

SEEING CHANGE

LEADER'S GUIDE



THE CENTRE FOR
**THEOLOGY
& COMMUNITY**

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Christianity is a religion of the 'word made flesh'. In The Message translation of John 1.14 it says that God has "moved into the neighbourhood" in Christ and shared the experience of our daily lives. For Christians this means that the spiritual cannot be separated from the material and that our faith cannot be separated from our actions.

If the same God who chose to take on our earthly life now dwells in us by the Spirit, then the signs of that presence will be the transformation of every aspect of our lives at both an individual and a social level. It is this belief which drives our passion for seeing churches fully engaging with their communities, and which has led to the creation of this course.

The materials in this course have been developed in relationship with a wide variety of churches which have been wrestling with the issue of 'rebuilding' since the Financial Crisis of 2007-8. That event unmasked the deep brokenness in our economic system, and has since created a wave of social and financial problems for Britain's most deprived communities. Many of the actions of these churches are documented in our 'God and the Moneylenders' publication, available for free on our website.

A crucial resource for these churches has been the story of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is an often overlooked book of the Bible, yet it contains a wealth of wisdom and insight about how Christians can faithfully contribute to the 'rebuilding' of their community and society. It is our hope and prayer that this course might play a small part in the unlocking of this incredible resource for the benefit of the Church and the common good.

The course has five sessions. The first focuses on Chapter One of Nehemiah and the relationship between **listening, prayer and action**. The second moves on to Chapter Two and looks at the question of **power** and how it is used. The third session examines Chapter Five and how **charity and justice** are related, before the fourth session focuses in on the theology of money. Finally, the fifth session looks at how a **Money Talk event** can help you move from reflection and discussion to action.

PRACTICALITIES

Each session should last approximately 90 minutes and consists of the following four elements:

- **Prayer**
- **Introductory question for discussion**
- **Video**

Downloadable from the CTC website at

theology-centre.org/projects/economic-justice

- **Discussion questions/exercises**

Sessions can be held anywhere your group can watch the videos. We would recommend groups of 4-12 but it is also possible to have a larger group which splits up for the discussions. Feel free to include food and/or worship as additional elements to the sessions. The course is designed for groups who all attend the same local church, but it could also be used by groups who don't live near their church but who meet regularly and have a focus on the area in which they live.

As the group leader, you will have responsibility for taking your group through each session and facilitating discussions. Try to keep the discussion open and informal but be prepared to gently bring people back to the question or topic where necessary. The timings for each section are approximate so don't worry if you go over or under time on any particular element, just try to keep the whole session to time.

Finally, if you have any questions about the course or any feedback you'd like to give, please feel free to contact us at **hello@theology-centre.org**.



WEEK ONE

SEEING CLEARLY

Opening prayer (5 mins)

This is an opportunity to lift up the course – and the life of your church and neighbourhood – before God in prayer.

Introduce the course (5 mins)

Read out the 'introduction to the course' section of this guide to your group. Explain that the course is intended to be open and participatory so they should always feel free to share any thoughts or ideas they have.

Introductory question and discussion (20 mins)

Go around the group and ask each person to describe something in their neighbourhood which is broken and in need of rebuilding (this could be something practical like damaged railings or something more abstract like the housing system or community spirit). If your group don't know each other also ask everyone to say their name and where they live. Allow this to turn into a short discussion on problems in your area.

Video (15 mins)

Ask someone to read Nehemiah Chapter One to the group, then play the first course video.

Discussion questions (30 mins)

Discuss the following questions, giving everyone a chance to speak:

- 1) What are the qualities of good listening? How about bad listening?
- 2) When and how does your church listen to its neighbours?
- 3) How does your prayer life currently relate to your engagement with the community? How about your church's prayer life? Does Nehemiah's prayer challenge that in any way?
- 4) Does Nehemiah's surprising repentance make you think of anything that you or your church needs to repent of?

Exercise before next session and closing prayer (5 mins)

Explain that this course will require a little bit of effort in-between sessions. Ask each person, before the next session, to do some research on the internet or from other sources about issues in the neighbourhood of your church or group. As a starter, try the Church Urban Fund's poverty lookup tool (<http://www.cuf.org.uk/povertyinengland>).



WEEK TWO

SEEING PEOPLE

Opening prayer (5 mins)

Feedback from exercise (5 mins)

Ask people to feedback what they learned from their research on issues in the church or group's neighbourhood. Did anything strike people as surprising or unexpected?

Introductory question and discussion (15 mins)

Tell your group that this session is all about power, and ask everyone to give an example (from their own experience if possible) of power used badly. Allow this to turn into a short discussion. If the examples given are all at an international or macro level ask for any local examples that people may know of.

Video (15 mins)

Ask someone to read Nehemiah Chapter Two to the group, then play the second course video.

Discussion questions (15 mins)

- 1) Do you usually think of power as a positive or negative thing? Why?
- 2) Nehemiah is a good example of building power with rather than over people. Can you think of any other Biblical examples of this? (If your group is stuck you might want to suggest Jesus with his disciples or Paul's image of the Church as a body with different parts).
- 3) How good is your church currently at building power with others?

Exercise (15 mins)

Read out the following to the group:

"Building power with people relies on relationships in which people truly understand each other. But if we want to understand others and what makes them tick, we first of all have to understand ourselves. One exercise which can help with this is to draw a stick person to represent yourself, and around it words which describe:

The key institutions (schools, congregations, workplaces etc.) which have been central to your life

Your key relationships (both public and private—with no need for intimate details)

Your key hopes

One or two key events or stories which have shaped your life

Your fears and anxieties

How you spend time, energy and money"

Ask the group to spend ten minutes creating their own stick person, and promise no-one will have to share anything they don't want to! When the group is ready, ask one or two people to share as much about their stick person with the rest of the group as they are comfortable with.

Exercise before next session and closing prayer (5 mins)

Ask each person to make a short list of people that they know who don't go to your church but live within 10 minutes' walk of it. Ask each person to have a conversation with one of the people on their list before their next session with the intention of really understanding them. Explain that the trick is to ask 'why' questions without turning the conversation into an interrogation! After their conversation they should do the 'stick person' exercise for the person they have spoken to.



WEEK THREE SEEING JUSTICE

Opening prayer (5 mins)

Feedback from exercise (5 mins)

Ask people how their conversations went – did they find it easy or difficult? Ask one or two people to share their stick people (without giving away any confidential information).

Introductory question and discussion (15 mins)

Tell the group that this session is all about the relationship between charity and justice. Ask each person to describe someone who has inspired them by fighting injustice. Allow this to turn into a short discussion, asking people why they chose the person they did.

Video (15 mins)

Ask someone to read Nehemiah Chapter Five verses 1-13 to the group, then play the third course video.

Discussion questions (30 mins)

- 1) Do you find it easier to engage in charity or justice? Why?
- 2) Is your church better at charity or justice? Why?
- 3) What holds people and churches back from challenging injustice? What kind of things could help them?
- 4) What do you think of the approach of community organising in building alliances of civil society organisations to work on issues of the common good? Is this something your church could engage in? (N.B if your church is already involved in community organising then ask how this work could be deepened or made more effective)

Exercise before next session and closing prayer (5 mins)

Think back to the issues in your neighbourhood that you identified after Week 1. This week, pick one of those issues and then think and pray about what a 'mercy-based' response and a 'justice-based' response to that issue might look like. What would be the pros and cons of each approach?



WEEK FOUR SEEING MONEY

Opening prayer (5 mins)

Feedback from exercise (5 mins)

Ask people to share their thoughts on what a 'mercy-based' and 'justice-based' response to issues in your neighbourhood might look like.

Introductory question and discussion (10 mins)

Tell the group that this session is going to look at the theology of money, a theme that we've seen running through the story of Nehemiah but which we haven't yet dealt with head-on. Ask everyone to share what their favourite thing to spend money on is, and why.

Video (10 mins)

Play the fourth course video

Discussion questions (30 mins)

- 1) What, if anything, did you find particularly helpful in the video? Why?
- 2) What, if anything, did you find particularly challenging or difficult in the video? Why?
- 3) Do you think people in your church think of money and the economy as something connected to faith or separate from it? What implications does this have for the life of your church?
- 4) What do you think of the Archbishop of Canterbury's initiative on payday lending and his call for the church to promote more ethical forms of finance like credit unions?

Prayer (15 mins)

Debt is a problem that affects millions of people in the UK, with huge implications for their well-being and relationships. Spend some time as a group in prayer for people trapped in debt. Pray too for those who work in the financial services sector, and particularly those Christians who are seeking to connect their faith with their work in this area.

Exercise before next session and closing prayer (5 mins)

Before the next session do some research on the main bank that you use, to try and work out how ethical you think it is. You might like to use the Ethical Consumer Bank Scorecard available online as a starting point.

N.B before the next session you should print out several copies of the 'guide to holding a money talk' from the CTC website at www.theology-centre.org/projects/economic-justice



WEEK 5

SEEING CHANGE

Opening prayer (5 mins)

Feedback from exercise (5 mins)

Allow people to feedback on their research about how ethical their bank is. Ask people if they found it easy to find the information they wanted, and whether they found it a comforting or a discomfoting experience learning more about their bank.

Introduction (10 mins)

Explain that this final session is all about moving from the theoretical to the practical. The video in last week's session mentioned a tool called a Money Talk, and this session is all about preparing to run a Money Talk that will work in your context. Pass around copies of the Guide to Holding a Money Talk and give people 5 mins or so to read them.

Video (10 mins)

Play the fifth course video

Discussion (30 mins)

Have a discussion to plan your Money Talk. First decide who you would like to be involved in the event (i.e. is it just for people in your church or do you want to invite others from the local community?). This decision can then lead into a discussion on where and when your Money Talk should happen. Try to give everyone in your group a role for the event, even if it is just inviting others to attend and join in.

Exercise (10 mins)

This is the final session of the Seeing Change course. Ask people to share what they have found most helpful across the whole course and what, if anything, they or the church might do differently as a result.

Closing prayer (5 mins)

NEXT STEPS AFTER THE COURSE

After you've run your Money Talk please send an email to hello@theology-centre.org and let us know how it has gone. Then someone from The Centre For Theology & Community will be in touch to help you with ideas and resources to move forward on the issues you've identified.



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