

A New Year in God's World

Session 5

Gathering and Introductions

Opening Prayer

Bible Study

The biblical texts that we have been studying in our sessions were the lectionary texts for New Year's day. Each text presents its own challenge to us as we look at it in light of global poverty. In this final session, take some time in your group to reread these scriptures together one more time.

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1-13
2. Psalm 8
3. Revelation 21:1-6
4. Matthew 25:31-46

What is the picture of God we get when we put these scriptures together? Using these texts only, list on a sheet of paper some words which describe who God is and what God expects from us.

Finally, compose a statement from these words that would reflect to others the vision that God has given your group.

Global Poverty:

What Churches and Individuals Can Do

1. Continue to read on this issue. Jeffrey Sachs's *The End of Poverty* and Stephen Smith's *Ending Global Poverty* are an excellent place to start. Both are written for lay people. Both authors present more about the economics of poverty and what kinds of programs are already working. Stephen Smith, in particular, dedicates several chapters at the end of his book to making

suggestions about getting started in the fight to end poverty.¹

2. Keep talking about global poverty. Remind people that our leading global economists believe that we *can* end extreme poverty in our generation, but we *must* reprioritize our priorities in order to make it happen. Who better than Christians to lead the way?
3. Ask your pastor to let your group plan and lead a worship service on global poverty.
4. Learn more about the Millennium Development Goals. If you are a United Methodist you should know that the United Methodist Church is a partner with Nothing But Nets. Nothing But Nets (see NothingButNets.net) is an organization which provides insecticide-treated bed nets to families in malaria zones, primarily in Africa. Malaria kills 1 million children per year. For \$10 Nothing But Nets can purchase a bed net, deliver it, and explain its use. A family of 4 can safely sleep under the net for 4 years. The Nothing But Nets website has all sorts of information about donating individually or starting a netraiser team. Remember that poor health is one of the 16 poverty traps, and malaria is certainly one of the largest

¹ Note: In last week's session I noted that Jeffrey Sachs has been asked if help for Africa would backfire into an even greater population explosion. Sachs's answer is that ending extreme poverty would be the best guarantor of ending today's population explosion. He says, "fertility rates come down as economic development proceeds...As households move from subsistence agriculture to commercial farming and especially to urban life, they also choose to have fewer children." See pages 323-326 for his complete explanation.

- causes of poor health, especially in Africa.
5. Buy an ark, or a part of one! Heifer Project International is an organization which provides food-producing animals (as well as other things) to the poor. For \$120 you can provide a goat which will produce milk for a poor family to drink. Extra milk can be made into cheese, butter, or yogurt and used to feed the family or sold for income. The goat manure can be used as fertilizer. Families are taught how to care for their animals. When the animals reproduce, the babies are given to others in the village, thus spreading your gift even further. Other animals such as water buffalo, cows, rabbits, llamas, chickens, geese, etc, are also available as gifts. \$10 can purchase a share of an animal. \$5000 purchases an ark of 15 pairs of animals. You can get as much information as you need from www.heifer.org. They have congregational resources for churches and often there is someone from Heifer Project in your area who will come to speak and to help you get started. *(Note: From personal experience, Heifer is a great way to get all ages in your church involved in the struggle against poverty.)*
 6. Become a microfinancier. On www.kiva.org you can loan as little as \$25 to an entrepreneur somewhere in the world, and you can select the borrower! You can see a picture of the borrower(s), find out something about the business being started, how much money is needed, and what the repayment terms are. When your loan is repaid, you can loan it again!
 7. Support the GROWTH Act. This Global Resources and Opportunities

- for Women to Thrive Act is designed to bring about self-sufficiency for women around the globe. Women are the backbone of the global economy, making up about 40% of the labor force in East and South-East Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean. Women farmers produce 60 to 80% of the food in most developing countries. Despite this, women in developing countries tend to work in the lowest paid sectors, have less stable incomes, work longer hours, have less access to training and education, and have fewer economic opportunities than men. With adequate income, women are less vulnerable to trafficking and HIV/AIDS, and have more options in the face of violence or abuse. The GROWTH Act would reshape U.S. assistance and trade policy to promote women's ability to start and grow businesses, enhance women's land and property rights, increase women's access to higher quality employment, and more. You can call the Congressional Switchboard at 202-224-3121. The bill number in the U.S. Senate is S-2069 and in the U.S. House it is HR-2965.
8. Support the Global Poverty Act. This act declares it official U.S. policy to promote the reduction of global poverty, the elimination of extreme global poverty, and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015; requires the President to development and implement a comprehensive strategy to carry out that policy; includes guidelines for what the strategy should include from aid, trade, and debt relief to working with the international

community, businesses and NGO's to ensuring environmental sustainability; requires that the President's strategy include specific and measurable goals; and requires the President to report back to Congress on progress made in the implementation of the global poverty strategy. The Senate bill number is S-2433.

Discussion

Is your group or church ready to do something to help end extreme poverty in our generation? Take some time to merge the vision statement you created at the beginning of today's session to write a plan of action for yourself and for your church. Share your plans and then pray over each one, remembering that 20,000 of God's children die of extreme poverty for each day that we wait to help.

Leaving

Pray together: Our God in Heaven, in this New Year direct our paths to your will. Give us a heart for those who are poor, remind us daily that you mourn with them in their plight, and guide us in our quest to care for them. In Christ's name, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.