

# ***Always ... Therefore: The Church's Challenge of Global Poverty***

## **Leaders Guide**



**Four online adult Sunday school lessons**

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*Always . . . Therefore: The Church's Challenge of Global Poverty* is produced in partnership with:

Baptist General Association of Virginia  
Baptist General Convention of Missouri  
Baptist General Convention of Texas  
Baptist World Aid  
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship  
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Arkansas  
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia  
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Oklahoma  
First Baptist Church Endowment Fund, Richmond, Virginia  
Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, Kentucky  
First Baptist Church, Griffin, Georgia  
First Baptist Church, San Angelo, Texas  
First Baptist Church, Wilmington, North Carolina  
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# Table of Contents

Preface	
Realism and Responsibility	4
Relief	9
Rehabilitation and Development	13
Renewing Justice	17

A DVD and a Students Guide for *Always . . . Therefore: The Church's Challenge of Global Poverty* are also available from Acacia Resources ([www.acaciaresources.com](http://www.acaciaresources.com)).

## Preface

We Christians too often read the Bible selectively about the poor, the hungry, the dispossessed, the foreigner and the weak. Consequently, we have at best a short-term commitment to their well-being. We sometimes respond to their immediate needs. We tend to neglect their long-term empowerment.

The global community needs for American Christians to read the Bible without skipping over the uncomfortable parts that call for a commitment beyond the horizon. The Bible speaks about an enduring commitment.

Years ago a Sunday school lesson left me with an unforgettable message about the selective way in which we read the Bible.

In June 1982, I taught a Sunday school class to Baylor University students at Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco. The curriculum series was from the Adult Bible Study, produced by the Baptist Sunday School Board, now LifeWay Christian Resources. The lesson's title was "Provision for the Poor." The focal texts were Deuteronomy 15:1-5a, 7-11a and 23:24-25. It was generally a good lesson.

One of the problems with the lesson was that it severed a critical text in half, leaving out the divine kick.

The eviscerated verse was Deuteronomy 15:11. The lesson focused on verse 11a: "For the poor will never cease out of the land" (RSV).

Indeed that portion of the verse validates social reality—poverty is an entrenched problem. The verse represents an example of biblical realism.

But the punch of the passage appears in the second part of the verse, the part about what God expects from us. The text doesn't stop with an acknowledgment about the human condition. The text turns directly to the divine expectation of the moral community.

Deuteronomy 11b says, "Therefore I [God] command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land" (RSV).

God commands his chosen people to let go of their tight-fisted possession for the sake of the empty-handed.

The larger passage suggests that an open hand gives freely, ungrudgingly, equipping the poor to become self-sufficient as a way to pursue a just society, one in which debts are forgiven and indentured servants are set free.

The text recognizes the crippling nature of the human situation and communicates the empowering nature of the divine expectation.

So why would the lesson avoid what God commanded? Why would a lesson cut in two a profound moral message? Why focus on the enduring problem and skip the solution?

I don't know why the text was cut in half. I don't know why what God commands was bypassed. I do know that if Sunday school classes read only the first part of the verse, then they might be tempted to think that the entrenched reality of poverty meant that we couldn't make a difference for and with the poor. Students might think that they didn't have an ongoing responsibility to address the needs of the impoverished.

Regrettably, too many American Christians have myopia about the malnourished and their moral obligations.

How often have we seen a flourish of giving to famine relief efforts and natural disasters followed by a sharp decline in giving? Donor fatigue is the term for disengagement from global crises such as what happened in the Sahel, Ethiopia, and Southeast Asia after the tsunami.

How often have we heard Christians say "the poor you have with you always," as a proof-text, a justification, for why rich Christians don't need to care about the hungry?

How often have we heard church members talk in negative terms about the laziness of the poor, their faulty moral choices related to out-of-wedlock children and their substance abuse? Or church members who criticize the hungry in nations where their religious beliefs place restrictions on beef consumption, for example?

Have we heard only the first part of the passage from Deuteronomy 15:11?

What if folk memorized the second part of the passage, the part about God commanding us to open wide our hand to the impoverished?

Imagine what we could do if we memorized the whole verse. Perhaps we would begin to rethink our worldview, reorient our priorities and reengage our global society. Perhaps our new approach would be "Always ... Therefore."

"Always ... Therefore" is the theme of this educational resource that has a twofold goal:

(1) Explore the biblical mandate to feed the hungry. Baptists are people of the book. The book is our moral compass.

(2) Raise the level of awareness about and deepen the commitment to what good will Baptists are doing through Baptist World Aid and its partners to be faithful to the biblical mandate.

With a sound biblical foundation and a compelling overview of what Baptists are doing, we hope that church members will make a long-term commitment to feeding the hungry through relief efforts, development projects and justice initiatives.

This study guide and the accompanying DVD are underwritten by the Baptist General Association of Virginia, Baptist General Convention of Missouri, Baptist General Convention of Texas, Baptist World Aid, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Arkansas, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Oklahoma.

Several churches have also joined in providing support to produce this resource: Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, Kentucky; First Baptist Church, Griffin, Georgia; First Baptist Church, San Angelo, Texas; First Baptist Church, Wilmington, North Carolina and St. Matthews Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky. Additional support came from First Baptist Church Endowment Fund, Richmond, Virginia, and several foundations.

You can use this resource in two ways: watch the DVD and discuss it in a single session, or view the DVD over a four-week period, using the accompanying four-session study guide.

## **Realism and Responsibility Leaders Guide**

**Theme: The biblical witness recognizes the reality of entrenched poverty and calls for redemptive actions.**

**Text:  
Deuteronomy 15:1-15**

### **Before You Lead**

- ▶ Read Deuteronomy 15, the Preface and “Realism and Responsibility” from the Students Guide and the following suggestions.
- ▶ Preview the Introduction and first chapter from the DVD.
- ▶ Arrange to have a television monitor and DVD player in your meeting area.

### **As You Lead**

#### **Introduce the Lesson**

- ▶ Call attention to the story of Sweet Pea from the Introduction in the Students Guide. Then ask volunteers to describe for the group their first personal encounters with real, chronic, life-threatening hunger.
- ▶ As time permits, point out facts such as these about global hunger and poverty:

- Worldwide, 842 million people are hungry. That means that they live in such extreme poverty that they cannot meet their most basic need for food.
- Most poor people who are hungry are also chronically undernourished, have severe vitamin and mineral deficiencies that result in stunted growth and have a heightened susceptibility to illness.
- Every year, 10 million children die from poverty-related malnutrition and infections. The most common of these diseases are diarrhea, acute respiratory illness, malaria and measles—all preventable and treatable. But parents living in poverty do not have access to immunizations and medicines that prevent and treat these illnesses.
- Countries in which a large percentage of the populace fights hunger usually do not have social “safety nets” like soup kitchens, food stamps and job training programs. Hungry people in these countries literally have nowhere to turn for help.
- Many hungry people must spend so much time searching for and securing food that they have little time to work and earn an income.
- Ending global hunger is an achievable goal. According to the United Nations Development Program, we can meet the basic health and nutrition needs of the world’s poorest people for an additional \$13 billion annually. People in the United States and Europe spend more than that on pet food each year.

► Play the Introduction and Chapter 1 of the DVD and allow adults to respond to it. Generate discussion with questions such as these:

- *What excuses do Christians typically give for not engaging in long-term commitment to help those who are poor?*
- *How would you describe the average church’s response to the poor?*
- *Based on what you have learned from your church experiences, how would you summarize the Bible’s teachings to us concerning the poor?*

### Explore the Bible

► Suggest that when it comes to our relationship with those who are poor, the phrase Christians are most likely to quote is some variation on Deuteronomy 15:11a: “There will always be poor people in the land” (NIV). Stress that while this portion of scripture indeed underscores a reality of the human condition, our tendency to stop reading at that point prevents us from confronting what God expects from us.

Ask someone to read aloud Deuteronomy 15:11. Emphasize the second part of the verse: “I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.’”

Acknowledge that an incomplete reading of scripture and the reality of entrenched poverty lead some people to conclude that we really can’t make a lasting difference for those who are poor.

Stress that God’s command to “open your hand to the poor and needy” includes not only God’s expectation of us but God’s formula for addressing poverty and hunger.

► Using information from the Students Guide, review

some of the biblical accounts of the struggle for food and good health and against poverty and ill health. Remind adults that scripture paints an honest picture of the ongoing reality of poverty and hunger. Yet it also clearly calls God's people to pursue justice for the poor and identifies caring for the weak, ill and imprisoned as a mark of Christian discipleship.

► Remind adults that Deuteronomy contains instructions about how God expects God's people to live together and relate to others. Chapter 15 deals extensively with treatment of those who are poor.

Read aloud Deuteronomy 15:7b-8 and 11; then ask:

- *What specifically does God expect from us in relationship to those who are poor?*
  - *What formula does God offer as a constructive response to poverty?*
  - *In what ways are we “hard-hearted” and “tight-fisted” toward those who are poor?*
  - *Why do you think most Christians tend toward short-term projects that meet immediate needs of the poor instead of the long-term commitments that lead to their empowerment?*
  - *What does long-term commitment to helping those who are poor look like for us? What forms does it take?*
- Ask someone to read aloud Deuteronomy 15:1, 12-15. Then ask:

- *What three specific things did God command*

*related to debts and slaves?*

- *What is the goal of this divine program?*
- *Why is a compassionate attitude toward the poor not enough? What must accompany it?*
- *Why do you think feeding the hungry and addressing the other problems that accompany poverty are low priorities for so many Baptist churches? What do we consider more important?*
- *Do you think many Baptists have stressed evangelism over hunger relief and rehabilitation projects? Do you think that one is more important than the other? Why or why not?*

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

► Using information from “Therefore Take Action” in the Students Guide, describe Leena Lavanya and the ministries in which she is involved. Note that Paul Montacute, director of Baptist World Aid, describes her as “the closest thing we [Baptists] have to Mother Teresa.” Point out her work among lepers, AIDS/HIV patients, prostitutes and their children.

► Recall for adults the challenges to “share information” and “challenge apathy” from the DVD. Then ask:

- *Which of these two tasks is most difficult for the American Christian church? Why?*
- *Where do we begin to accept our responsibility for dealing with global hunger and poverty? How do we replace the apathy that exists with actions that lead hungry people to self-reliance?*

## Relief Leaders Guide

**Theme: The biblical witness underscores the importance of relief aid.**

### Texts:

**Acts 11:27-30**

**Acts 6:1-7**

**Acts 2:43-47**

### Before You Lead

- ▶ Read “Relief” from the Students Guide and the following suggestions.
- ▶ Preview the second chapter from the DVD.
- ▶ Arrange to have a television monitor and DVD player in your meeting area.
- ▶ Visit the Web site of Baptist World Aid at [www.bwanet.org/BWAid/index.htm](http://www.bwanet.org/BWAid/index.htm) for current projects, stories and information about donating.

### As You Lead

#### Introduce the Lesson

- ▶ Begin with the following illustration:

On December 28, 2004, just two days after the unprecedented tsunami struck affecting 13 countries, an Immediate Response Team comprised of Baptist World Aid and Hungarian Baptist Aid members arrived on Holiday Island, Sri Lanka. They immediately contacted official government bodies and local Baptist communities and linked with several other local Christian organizations to provide urgent support.

They and the residents who survived the disaster faced a serious lack of drinking water and food. In some remote areas, people faced starvation because roads and streets had been destroyed. Lack of local humanitarian management and serious internal conflicts further complicated relief efforts. Outbreaks of infections and epidemics posed an immediate threat to the poorest and most vulnerable.

Yet within only days, the team had:

- established public kitchens to provide food, especially in endangered rural areas;
- provided drinking water for residents in and outside of temporary camps in rural areas;
- provided healthcare services for the most vulnerable, including children and mothers;
- provided special food, milk and vitamins for mothers and infants;
- provided support for still functioning orphanages and established new, temporary orphanages in remote areas.

Note that Hungarian Baptist Aid has become one of the Baptist World Alliance’s most effective emergency relief

partners and has emerged as one of the “first responders” within the global Baptist community. In addition to its tsunami relief work, this group has been involved in relief efforts in North Korea, Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Kosovo, Ukraine and Iran.

► Lead adults to recall some of the devastating effects of the December 2004 tsunami. Supplement their input with facts such as these:

- Reuters reported that between 1.77 million and 2.8 million people were displaced as a result of the tsunami.
- Over 390,000 houses were reduced to rubble.
- More than 100,000 boats were destroyed, many of them the source of livelihood for their owners.
- Over 1.5 million people lost their livelihoods.
- Over 230,000 people were killed in the tsunami’s raging floodwaters, with women and children killed at a ratio of 3:1 over men.
- According to the United Nations, the tsunami relief and rebuilding effort was the most generous and most immediately funded emergency relief effort ever.

► Play Chapter 2 of the DVD and allow adults to respond to it. Generate discussion with questions such as these:

- *What is emergency relief, and how is it different from long-term efforts?*

- *Why do you think people respond so immediately and generously to disasters such as the 2004 tsunami? Why do so many of them avoid long-term commitments to help?*
- *Do you agree with the assessment that Christians typically give what we have to spare instead of giving sacrificially?*

► Stress that when natural disasters strike, relief is the first line of response, one clearly supported through the biblical witness. Scripture records many accounts of people of faith responding to human suffering and giving to help alleviate it.

### Explore the Bible

► Note that some have called Acts 11:27-30 the “first Christian relief fund.” Stress that it reinforces our responsibility to address the chronic hunger and starvation of millions of people around the world.

Ask someone to read aloud these verses; then ask:

- *What from their memories of Jesus’ teachings prompted these early Christians in Jerusalem to take immediate and decisive action to help those affected by this famine?*
- *How did they determine what they would give?*
- *How were their gifts distributed?*

Point out the simplicity but effectiveness of this early organizational system: each person gave; the elders managed the gifts; and Paul and Barnabas delivered the gifts.

► Stress that hunger was a harsh reality in the early Christian community, especially for widows. Remind adults that women's sources of income and in fact their entire standing in the community were largely defined by their husbands. Women whose husbands died were without support and could easily become victims of the circumstances imposed by a male-dominated society. The community of faith recognized that taking care of those who were hungry was one of their responsibilities.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Acts 6:1-7. Then ask:

- *Why had a problem arisen?*
- *How did the Christian community resolve the problem?*
- *What qualities were important for those selected to dispense relief aid?*
- *What qualities are necessary today for those involved in relief efforts?*

Point out the importance of leadership, division of labor, a plan that was agreeable to all, a willingness to create a new structure within the community and the reliance upon God's spirit in this hunger crisis.

► Read aloud Acts 2:43-47. Note that this healthy community was committed to core values of unity and sharing. Point out that the phrase "had all things in common" comes from the Greek word *koinonia*, which is translated "fellowship," "communion" and "participation." The faith community for these Christians was more than a group or gathering. It had become for them a way of life and represented their primary commitment in terms of time and money. They

understood that if anyone had needs, it was their responsibility to meet those needs.

Ask:

- *To what degree do you think the core values of unity and sharing characterize the Baptist family today?*
- *Do you think most people in Baptist churches understand their responsibility to help meet another person's need?*

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

► Remind adults of established collection systems for hunger funds within the Baptist family and stress that they enable individuals and churches to give according to their abilities and through trustworthy distribution structures. While both hunger needs and opportunities to contribute are ongoing, some groups, such as the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger ([www.bgct.org/texasbaptists/Page.aspx?&pid=1225&srcid=2391](http://www.bgct.org/texasbaptists/Page.aspx?&pid=1225&srcid=2391)), also encourage churches to emphasize giving to the offering on a particular day each year.

Point out the work of Baptist World Aid ([www.bwanet.org/BWAid/index.htm](http://www.bwanet.org/BWAid/index.htm)) and its efforts to provide food, medicine and medical equipment to those who urgently need it. Relief is one of BWAid's three ministry arms and is immediately dispensed irrespective of tribe, caste, color or religion.

BWAid's disaster relief efforts include providing food, shelter, blankets, medicines and other immediate necessities and also extend to provide subsequent rehabilitation of homes and churches.

- ▶ Illustrate the importance of Baptists working together through established systems by pointing out the dire hunger situation Malawi faced in early 2006.

Circumstances in that country were devastating, leading the government to declare it a disaster zone. Several hundred children starved to death in the country's southern region, the majority of them orphans. Texas Baptists, working through Baptist World Aid, acted quickly to offer much-needed food distribution throughout the country. Fletcher Kaiya, general secretary of the Baptist Convention of Malawi, credited their efforts with raising awareness of his country's poverty and hunger. "We thank you most sincerely for your great assistance," he wrote.

- ▶ Stress the effect that providing relief aid has on others who are also able to give by noting the influence First Baptist Church, Rome, Georgia, had on First Baptist Church, Wilmington, North Carolina (see "According to Our Ability" in the Students Guide). Challenge adults to become examples of open-handed, sacrificial giving that offers not only relief in emergencies but opportunities for self-reliance to those living in poverty.

## **Rehabilitation and Development Leaders Guide**

**Theme: The biblical witness recognizes the necessity of efforts that provide a hand up to self-reliance.**

**Texts:  
Exodus 23:10-11a  
Leviticus 19:9-10**

### **Before You Lead**

- ▶ Read "Rehabilitation and Development" from the Students Guide and the following suggestions.
- ▶ Preview the third chapter from the DVD.
- ▶ Arrange to have a television monitor and DVD player in your meeting area.

### **As You Lead**

#### **Introduce the Lesson**

- ▶ Begin with this illustration:

Each year since 2000, the country of Cambodia has been struck by natural disasters such as drought, flood or storms. The results have been devastating, especially for the 90 percent of Cambodians who are farmers. Food shortages are common, and children and the elderly are especially

vulnerable to malnutrition. The country's many orphans and street children are easy targets for exploitation.

While immediate food distribution is always helpful and essential following such catastrophic events, longer-term solutions are equally important. When the Cambodia Baptist Union requested help from Baptist World Aid, it came in the form of rice and seed distribution and a well construction program undertaken by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Such rehabilitation and development efforts model the biblical witness, which teaches the necessity of providing a hand up to self-reliance to those in need.

► Stress the importance of such a holistic development approach, particularly in the aftermath of disasters such as the December 2004 tsunami. Rehabilitation and development efforts now underway by BWA and other Baptist groups are designed to lead to self-sufficiency in food production, creation of employment opportunities, primary education for children, functional adult literacy, job and skills training for adults and maintenance of primary health care.

Point out the assessment of Tim Costello, an Australian Baptist and executive of World Vision Australia, who has been instrumental in aid, rehabilitation and development following the tsunami. Costello compared the rebuilding efforts following the tsunami to those required to rebuild Europe following World War II. "It's going to take a generation" to rebuild, he believes.

► Play Chapter 3 of the DVD and allow adults to respond to it. Stress the fact that unlike emergency relief, rehabilitation and development take years, even decades, causing some to avoid commitment to them. Our lack of commitment to rehabilitation and development efforts contributes to the "silent disasters" that go on every day around the

world, including the deaths of 16,000 children daily from hunger.

### Explore the Bible

► Introduce the scripture texts by noting that they fall within instructions God gave the people about building community and safeguarding the well-being of each of its citizens.

Stress that God's intentions focus on shared human life, recognize the human realities of pain and need and hold God's people accountable for the well-being of each other. Clearly in God's economy, poor people "count."

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud Exodus 23:10-11. Point out that while letting the land "rest" every seventh year was definitely good for the land, this was not the main intention behind the commandment. Instead, God gave this command so that those who had little or nothing of their own could benefit from the land.

Emphasize that though the land was "on sabbatical," it would continue to voluntarily yield fruits, vegetables and grains. Privately owned fields, vineyards and orchards were open to the poor for their benefit. Accompanied by the other commandments to remove debt, free slaves and equip them for self-sufficiency, this commandment designed to take care of the poor reveals divine economic priorities that offer both an immediate hand out and a longer-term hand up toward self-sufficiency.

► Call attention to Jeremiah 34:8-22, reading aloud specific verses that address the failure of the Hebrew people to follow God's commandments. Then ask:

- *What do you think are our responsibilities related to these commandments from God?*
- *What principles can we apply from these scriptures to show our faithfulness to God and live up to God's expectations in our care for the poor today?*

► Ask adults to recall facts from the story of Ruth and Naomi. Remind them that Ruth, a Moabite, had married one of Naomi's sons. When the husbands of both women died, the two widows returned to Naomi's native Bethlehem, where they faced real and chronic hunger. Because of God's provision through the law of gleaning, Ruth could go into the fields after the reapers had collected most of the harvest and obtain enough to feed her mother-in-law and herself.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Leviticus 19:9-10. Remind adults that God expected ethical actions from the people that reflected God's own image. Faithfulness to God was impossible apart from ethics that colored life's day-to-day affairs.

Lead adults to discuss and apply this scripture by asking such questions as:

- *How are holiness and our treatment of the poor related?*
- *What specific attitudes and actions toward the world's poor do you think God would take? What specific attitudes and actions does God expect from us?*
- *How do our actions toward the chronically poor and hungry imitate and reflect God's character? How do they fail to do so?*

- *What structures exist that enable us to give a "hand up" to the world's poor? What stands in the way of our helping the poor move toward self-reliance?*
- *Why is a hand up toward self-reliance just as important as a hand out during a crisis or a disaster?*

### **Apply Biblical Truth**

- Using information from the Students Guide and the DVD, review some of the projects in which Baptists are involved that are designed to move people toward self-reliance.
- Challenge adults to direct their resources toward both rehabilitation projects, which help individuals rebuild their lives, and development projects, which help individuals build better lives. Remind them that doing so demonstrates faithfulness to the biblical witness to provide a hand up.

# Renewing Justice

## Leaders Guide

**Theme: The biblical witness calls us to do justice for the poor and hungry.**

### Texts:

**Micah 6:8**

**Amos 5:21-24**

**Isaiah 30:18**

**Deuteronomy 16:18-20**

### Before You Lead

- ▶ Read “Renewing Justice” from the Students Guide and the following suggestions.
- ▶ Preview the fourth chapter from the DVD.
- ▶ Arrange to have a television monitor and DVD player in your meeting area.
- ▶ Visit the Web site of the Micah Challenge at [www.micahchallenge.org/global/home/intro.html](http://www.micahchallenge.org/global/home/intro.html) for an overview, updates, additional information and resources.

### As You Lead

#### Introduce the Lesson

- ▶ Begin with this illustration:

*Sojourners* magazine labeled the rock star Bono’s speech at the 2006 National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. his “best sermon yet.” The dominant thread in that speech was the biblical mandate for justice for the world’s poor and hungry.

Quoting both from Hebrew prophets and from the teachings of Jesus, Bono laid out a challenge designed to move Americans from offering an occasional hand out to the poor and suffering to an ongoing, active pursuit of justice for every person on earth.

“God may well be with us in our mansions on the hill,” Bono said. “I hope so. He may well be with us in all manner of controversial stuff. Maybe, maybe not. But the one thing we can all agree, all faiths and ideologies, is that God is with the vulnerable and poor,” he said.

“God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war. God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us if we are with them.”

It’s no coincidence, he said, that scriptures mention poverty more than 2,100 times. Neither is it an accident, but “good news to the poor.”

While Americans can be proud of the efforts they have made in funding global health projects that fight the spread of AIDS and treat other preventable but life-threatening diseases, “from charity to justice, the good news is yet to come.

“It’s not about charity after all, is it? It’s about justice. Justice,” he said, “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.”

With 6,500 Africans dying every day of a preventable, treatable disease for lack of drugs we can buy at any drug store, “this is not about charity, this is about justice and equality. ... It’s annoying but justice and equality are mates. Aren’t they? Justice always wants to hang out with equality. And equality is a *real pain*.”

► Allow adults opportunity to respond and react to Bono’s challenging remarks. Then, using information from the Students Guide and the Micah Challenge Web site ([www.micahchallenge.org/global/home/intro.html](http://www.micahchallenge.org/global/home/intro.html)), introduce the Micah Challenge, a movement dedicated to making the United Nations keep their pledge for Millennium Development Goals to cut global poverty in half by 2015.

### Millennium Development Goals are:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Stress that the governments of the United States and other nations are more likely to keep their pledge to meet these

goals if people of faith continue to call for action. Suggest that for too many Baptists in America, however, social justice has been severed from authentic Christianity.

“Perhaps justice got severed during the civil rights movement, when justice meant equality and integration,” offered Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics. “Maybe it got lost in the therapeutic movement, when personal affirmation replaced moral accountability. Possibly justice got washed away in the contemporary worship movement, when phrases of adoration replaced words of responsibility” ([www.ethicsdaily.com](http://www.ethicsdaily.com)).

“Certainly,” he said, “the biblical mandate to do justice got distorted when fundamentalists read justice to mean punishment and not the empowerment of the poor, delivery of freedom of the oppressed, protection for the downtrodden and fairness in the marketplace.

“We need a reformation that restores social justice as a defining characteristic of what it means to be Christian and a central aspect of the church’s mission. One way for this to happen is through involvement in the Micah Challenge,” he said.

► Play Chapter 4 of the DVD and allow adults to respond to it. Generate discussion with questions such as these:

- *How do you distinguish between charity and justice? Why is charity never enough?*
- *What does justice do that charity cannot?*

Stress that following Jesus faithfully means working tirelessly for justice for all the world’s people.

## Explore the Bible

► Remind adults that in spite of the fact that many American Christians refuse to hear it, the call to do justice lies at the heart of scripture.

Ask volunteers to read aloud Micah 6:8 and Amos 5:21-25. Then lead them to discuss these scriptures by asking questions such as these:

- *What conditions led Micah to issue this call to justice?*
- *Why did Amos say God had rejected the people's worship?*
- *What did both prophets say that God demands?*

Note Amos's connection of hunger and poverty to injustice. Then ask:

- *How are hunger and poverty connected to justice today? In what areas is this most prevalent? What can we do to address it?*
  - *What did Amos prescribe as a cure for the injustices of his day?*
  - *How do we go about establishing "justice in the gate" for the millions of people worldwide who live in poverty?*
- Call attention to Isaiah 30:18 and its emphasis on God's just nature. Reinforce the biblical thread that ties justice to God's character by asking volunteers to read aloud the following verses from the Psalms: 33:5; 37:28; 89:14; 96:13; 140:12.

► Note that justice was a foundational priority in the establishment of the nation of Israel. Read aloud Deuteronomy 16:18-20; then ask:

- *What was Moses' goal in issuing these instructions?*
- *What did he say would follow if the people pursued justice?*
- *What happens to societies and nations when we allow distorted justice, partiality, bribes and other wrongs? Who suffers first, and most?*

## Apply Biblical Truth

► Suggest that one clear way forward in our pursuit of justice is support of the Micah Challenge. Using information from "Do Justice" in the Students Guide, summarize for adults some of the conditions the Micah Challenge seeks to address.

► Close by challenging adults with the words of Alistair Brown, general director, BMS World Mission:

"Who says that we are entitled to an affluent way of life if the price of that is that others must have a life of poverty and misery? In fact the Christian teaching as I understand it is that if you've got two coats, give one away to the one who has none. It doesn't mean that you don't have a coat. It just means that you live in such a way that they have a coat too. And in this context of large-scale economies it seems to me that we are not entitled to high-level lifestyle unless others have an equal opportunity, and they just don't. We need to let go of something that we have in order that they might have more" ([www.ethicsdaily.com](http://www.ethicsdaily.com)).

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