

THE BLESSING COURSE

Units in this series

- Unit 1 - Being Disciples
- Unit 2 - Building Our Faith
- Unit 3 - Prayer & Our Spiritual Lives
- Unit 4 - Being The Church
- Unit 5 - Being God's Servants
- Unit 6 - Blessing Your Local Area

Document Revision 2.0
Text © Melody Briggs with Sophie Jelley 2018
Illustrations By: Matthew Lawrence 2018



Diocese of Durham

Cuthbert House
Stonebridge
Durham
DH1 3RY

T: 01388 604515 | W: www.durham.anglican.org | E: enquiries@durham.anglican.org

The Durham Diocesan Board of Finance is the Financial Executive of the Diocese of Durham of the Church of England, is registered in England (Company No 192018) under the Companies Act, is a Company Limited by Guarantee and is a Charity registered under No 248287



Diocese of Durham



UNIT 6

BLESSING YOUR LOCAL AREA

THE BLESSING COURSE

LIVING AS DISCIPLES OF
THE GOD OF BLESSING

Blessing our communities in Jesus' name



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Foreword

God is in the business of blessing. He blesses in creation (Genesis 1.22, 28). He blesses in the covenants he makes with humanity (e.g. Abraham Gen 12.1-4). He blesses supremely in our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1.3-14).

We are blessed people. So in response we bless God in praise and worship.

Then we are also called to be a people of blessing. God chooses to use us to bless others, as individuals and communities, and to bless the whole of creation. So we need to grow in our experience and understanding of this blessedness. Hence *The Blessing Course*.

The aim of the whole series is to help us grow as followers of Jesus so that we can be a people of blessing. We bless by our presence, by our prayers, by proclaiming the good news, and by serving.

It is my simple prayer that *The Blessing Course* will be a blessing to all who engage in it; and that we will all then be a means of God's blessing to others.

+Paul Dunelm
May 2016

Conclude your session by giving all of your steps forward in life to God with this prayer:

**I thank you for this, my God,
I am a traveller and stranger in the world,
like so many of your people before me.**

**There is a sense of adventure,
of openness to possibilities,
abandonment to God and expectation
of fulfilling his will.**

**I accept the responsibility.
I'll hear and obey,
and trust it is your voice I hear,
the call of the Spirit,
the cry of Heaven.**

Amen.*

*Adapted from 'Prayers for a Spiritual Journey, Part VI' in the Northumbria Community Trust, *Celtic Daily Prayer: Book One The Journey Begins* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p.307.

Contents

Introduction	4
Session 1 God at Work Among Us	6
Session 2 Praying in the Midst of Your Local Area	14
Session 3 Loving Everyone in Your Local Area	20
Session 4 Sharing Faith in Your Local Area	28
Session 5 Challenging Injustice	35

Introduction to Blessing Your Local Area

With what shall I come before the Lord?

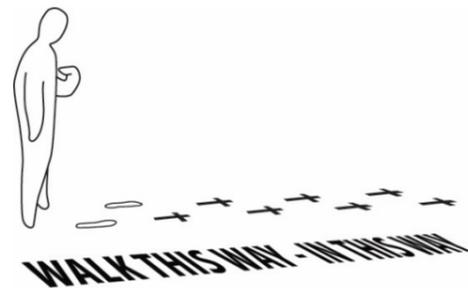
He has shown you, oh people, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

*To act justly, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

Micah 6.6, 8

With what shall I come before the Lord? Do I need to bring *things* to God in order to make him happy? Will God be pleased with gifts of money, with beautiful hymns, with repeated attendance at church services?



Micah answers these questions with an impatient, 'no'. As verse 8 says, God has already shown us what he wants. What God wants has to do with *our character* and with *how we live*. Our lives should point to God. We are to

live in a way that helps the people around us to see God. This happens when our actions are guided by justice. This happens when our hearts are directed by mercy. This happens when we walk through every day with God as our companion.

This booklet contains five sessions, each of which is designed to help you to think about how you and your church may live as God's people right where you are.

Notice how each small footstep helps to blot out the injustice. One step may not get rid of the injustice completely, but even small acts can make a difference.

- Activity 5.8 Pray together for the injustices on the cards you have talked about.

Begin by closing your eyes and becoming aware of God's presence in the room with you. Turn your focus on him.

Pray silently asking God to intervene in the injustices you have talked about.

Then pray for the footsteps. Ask God to make some of those footsteps possible. Ask him to show you if he is calling you to take any of these steps. You may pray for this out loud as a group, or silently.

Then wait in prayerful silence. Listen for God. Conclude by resting quietly before God.

- Activity 5.9 Talk about any thoughts or insights you had during your time of prayer.

As a group, consider if there is one small footstep that you may be able to take. Consider how and when you may be able to take that step.

After being let out of prison, Peter and the other disciples do not run and hide. Instead they listen to the Angel and go back to telling people about Jesus. In this passage, the religious leaders are in charge: they have the power. Yet Peter and the other disciples do what they can: they take a stand *for* God.

Even our small steps can make a difference when we take a stand for God.

- Activity 5.6 Talk about any injustices you can think of in your local area. What conduct is unfair? What takes away human dignity? What damages the environment? What dishonours God? Try to think of small issues as well as large ones.

Write each injustice on one of the dark coloured A5 cards. Scatter these injustice cards around on the floor or on a table top so that each can be seen.

- Activity 5.7 Select 2-3 of these injustices to talk about. What could you do, either as individuals or as a church, in response to each injustice?

As you think of a response to the injustice, write or draw a picture of that response on a footprint post-it note or card and attach it to the top of the injustice card.



As you add footprints to the injustice card, the injustice should slowly be covered over by the footprints.

Session Contents and Structure

The sessions in this booklet are designed for group study and consist primarily of activities for you to engage in as a group. In between the activities are short explanatory paragraphs that are meant to guide your sessions. You may want to read these paragraphs aloud, or the group leader may summarise them briefly.

Each session is divided into three sections. The first section is called *Welcome and Worship* - all of the sessions open and conclude with worship. Worshipping God together honours God. It also reminds us that our sessions are about our spiritual growth and opens us to the work of the Holy Spirit.

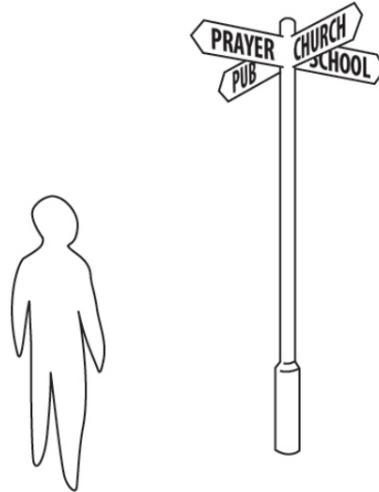
The next part of each session is called *Reflecting Together*. Here you will find opportunities to talk about your faith and what you believe. The final section, *Responding*, helps you to relate your thoughts about your faith to your own discipleship. It allows space for personal reflection and includes the closing worship.

At the very beginning of each session, you will also see a section labelled *Resources*. This provides a list of items you will need for that session. The group leader may provide the items in the list, or you may divide responsibility for these items among the members of your group.

Session 1

God at Work Among Us

How is God already at work where you live?



Resources

For this session you will need:

- A large copy of the painting *Holy Trinity* by Sandro Botticelli
- The music & words to 'Father, We Love You' by Donna Adkins.
- One Bible per person
- A map of your local area
- A flip chart or 2 large sheets of paper, and markers
- Gold foil covered chocolate coins, or something comparable, to represent treasure
- Small post-it notes or sticky labels to attach to the gold coins

Responding

The scale of injustice in our world can feel overwhelming. We can feel powerless in the face of so much injustice. We are small. But God can and does use small things.

- Activity 5.5 Read Acts 5.17-32 out loud as a drama. Give the following parts to people (the verses in brackets indicate where each character speaks):

The Angel (vs 20)

The Officer (vs 23)

The Reporter (vs. 25)

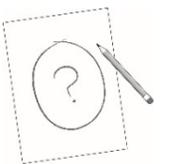
The High Priest (vs.28)

Peter (vs.29-32)

The Narrator

Afterwards, talk *briefly* about what motivates the High Priest and the other religious leaders, and especially about what motivates Peter and the other disciples. Why do they do what they do?

Draw or write your thoughts here:



God wants us to prioritise justice and righteousness in our lives and in the life of our church. See Amos 5.23-24 in the box below.

**Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to
the music of your instruments!
But let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness
like a never-failing stream!**
Amos 5.23-24 (NIV)

- Activity 5.2 Talk about Amos 5.23-24. These verses are addressed to God's people.

What do you notice in these verses?



What do these verses mean for how you live as a Christian and for the life of your church community?

Many of us have experienced injustice in our personal lives.

- Activity 5.3 Tell each other stories about your own experiences of injustice. For these stories, try especially to think of small acts of injustice (and not just legal matters).
- Activity 5.4 Think a little more about these stories and talk about how they impacted you. How did they make you feel?

Welcome and Worship

Place the copy of the painting *Holy Trinity* by Sandro Botticelli in a spot where everyone can see it. This painting helps us to think about the trinity. Notice how in the painting, the viewer has to look through the Spirit and the Son to see the Father.

Today's session considers how God is present and at work in our world. Using the painting, meditate quietly and prayerfully for 2-3 minutes on how the Son reveals God to us, and how the Spirit makes God present to us.



Close the meditation by singing together 'Father, We Love You' by Donna Adkins.

Reflecting Together

In this unit of the Blessing Course, we will use the first 5 chapters of Acts to help us think about God's mission and our participation in it. It is important to remember that *the work of mission is first and foremost the work of God*. It is our privilege to join in that mission.

Acts 1.1-9 tells the story of how, after his resurrection, Jesus leaves his disciples and ascends into heaven.

- Activity 1.1 Ask everyone to imagine themselves as one of Jesus' disciples in the days following Jesus' resurrection.

Read Acts 1.1-9 out loud slowly.

Then talk together briefly about the following:

How does Jesus' departure make you feel?

What promise does Jesus give (verses 4-5)? Why is this promise important?

In verse 8, what does Jesus want you to do after he leaves?

God does not leave us alone in this world. He sends his Spirit, and his Spirit helps us to point to God in 'Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'



- Activity 5.1 Look through the newspapers and find 3 stories that reflect some form of injustice in our world: one in your local area, one that is national, and one that is international. The injustice may have to do with treatment of people or of the environment.



Injustice in our local area:

Injustice in our nation:

Injustice in our world:

Although the world around us may be full of injustice, our God is a God of justice. He calls upon us, his people, 'to act justly' in our world (recall your discussion of Micah 6.8 in Session 3; also see this verse in the Introduction to this booklet).

Welcome and Worship



Listen to or sing together 'I, The Lord of Sea and Sky' by Dan Schutte or 'Jesus Christ is Waiting' by John Bell.

Then say together the following prayer:

**Living God,
deliver us from a world without justice
and a future without mercy.**

**In your mercy, establish justice,
and in your justice, remember the mercy
revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Amen.*

*'For Justice', Prayers for Personal Situations, The Church of England,
<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/topical-prayers/prayers-personal-situations>

In this session, you will think about the first of these places: about your church's 'Jerusalem'.

- Activity 1.2 'Jerusalem' refers to your local area. How would you describe the local area or parish of your church? Who are the main groups of people? Where are some of the places that people meet? Does the area include schools, offices, shops, parks, countryside, etc.? Use a local map to help you with this.

- Activity 1.3 What are some of the positive things about your local area? For example, what helps people to live well? Where do people enjoy meeting? In what ways is the local environment looked after? Who cares for people in need? Where are the gathering places that promote community?

You could call these positive things the *assets* of your area.

Make a list of these assets on the flip chart. This is list 1.

Some assets of my local area:



Reflecting Together

Our society does not always reflect the good that God desires for humanity and for his creation. Injustice is sometimes built into the system around us. The clothes we buy and the coffee that we drink may keep other people in poverty. We damage the environment because it is less important to us than having a fast internet signal, buying cheap food, or the inconvenience of carrying around a reusable bag.

- Activity 1.4 Use your list to talk about how God may already be at work in your local area. How might God be seen in your area? Where do you see signs of his justice being expressed? Of his mercy being displayed?

Add any new ideas to your list on the flip chart.

Your church is not separate from your local area. **Your church is God's people *in the midst* of that area.** Your church helps to make God visible in your place.

Jesus became one of us – he became human – so that we might meet God. In the same way, you, the church, are placed in your particular area so that you may point to God's presence in that place.

- Activity 1.5 On a separate sheet of flip chart paper, list the ways your church relates to your local area. This is list 2.

Include on the list:

Individuals in your church who are involved in the local area.

Groups of people in your church who are involved in the local area.

Ways in which your church community is already involved in the area.

Ways in which your church building is used by local people.

Session 5

Challenging Injustice

What might your church do to stand up for God's justice and goodness in this world?



Resources

For this session you will need:

- The music and words for 'I, The Lord of Sea and Sky' by Dan Schutte or 'Jesus Christ is Waiting' by John Bell.
- A variety of recent newspapers, both national and local (or you may prefer to look at national and local news sites on smart phones, tablets, or i-pads).
- One Bible per person
- 5-8 dark coloured A5 cards
- Footprint shaped post-it notes in a light colour; or alternatively create your own set of footprints out of light coloured card, and blu-tack

Pray for the things you have been talking about in Activity 4.8. Begin by praying silently, listening for God. Then give your ideas to God in prayer.

Close your prayer time by saying the following together:

**The love of God be the passion
in our hearts.
The joy of God our strength
when times are hard.
The presence of God a peace
that overflows.
The Word of God the seed
that we might sow.
Amen.***

*Adapted from John Birch, 'Contemporary Prayers of Blessing', Faith and Worship,
http://www.faithandworship.com/blessings_and_benedictions.html

Responding

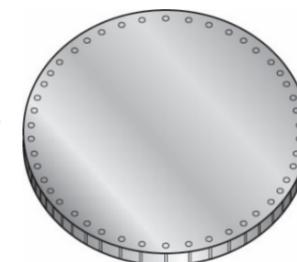
You should now have two lists:

- List 1 is for your local area
- List 2 is for your church

Both lists describe some of the assets or 'treasures' of your local area and of your church.

These treasures may give you a glimpse of how God is already at work in your local area. They also show how the Spirit may be using your church to point to God in the place where you live.

- Activity 1.6 On the post-it notes or sticky labels, draw a symbol or write one word to represent the treasures in your local area and in your church, using your two lists.



Write one treasure per post-it note and use it to label one gold coin. Everyone should help with this.

- Activity 1.7 Make two piles of coins: one pile of local treasures and one pile of church treasures.

Compare the two piles using the following questions:

What are some of the links between the two?

Are there treasures in the local pile that your church may join in with or encourage for the good of all?

Are there treasures in the church pile that could be developed?

Pray together for these treasures.

- Activity 1.8 Distribute the gold coins so that everyone has a similar number of treasures.



Open your hands, turn your palms upwards, and rest the gold coins on your palms. Your open palms represent your desire to give these treasures to God to bless.

Close your eyes and pray silently for the treasures in your hands. Give thanks for the treasures and then ask for God to act through them.

- Activity 4.7 The phrase that is used for this is: *belonging before believing*. People get to know Christians and the church community, who in turn help them to meet Jesus.

If most people form relationships with people in the church before they believe in the Christian faith, what might this mean for the life and growth of your church?



To encounter Jesus, people need you to invite them in.

- Activity 4.8 Return to the responses you wrote out in Activity 4.5. Pick out one or two of the things on list 1 that you think you could help out with. Talk together as a group about specific steps that you could take to strengthen these parts of your church life.

Draw or write your thoughts here:



Responding

How do people meet Jesus? Often through relationships. How does the church grow? Through relationships.

- Activity 4.6 Back in your pairs, talk about how you met some of your own friends. Was it through a common activity? Were you introduced by someone else?

Next take a few minutes to talk about this as a whole group. What might this mean for how you can help others to meet Jesus?

Draw or write some of your thoughts here:

Most people become part of the church community before they believe in Jesus. They *belong* to the church before they fully *believe*.



Relationships really do come first.

Allow about 3 minutes for this time of prayer, so that everyone has time to pray for all of their treasures.

Ask one person to close your prayer time by praying out loud, giving thanks for all of the treasures and what they suggest about God at work in your church and your local area.

Take home the treasures you are holding. Use the gold coins to pray for the treasures in the coming week - then eat the coins!

Most of the next session is a prayer walk. Before finishing this current session, you may want to select 2 or 3 places to visit and pray for during the prayer walk. *See the beginning of the next session for guidance on this.*

Please come to the next session prepared to take a 40-45 minute walk around your local area, visiting the places you have selected.

Session 2

Praying in the Midst of Your Local Area

To be the church is to be the people who stand for God, speak to God and ask God to act in your local area. An important way to do this is through prayer.

Resources

For this session you will need:

- A Bible
- Refreshments, both food and drink, for the end of the session.
- The heart of this session is a prayer walk around your local area. Prepare this beforehand by choosing, at the most, 2 or 3 local public places to pray for. You may want to choose the places as a group. Some appropriate places may include: a public gathering place such as a pub, café or a park; a school; a historic building or site; a doctor's surgery; or a place where your church is at work in the local area such as a foodbank.



When Peter and John tell the religious leaders about Jesus, they speak out of their own experience. Acts 4.13 calls them 'companions' of Jesus. What they say grows out of their relationship with Jesus.

- Activity 4.4 Turn back to the person next to you, and repeat Activity 4.2, but this time tell that person about Jesus. Use a few of the items on the post-it notes to guide you.

The heart of the Christian gospel is a person, Jesus. When you talk about your faith in Jesus with people who are not part of the church, you engage in *evangelism*. Evangelism means telling others about Jesus.

- Activity 4.5 The aim of evangelism is to help people meet Jesus. How might the people of your church do that?

To think about this, on the A3 sheet of paper, write responses to the following:

1. What are the people in your church doing to help others meet Jesus?

2. What are the people in your church doing that might not help others to meet Jesus?

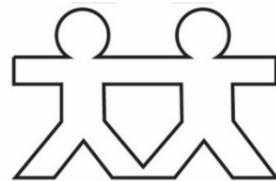
- Activity 4.1 Ask one person to read Acts 4.1-13 out loud while everyone else listens. Afterwards discuss:

What is Peter's response (see especially verses 8-12)?

How might Peter and John provide a model for us?

Peter and John do not hesitate to tell the people they meet about their friend and Saviour, Jesus.

- Activity 4.2 Think of a friend whom you enjoy being with. Turn to the person next to you and tell that person about your friend, in 2 minutes or less. Then let your partner tell you about her or his friend.



- Activity 4.3 What kinds of things did you talk about? Time spent together? Why you like the person? How you met? Talk about this as a group.

On the post-it notes, write or draw in large letters the things you have talked about. Write or draw one item per post-it note. For example, one post-it note might say 'we go to the pub together', another might show a picture of 2 people chatting, 'while a third might say 'I can rely on him'.

Attach the post-it notes to a wall or table where everyone can see them.

You will walk to these places as a group during the session. The whole prayer walk should take about 40-45 minutes, so select places and design a route that can be walked in this time. Prepare in advance some maps showing your chosen places, including the route that you will take.

If you do not normally meet in a place that is convenient for reaching some of your chosen locations, you may want to change your meeting venue for this session.

Use the session contents to guide your prayers.

- If your group includes people who are not mobile, you may alternatively want to create 4 or 5 physical representations of local places. Please be creative with this, and put effort and time into it. You may want to ask different members of the group to prepare these physical representations in advance and to bring them along to the session.

At the beginning of this session, set up these physical representations around the place where you meet so that the people in the group may move between them and use them to pray for the local area. Follow the session in this booklet as written, but instead of going outside, use the physical representations as the sites for the prayer walk.

Welcome and Worship

Begin the session in your normal (or selected alternative) venue.

Start the session with a *very brief* meditation (not more than 5 minutes) on Acts 2.36-47. This passage comes at the end of Peter's Pentecost sermon. It describes people's reactions to the sermon and tells the story of the beginning of the church.

Ask everyone to close their eyes and choose one person to read Acts 2.36-42 out loud. Afterwards ask everyone to state a word or two that describes what the people did in response to Peter's sermon.

Notice that the believers of the early church did not hide their faith. Have everyone close their eyes again and choose one person to read Acts 2.43-47 out loud. Afterwards ask everyone to keep their eyes closed and to pray out one or two words of praise to God for his work in the church.

Reflecting Together

The people of the early church were visible in the midst of their community.

- Activity 2.1 Talk together for 3-4 minutes about the difference between church activities that ask other people to 'come to us in our church' and activities in which we 'go to where the people are'. How does each type of activity help others to see God?

Welcome and Worship

Give everyone a blank A5 card and a few markers or coloured pens. Tell them that you will play a worship song and that as they listen they should respond to the music by doodling on their card.

 Play 'Tell Out My Soul' by Timothy Dudley-Smith. (This song is a version of the Magnificat from Luke 1.46-55). Encourage everyone to respond on their card. They may doodle pictures, words, or simply express themselves using colours, in response to the song.

Afterwards, pray together as a group. Ask everyone to give thanks or pray for one picture that they have doodled. The prayers should be short, and may simply be one word or phrase.

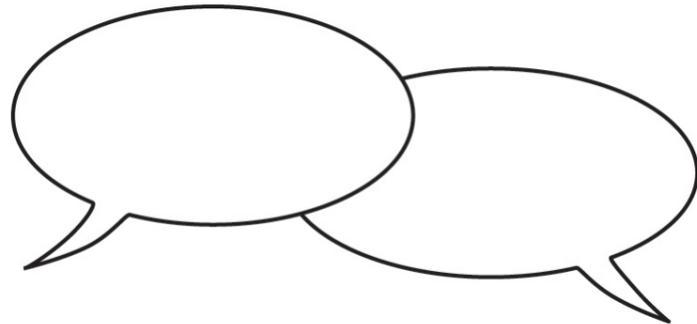
Reflecting Together

Acts 4.1-13 continues the story of the healing of the lame man, from Acts 3, that you looked at in Session 3. In Acts 3, you saw how the lame man experienced poverty on many levels, and Peter brought healing to him. In Acts 4, Peter is questioned about what he has done.

Session 4

Sharing Faith in Your Local Area

Your church is called to share the love of God and the good news of Jesus in your local area. How might you do that?



Resources

For this session you will need:

- The music and words for 'Tell Out My Soul' by Timothy Dudley-Smith.
- A5 blank cards, one per person, and markers or coloured pens
- One Bible per person
- Post-it notes and pens
- An A3 sheet of paper and markers

In this session, you will go to where the people are in your local area by walking around your local area and praying for a few locations.



- Activity 2.2 Talk together *briefly* about the places you have chosen to pray for. What roles do they play in your local area? How might you want to pray for each of them?

Make a list of prayer points here:

Place 1

Place 2

Place 3

- Activity 2.3 Hand out the maps and explain the route. Agree a simple way to pray for each place when you arrive. For example, you do not need to bow your heads or close your eyes. Instead, look around and pray for what you see. Ask God to bless it. It's up to you whether you pray in pairs or as one group. Decide who will lead prayers in each place.



- Activity 2.4 Walk to your first location. As you walk, look around to see where God might be at work.

When you arrive, take a few minutes to look at your chosen place and talk about what you notice. Look for any signs, sounds, sights and smells to guide your prayers.

You may want to come up with your own prayers for the location. The following are a few suggestions if you would like some guidance.

You could begin your prayer time by reading out loud: 'The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.' (John 1.14, *The Message*).

Pray for the place by saying: 'Thank you God for being at work here. We pray for you to bless all the people who use this place. We ask for you to protect them and to make them aware of your love. We pray for you to be honoured in this place, and ask for you to show us how to be part of that.'

Then use the prayer points that you listed in Activity 2.2 to pray specifically for this place. You may also use the things that you noticed when you first arrived to guide your prayers.

Conclude by blessing the place: 'May the LORD bless you and keep you. May the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. Amen.' (Numbers 6.24-26, NIV).

- Activity 2.5 Walk to your second and third locations, and repeat Activity 2.4.

Afterwards, return back to your meeting venue.

How is your church living out its faith in your local area, especially in relation to all types of poverty that you have been talking about in this session?

- Activity 3.9 Ask everyone to bring before God in prayer the person or situation they have drawn on their card. Pray together silently for 2-3 minutes, giving everyone time to do this.



Conclude by singing together prayerfully 'Beauty for Brokenness' (God of the Poor) by Graham Kendrick.

Take your card home and continue to pray for the person or situation on your card.

Responding

Facing and responding to poverty can feel overwhelming. We may feel small and powerless. It is important to recall that God is the one who is big, not us. We are called to live for God.

- Activity 3.7 Look at the verse in the box below. It is the same verse that is used in the Introduction to this unit of the Blessing Course. (You may want to look back at the Introduction).

**He has shown you, oh people,
what is good.
And what does the Lord require
of you?
To act justly, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your
God.**
Micah 6.8 (NIV)

Based on this verse, how is God calling you to live? What does this suggest about your own response to poverty?

- Activity 3.8 Look again at Acts 3.1-8. Notice how Peter and John respond to the poverty of the man at the gate. In verse 6, Peter says, 'what I have I give you.' Also read verse 16, where Peter makes it clear what he has: faith in Jesus.

Responding

Share refreshments together.



- Activity 2.6 As you eat and drink, talk together about your experience:

What did you notice about the places you prayed for?

How might you continue to pray for these places?

Conclude with this prayer from St Columba:

**My dearest Lord,

Be Thou a bright flame before us.
Be Thou a guiding star above us.
Be Thou a smooth path beneath us.
Be Thou a kindly shepherd behind us.

Today and evermore.
Amen.***

*Adapted from St Columba, 'Christ with Us', in *A Celtic Psalter*, ed. By David Adam (London: SPCK, 2001), p.102.

Session 3

Loving Everyone in Your Local Area

**In this session we think about how to love
the people around us who may find life
difficult.**



Resources

For this session you will need:

- The music for 'Beauty for Brokenness' (God of the Poor) by Graham Kendrick.
- One Bible per person
- A large copy of the Church Urban Fund's 'web of poverty'. This may be accessed at: www.cuf.org.uk/web-of-poverty
You may also want to print our copies for members of the group
- A blank index card for each person in the group, and markers

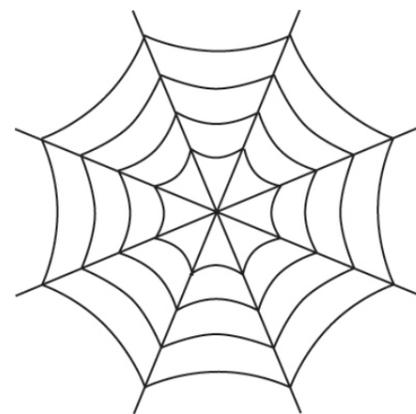
- Activity 3.4 Do you know of anyone, or a group of people, in your local area who may be experiencing one of these forms of poverty? Use the situation of the lame man and the web of poverty as guides to help you talk about this.
- Activity 3.5 Give everyone a blank index card and a pen or marker. On your card, write a word or draw a picture to represent the situation of someone you know, or know about, who may be experiencing any form of poverty. You do not need to share what you have put on the card if you do not want to.
- Activity 3.6 Use the 2 story cards to talk about how your church might respond to different forms of poverty. If group members want to talk about what they have written on their cards in Activity 3.5, you may prefer to talk about two of their cards instead. But please do not make anyone feel as if they have to talk about their card.

For each card ask: 'What might love look like for this person?'
'How might the church help this person to know how valuable they are to God?'

Your aim here is not to provide a solution to the person's poverty, but rather to begin to see that person through the eyes of the God of love.

- Activity 3.3 The Church Urban Fund has created a 'web of poverty' that shows the complexity of poverty. Look at this together. What do you notice? How might the lame man's poverty be described, using this web?

Draw or write your ideas here:



This web of poverty divides poverty into three categories:

- poverty of resources
- poverty of relationships
- poverty of identity.

People may experience poverty in any of these categories. The Church Urban Fund says that poverty is at its most extreme when people experience poverty in all three categories.

- Create 2 story cards (on index cards), each describing the situation of one person who is struggling. You may want to use the situations of people in your parish or local area (but keep the stories anonymous). Alternatively, you may want to use two of the people described below:

Person 1: Norma lost her husband 4 years ago and is retired. She is alone all week and only sees people when she goes out to do her shopping. Then she talks constantly to whoever will listen.

Person 2: Stan took drugs when he was young and ended up in jail. He is now middle-aged and, thanks to rehabilitation, off drugs. But he never learned a trade and finds it difficult to hold down work. He has a very low view of himself.

Person 3: Gilly is a single mum with three primary school-aged kids by two partners. She has an unreliable zero hours contract job. What little money she has she spends on junk food for herself and the kids, 'to make us all feel happy'.

Person 4: George is an angry young man. He is in a wheelchair and doesn't work. His anger has driven away his family and he lives alone in a council flat on benefits. He tells everyone he meets about the meaningless of his life, and if they suggest otherwise, they encounter the sharp end of his tongue.

Welcome and Worship

Pray briefly, asking the Holy Spirit to lead you in a time of prayerful meditation.

 Listen quietly, as a prayer, to 'Beauty for Brokenness' (God of the Poor) by Graham Kendrick.

Then meditate prayerfully on Acts 3.1-8 using the form of *lectio divina* provided below. You will need to read the passage out loud 3 times.

For the first reading: Close your eyes and step inside the story. As you listen, imagine the place, the sounds, the actions, the characters – all the elements that would make the story real to you. How does the story make you feel?

Read Acts 3.1-8 out loud slowly for the first time. Allow 1 minute of silence afterwards.

For the second reading: Keep your eyes open and follow the reading in your Bible. What might it mean? What does it suggest about God? Read Acts 3.1-8 out loud for the second time. Allow 1 minute of silence afterwards.

For the third reading: Pray about something you have noticed in the passage. As you listen, bring the thing you have noticed before God and remain open to anything God might say to you.

Read Acts 3.1-8 for the third time. Allow 2 minutes of silence afterwards.

Then take 2-3 minutes to talk together about your responses to the passage. But don't dwell on this. Enable people to speak if they want to, but also allow the meditation to remain personal.

Reflecting Together

- Activity 3.1 What do you think of when you hear the word 'poverty'?

In the New Testament, poverty is much bigger than a lack of money. The poor are those who lack what is needed for basic living. To live in poverty means to be poor in finances, to lack education, to live with poor health, to be isolated, or to have no power to make a difference to your situation. It may also mean living in spiritual poverty, not having awareness of God.

Poverty is much the same today.

- Activity 3.2 What types of poverty does the lame man, at the centre of the Acts 3.1-8 story, live with?

This man experiences poverty on many levels. He is a beggar – he does not have enough resources to live on. He is a cripple – his health prevents him from taking care of himself. He is alone at the gate – he does not have relationships strong enough to ensure his daily care. His begging appears to be routine and wretched suggesting that he has a low view of himself - in verse 4, Peter has to ask the man to look up at him.