

The Lies We Tell Ourselves: Ending Comfortable Myths About Poverty

“Churches have a special interest in speaking truthfully about poverty. The systematic misrepresentation of the poorest in society is a matter of injustice which all Christians have a responsibility to challenge.”

1. ‘They’ are lazy and don’t want to work

Child poverty is most commonly blamed, by churchgoers and the general public alike, on “their parents not wanting to work”. Yet the majority of children in poverty are from working households. In-work poverty is now more common than out-of-work poverty.

2. ‘They’ are addicted to drink and drugs

Churchgoers and the wider public cite addiction as the second most common cause of child poverty. While addiction is devastating for the families and communities touched by it, fewer than 4% of benefit claimants report any form of addiction.

3. ‘They’ are not really poor – they just don’t manage their money properly

Nearly 60% of the UK population believes that the poor could cope if only they handled their money properly. The experience of living on a low income is one of constant struggle to manage limited resources, with small events having serious consequences. Statistics show that the poorest spend their money carefully, limiting themselves to the essentials.

4. ‘They’ are on the fiddle

Over 80% of the UK population believe that “large numbers falsely claim benefits”. Benefit fraud has decreased to historically low levels - the kind of levels that the tax system can only dream of. Less than 0.9% of the welfare budget is lost to fraud.

5. ‘They’ have an easy life

Over half the British public believes benefits are too high. Government ministers speak of families opting for benefits as a lifestyle choice. Yet we know that benefits do not meet minimum income standards. They have halved in value relative to average incomes over the last 30 years. We know the ill and the unemployed are the people least satisfied and happy with life.

6. ‘They’ caused the deficit

The proportion of our tax bills spent on welfare has remained stable for the last 20 years. It is ridiculous to argue, as some have, that increasing welfare spending is responsible for the current deficit. Public debt is a problem but why is it being laid at the feet of the poorest?

Read the new report from the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland and find more resources at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truthandlies



The Bible, poverty and truth-telling

A report from
the Baptist Union of Great Britain,
the Methodist Church,
the Church of Scotland
and the United Reformed Church

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**Four bible passages and questions to get you
thinking about poverty and truth telling**

Poverty: good news, truth and lies

Luke 4: 16-19

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

- What does "good news to the poor" mean today?
- How do spiritual dynamics – the Spirit of the Lord, anointing, proclamation – link with justice?
- How do we – as individuals and churches - bring good news to people in poverty?

Mark 10

As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'⁴⁸ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'⁴⁹ Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.'

- How does the crowd following Jesus first respond to the cries of Bartimaeus? What causes their change in attitude? And how does Jesus use the crowd to meet Bartimaeus' needs?
- What attitudes exist in our church towards people in society who are marginalised?
- Which are the dominant stories in our society which drown out the less powerful ones? How can we make sure we don't only listen to the most dominant?

James 2: 1-13

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please', while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet', have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

- How might the kind of favouritism James talks about be expressed in our churches today?
- What is the link between favouritism and unbelief?
- How does this challenge us to step beyond offering charity to embracing justice? Do our churches offer charity or justice – or both?

Isaiah 59:14

Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands at a distance; for truth stumbles in the public square, and uprightness cannot enter.

- Truth stumbles in the public square: where could this vivid metaphor be applied to public debate today?
- What are the effects of truth stumbling on the life of the nation?
- Who is most affected when truth falls?
- What barriers to truth and justice do you see?

Find more resources overleaf or at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truthandlies