. What do you think Jesus meant by the term 'the whole creation'? Who or what was not to be included in the 'whole'?
3. What does the truism 'actions speak louder than words' mean in relation to proclaiming the good news? What happens to the message if the behaviour of the messenger contradicts what the receiver thinks she or he is hearing?
4. In Luke 4:16–23, who were the special recipients of the good news and of Jesus' proclamation?

Exercises

Look up other key passages to consider in relation to proclaiming the good news. Of course there are many more you can look up in a concordance. Search words such as proclaim, proclaiming, proclamation, preaching, preacher and declare. Some relevant verses include

- Romans 10:14; 15:20–21
- Acts 26:14–23
- Matthew 4:18–5:3; 10:5–15; 22–32; 26:8–18
- Luke 4:16–23.

The community of faith

Living, visible evidence of a loving God

In this section we get to the very heart of wearing our faith on our sleeve for all to see. And it's not as scary as it might seem! Jesus makes it very clear how to do it. How do others know you are a person of faith? How do they know you are a committed follower of Jesus? Because you told them? Let's take a look.

John 13:34–35
Ephesians 4:1–6
John 17:23 (16–26)

Reflection

John 13:35 (13:31–38)

1 From the text, how will everyone know that you are a disciple of Jesus?

2. How can you apply this fundamental principle and challenge to your life as a team member and as a team?

> 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples…'
>
> *John 13:35*

3. The community of disciples together is the loudest and clearest 'witness' to faith. Let's get to the very heart of it. What does it really mean to 'have love for one another'? Be very practical:
   - How do you love each other in a team, especially in an emergency response or a very stressful time?
   - What do you do if you don't like someone else in the team?
   - Does it mean that you make a big show of your care and concern for one another?
   - What do you do if you sense that there are people in other agencies who don't claim to be Christian, yet they seem to be more loving in their team than you experience in yours?
   - Given that your task in an emergency is to save lives, why worry about team relationships and loving each other anyway? What's to gain? And what's to lose? Another way to look at this question is, What does a team of people who love each other look like? How do they behave? And what does it look like when there isn't love and unity in a team?

John 17:23 (17:18–26)

Not only is the unity and love amongst believers the loudest proclamation of their loyalty to God, but it is the loudest declaration that God is the loving God who sent Jesus to demonstrate that love, in its most complete way.

> '…that they may become completely one, so that the world may know…'
>
> *John 17:23*

1. What is meant here by the term 'completely one'?
2. Is there unity in your team? If not, what can you do in very practical ways to build the unity that shouts to the world, 'we are loved by a loving God'?

Exercises

A. List things that World Vision in general, and your team in particular, does which express within your corporate life something of the love and unity that Jesus talks about. For example: Your emergency team invites other agency members to your own community meals and social occasions.

B. What programmes does World Vision provide that support churches and faith-based organisations to develop and demonstrate unity? For example: hosting leadership seminars; collaborating and partnering with other organisations.

C. What opportunities are there to demonstrate unity that you haven't yet put into practice?

Digging deeper

Further key passages to explore are provided below. See what others you can find that help us understand what Jesus means by love and unity.

- John 15:13; 1 John 3:16–18
- Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 5:43–48; 19:18–20; 22:39
- Mark 12:31
- Luke 10:27
- Romans 13:8–10
- Galatians 5:13–15
- James 2:5–13
- 1 John 4:17–21

The ministry of reconciliation

Putting relationships and partnerships back together again

In this section we take a brief look at the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is not difficult to understand. We use the term in different ways. It is not uniquely a religious or biblical word – we reconcile bank statements, we reconcile one idea against another, we conduct peace and reconciliation activities.

The Reconciliation Network published the following definition and description of reconciliation in its 2005 booklet:

> Reconciliation is God's initiative, seeking 'to reconcile to himself all things' through Christ (Colossians 1:19-20, NIV). Reconciliation is grounded in God restoring the world to God's intentions, the process of restoring the brokenness between people and God, within people, between people, and with God's created earth. Reconciliation between people is a mutual journey, requiring reciprocal participation. It includes a willingness to acknowledge wrongs done, extend forgiveness, and make restorative changes that help build trust so that truth and mercy, justice and peace dwell together.[8]

2 Corinthians 5:18 (18–21)
Colossians 1:19–23

[8] World Vision International, *Reconciliation as the Mission of God*, (2005), 20.

Reflection

2 Corinthians 5:18 (18–21)

1. Who are the ambassadors in this passage? Who isn't an ambassador?
2. What are the ambassadors' key messages?
3. If you were to speak a word of reconciliation (v. 19), what kinds of things would you say?
4. What kinds of programmes would you run?
5. If we are new creations and the old creation has gone, according to this passage, what is it that has gone and what now exists? Remember to look at the wider context.

> 'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.'
>
> *2 Corinthians 5:18*

Colossians 1:19–23

1. When the passage says '…through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven…', what does it mean by 'all things'?
2. We are all invited into the ministry of reconciliation – we have been given the word of reconciliation. What are you going to do about that?
3. What difference will this responsibility make to your work and partnerships today?
4. If you are an active ambassador of reconciliation of all things, what do you say with your voice of faith?

Exercises

A. What are some programmes World Vision provides or could provide that demonstrate the ministry of reconciliation? For example: reconciliation programmes in conflict-affected countries such as South Sudan. What are others?

B. What opportunities are there for you to be an ambassador of reconciliation that you haven't yet utilised?

Lifestyle and friendship

Incarnate the good news through natural and personal demonstration of faith

Everything we are as friends and in our everyday lifestyle is an opportunity to incarnate the good news Jesus offers for all.

Let's tackle first what we mean by 'incarnate'. In our Christian context, incarnation means that Jesus was God in human flesh. The central idea is that God becomes one of us in the human form of Jesus. We can no longer shake our fists at God and accuse God of not knowing what it's like to be a human. Why? Because God knows perfectly well what it is like to be us. In fact God knows our weaknesses and strengths better than we do (Hebrews 4:14–16).

We are not God incarnate like Jesus. But we are the contemporary human form of the new creation God has breathed into us – in this way we incarnate God's good news to our contemporaries. We do this by demonstrating good news through real empathy. Like Jesus, we enter the other's world through their eyes and by 'wearing their shoes', not from a distant preaching pulpit, but by being the good news to them.

As a by-product (not the main purpose) we find that when there is integrity in our friendships and lifestyle, this sometimes provokes questions about what motivates us, what drives and guides us.

Hebrews 2:18 (10–18); 4:14–16
John 20:21 (19–23)

Reflection

Hebrews 2:17–18

1. What is the basic principle that Jesus lived out in this reference? In theology we call this 'incarnation'. In our time, what other word(s) might we use?
2. Jesus models to us the very heart of ministry – caring or simply being a friend. What is the model?

> 'Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect…'.
>
> *Hebrews 2:17*

3. How can you apply this empathic model in what you do today or tomorrow? If you were being empathic, how would you be behaving? What difference would it make to the 'other' you are being empathic with?

John 20:19–23

1. What is the story here?
2. And what is the occasion and context of the story?
3. V. 21 – What are the implications of this statement? What have we been commissioned to do?

> '…As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'
>
> *John 20:21*

4. V. 22 – Where else in our faith text do we see God breathing on (or into) humans? What did God breathe into the first humans? And what did God breathe into us, God's disciples?

Exercises

A. If the Holy Spirit has been breathed into us, what are the fruits of that breath? A new theology? No, a new creation – a whole new way of being (see Galatians 5:22–26), a whole new way of behaving.

B. So, if we have been sent in the same way that Jesus was sent, what does that mean for us? What does that mean about the way you behave, spend your time, talk with people, do your work, spend your private moments and relate to your family?

Apostolic witness

Incarnational leadership and statesmanship shines light on truth

Apostleship is a sobering undertaking. This text should give pause to those selected to lead organisations such as World Vision and to be a voice for all who are stakeholders in World Vision's ministry.

To be an apostle is to exercise godly, guileless and humble leadership, uncorrupted by political power. The meaning of the word 'apostle' is similar to what is meant by 'statesmanship'. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Body of Christ (the church), but is it as glamorous as some make out? Apostleship is the hard grind of godly leadership. As a gift for

the community of faith, the role of apostle is 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' (Ephesians 4:12). Like so many positions, we make them somewhat grander and more mysterious than they really are.

It is very useful to look at this model of leadership alongside what Jim Collins calls 'Level 5 leadership' in chapter two of his book, *Good to Great*.[9]

It is completely unnecessary to claim the mantle of 'apostle' for either yourself or others, but it doesn't stop any leader from fulfilling the function of equipping others for the work of ministry and being a voice for those who share and labour for the mission.

Ephesians 4:11-12

Reflection

Ephesians 4:11

> 'The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles …'.
>
> *Ephesians 4:11*

1. There are many references to apostles in the New Testament. What others can you find that help us to understand roles and responsibilities of an apostle?
2. In modern times, what is the essential role of an apostle? Are apostles no longer 'called and installed', as used to be said?
3. What are responsibilities of apostles?
4. For contemporary people of faith, what is the role of an apostle when it comes to providing a voice?

Exercises

A. What are some programmes that provide World Vision with opportunity to exercise an apostolic role? For example: leadership development and WV's public voice in the church.

B. What other opportunities can you identify?

[9] J. Collins. *Good to Great* (2001).

Teaching the Good News

Expounding the good news to help understanding and informed choice

What is the difference between 'preaching' and 'teaching'? Sometimes you come across others who are on a journey of exploring what faith might mean to them. Somewhere on their journey, they meet you and recognise you as a person of faith, and start to ask you questions; it all seems perfectly natural.

Preaching at this point in their journey is probably unnatural. They are looking for practical life applications and personal perspectives: Why have you chosen to put your faith in God? What does it mean to you? What difference does it make? You've thought about such questions before, and you are available at a time they are exploring. Careful and genuine explanation is teaching the good news.

Good teaching also conveys that there are no easy formulas to faith. Teaching helps the enquirer to understand what discipleship really is, what it costs and what joy it brings. Try teaching the good news also when you have groups of people who want to know more. But a big caution – do not cross over into proselytism!

Acts 28:30–31; 5:40–42

Reflection

Acts 28:30–31; 5:40–42

These passages refer to work the apostle Paul did in various places in the world.

1. When Paul was 'teaching' what do you think he was doing? Just talking or something more? What activities did 'teaching' involve?
2. Where did he do his teaching? Clue: examine the surrounding chapters in Acts.

Exercises

A. How does or could World Vision 'teach the good news' in an ethical way?

B. If you were to teach the good news in your work context, how would you go about it?

CONCLUSION

Next Steps on the Journey

Biblical faith foundations

Congratulations! We have not come to an ending, but rather to an invitation to further adventures in humanitarianism. The work ahead of us will continue to require many journeys and many returns as we secure the deep foundations needed to construct, brick by brick, the magnificent cathedral God calls 'you'. We are all magnificent creations under construction, and this series is designed to help build and strengthen the foundations on which we are built, creating space for breathing something of God's very nature into you and your discipleship.

The humanitarian imperative

The imperative for humanitarian action now on earth has a heavenly and eternal basis way beyond human rights, conventions and protection principles, as important as these are. Humanitarian action is grounded in the very existence and nature of God. It is who God is.

Our studies in this series have only scratched the surface of references in the Christian scriptures that relate to the humanitarian imperative. But it is enough to give you a start in exploring further many other references not cited. We recommend the discipline of exegesis – the discipline of seeking out the meaning of the text, deeply listening to the text – rather than the common practise of eisegesis – reading into the text what we want it to say.

The Bible provides incredible clarity about what humanitarian action looks like to God and for those seeking to follow the divine vision for creation. It is full of models, stories, standards and the manufacturer's instructions with an eternal guarantee.

We see that the faith the scriptures talk about and the faith God breathes into us is evidenced not by our theology or our attending church regularly but by the deeds we do. We are not saved by those good works, but we are what God has made us, recreated in Jesus Christ for the very purpose of doing the good works which God made clear were ours to do long before we were born. This is God's call to humanitarian action.

Faith and anthropology

Our primary measure of success is not how good our reports are or even that we can attribute great impact in the beneficiary community to the money invested by many donors. These are important, yes. But our real impact can best be measured by what of God's nature has been breathed into the communities we partner with.

If our humanitarian endeavour is established and guided by God's key indicators of love, creativity, responsibility and truth, then our chances of successfully partnering with God and

with others are great. Not to do so is to dehumanise ourselves, our partners and those we seek to serve.

The point of our exploring is not to develop some clever academic or philosophical framework, but to examine and construct our own discipleship and our professional endeavours from a deeper faith perspective, to once more refer to the manufacturer's operating manual for this being we call human. All that remains is for us to do it!

Faith and sociology

From a faith-based perspective, God has placed humans in society, where a range of practical and emotional relationships are designed to reflect the nature of God as a relational God. Practical application of these social dimensions of faith informs and shapes our thinking about ministry – community development, managing vulnerabilities and shocks, and developing a voice for truth.

Humanitarians always work in teams. For humanitarians in faith-based organisations like World Vision, we share both a unique opportunity and a deep responsibility to demonstrate what God's dream for society could look like. The community of disciples, during Jesus' earthly ministry and also in the early church, was known for its welcoming and open-hearted structure. The loving and redemptive community became the loudest testimony of all to the redemptive power of faith in Christ.

Now, there's a challenge! Do you think we can do it?

The humanitarian's voice

We all have a voice, whether we recognise it or not. We all testify to something, whether we use words or not. Silence is one of the loudest forms of communication. That's just the way it is. The question remains, to what do you testify?

Spoken and written languages are the most important symbol systems in human experience. All communication, in whatever form, proceeds via symbols. Interpretation of those symbols is the crucial element in communicating effectively. Without shared meanings, we have a problem when it comes to the humanitarian having a voice. We cannot guarantee that what we 'say' is what is 'heard'. Most often, the words and symbols we choose to use to articulate our faith are in fact constructed from within our culture's reading of the faith texts.

A love for God's word, careful exegesis of faith texts, a loving and redemptive community, a deep faith, practical discipleship and cultural awareness are critical for the humanitarian to have an effective voice in advocating for needs that are more than material – for justice and an abundant life. How would you rate yourself on these foundations for an effective voice?

We are not lonely voices. While hypocrisy worn with pride and arrogance will drown out our endeavours in a flash, integrity worn with humility and child-like wonder will establish the witness of our lives forever, long after our words have drifted away.

We wish you God's very best as you continue on this journey both as a disciple and as a professional caring human being.

Your stories and your feedback are greatly valued.

The author (John West) can be contacted by email at john.west@realcapacity.org.

Appendix 1:
Notes and Tips for Group Facilitators

This series of study modules, as explained at the start, is written for individual readers – so that we could emphasise the personal growth and staff development required for sustainable, transformative and genuine capacity-building amongst humanitarian workers and their teams and local partners. Simply put, these aims cannot be achieved without consideration of our own and others' faith foundations.

However, we strongly encourage group and team collaboration in utilising and discussing these materials to increase the depth and breadth of staff sensitivities and skills in aligning words, signs and deeds across all WV programming. With that in mind, we designed each module to be easily adaptable for use in group discussion and study.

Here are some tips:

1. Carefully assess the total time available for your group (including both individual preparation or follow-up, as well as time to work together). Select material from the modules or studies accordingly. Numerous texts have been referenced for more holistic understanding of the topics raised. Not all references always need to be covered in order to have productive discussions.
2. Allow time for your participants to first work through the material you've chosen, on their own, so they can begin thinking deeply about the issues before attempting group discussion. You may do this by having all participants read selections ahead of time or by assigning participants or small groups a few selections to prepare, then bringing them together to share insights.
3. Most of the **'Reflection'** questions can be easily adapted for group discussion, but you probably will want to choose only a few. The **'Exercises'** are designed to go a little deeper, and to begin consideration of WV practices and the difference staff can make by their choices and behaviours. (Note that not all sections have exercises.) Some sections have **'Opening exercises'** which make good group material. Of course, '**For the professional'** sections will usually have relevance for teams. On the other hand, the **'Digging deeper'** sections which challenge readers to attempt to research topics further may prove too time-consuming in groups, unless you carefully break down assignments.
4. Be sure to gather and prepare any flipcharts, white boards, markers and notebook supplies you feel your group might need in order to present their findings and ideas. You will also want to have copies of the Bible available, if participants do not bring their own.

5. If your group or team comes up with recommendations, be sure to follow up by making these actions part of your team's goals and objectives, and by encouraging implementation.
6. As a group leader, your primary role is to encourage and support both your group in its discussions and the individuals in your group on their journeys.
7. We strongly encourage you not to use this as an opportunity to preach. Of course you and each of your likely participants will have deeply held viewpoints, a lifetime of experiences and valuable insights. Because the purpose of this study is to encourage a broadening of deep thought and exploration of faith foundations for humanitarian work across all levels of HEA and World Vision, it is important that no one voice dominate the other voices. We want all individuals participating to ask the hard questions of faith and enhance their own journeys and solutions, whilst enlarging their capacities for leadership and collaboration.
8. See yourself as a provocateur and guide, rather than a teacher.
9. Group discussions should be more like tutorials rather than lectures. Try to get each person to share his or her own questions, learning and, in particular, 'ah-ha!' moments.
10. Lead the way by asking provocative questions and sharing your own faith explorations and 'ah-ha!' moments.

Finally, your feedback on both your process and the content of this material would be greatly valued and can be forwarded to your Christian Commitments/Faith and Development colleagues.

Godspeed!

Appendix 2:
How to Craft a 'Mind Map'

A mind map is a simple, flexible and expanding graphic you draw to help you think through and develop ideas and identify related issues. Several key features generally appear in a mind map:

- It is something like a map, as the name suggests – it's a list organised in graphic form, rather than down the page.
- It continuously expands, radiating outwards, and is limited only by the physical space you have (paste additional pages) and your ideas (remember, God is creative and talking with others helps you tap into that creativity).
- You can connect ideas, to establish related thinking.
- Use pictures, words, shapes and colours in any way that you enjoy.
- While there are some fundamentals to mind-mapping, there is no one way that is the right way. So, experiment and develop your own style.

There is much good information about mind mapping freely available on the internet. Try a search – 'How to do mind maps'. (Suggestion: Search for 'mind map' in Wikipedia for diagrams and a general explanation of mind mapping.)

The process:

1. You start with a topic, usually written in a shape (circle, square, etc.) – generally in the middle of a blank sheet or page. If you can, use a flipchart sheet because it will give you plenty of expansion space, but a normal blank sheet or page of an exercise book is good, too.
2. Then you 'map out' key issues that come to your mind in relation to that topic. You can make the next layer another shape or you can put the title on a line.
3. Then you add extensions of related ideas to each of those key issues. It is up to you whether you use shapes or just write them in 'space' or along the lines.
4. You can add as many layers or extensions as you think are useful to you.
5. Use dotted lines to connect related ideas.
6. And then

- Enjoy it.
- Expand it.
- Experiment.
- Share it.

© John West

Bibliography

Aitken, Jonathan. *Psalms for People Under Pressure*. (London: Continuum, 2004).

Anderson, Ray, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

Berlo, David K. *The Process of Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. (New York, NY: Touchstone Publications, 1995).

Collins, Jim. *Good to Great – Why some companies make the leap …and others don't*. (London: Random House, 2001).

Dearborn, Tim. *'You Will Be My Witnesses': Unavoidable witness in the work of World Vision*. (Monrovia, CA: World Vision International, 2011).

Fawcett, John, ed. *Stress and Trauma Handbook – Strategies for Flourishing in Demanding Environments*. (Monrovia, CA: World Vision International, 2003).

Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006).

Giddens, Anthony. *Sociology* (6th Edition). (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009).

Henrici, Johannes. 'Towards an Anthropological Philosophy of Communication', *Communication Resource*. (March 1983).

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC, sponsored by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response. *Code of Conduct for International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*. (1992).

The Lausanne Covenant. (No date). Retrieved from http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html.

Myers, Bryant L. 'Will the Poor Always Be With Us?' (John Mark Ministries, 2003). http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/1720.htm.

[NASB]. *The New American Standard Bible*. (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1989).

Peterson, Eugene. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002).

Robinson, Stephen. *Ministry in Disaster Settings – Lessons from the Edge*. (Australia, 2007). www.emergencyministry.com.au.

Schluter, Michael, and John Ashcroft, eds. *Jubilee Manifesto : A Framework, Agenda and Strategy for Christian Social Reform*. (Leicester, England: IVP, 2005).

Scott, Robert B. *The Relevance of the Prophets*. (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1944).

Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. (US: W Publishing Group, 1977).

Smail, Tom. *Like Father Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in our Humanity* (UK: Paternoster Press, 2005).

The Sphere Project. *The Sphere Project Handbook*. (2011). http://www.sphereproject.org/content/view/720/200/lang,english/.

Storkey, Alan. *Jesus and Politics: Confronting the Powers*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

Vine, W.E., Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997, © 1996).

Wallis, Jim. *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2005).

Wilkinson, Richard, and Kate Pickett. *The Spirit Level: Why Equality Is Better for Everyone*. (UK: Penguin Books, 2010, with revisions, including a chapter responding to critics).

Wink, Walter. *The Powers That Be.* (New York, NY: A Galilee Book by Doubleday, 1998).

World Vision International. *HEA Ministry Guiding Philosophy*. (2010).

World Vision International. *Reconciliation as the Mission of God*. (2005).

World Vision®

Executive Office
6-9 The Square, Stockley Park
Uxbridge, Middlesex
UB11 1FW
United Kingdom

International Liaison Office
Chemin de Balexert 7-9
Case Postale 545
CH-1219 Châtelaine
Switzerland

European Union Liaison Office
33 Rue Livingstone
1000 Brussels
Belgium

United Nations Liaison Office
919 2nd Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10017
USA

'John [West's] years of experience in World Vision's humanitarian operations have given him great insight into the often sensitive subject of the role of faith-based organisations in emergency response and disaster management… particularly when John was leading HEA's capacity building in Africa'.

Dan Kelly, Partnership Leader
Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs
World Vision International

What does it take to live and serve effectively in contexts of disaster, ongoing crisis, or unpredictable violence? Where do we go when faced by overwhelming material and spiritual need?

Grounded in good humanitarian practice, *Biblical Foundations for Humanitarian Workers* provides a resource for building resilience, character and wisdom, along with capacity for understanding linkages between formative faith assumptions and the long-term well-being of entire communities.

Ultimately, *Biblical Foundations for Humanitarian Workers* is a comprehensive challenge for inner transformation in our own lives. In each module, you'll find

- suggested readings, with detailed information for exploring and applying insights from those readings in humanitarian contexts
- exercises, for assessing assumptions and options
- reflections, for developing new approaches to challenges.

You'll also find innovative suggestions for further study enabling you to extend your knowledge and develop your own applications, in selected segments labelled 'Commentary', 'Digging deeper' and 'For the professional'.

Ease of use: Each lesson builds on the one before. But readers can easily adapt the contents for their own needs and schedule, to freely and fully explore lessons connected to their everyday decision-making and priorities. Readings can be approached in one sitting, or over time. All exercises and questions can be easily adapted to accommodate group discussion, if desired.