

# FOR THE LOVE OF GOD + -

## THE COURSE SESSION 3 RICH + POOR

[cpx.video/group3](https://cpx.video/group3)

### STARTER (5 minutes)

The title of the episode is *Rich + Poor*. Based on your own knowledge or experience, do you associate churches more with wealth creation or charitable work? Be assured: any kind of answer is welcome!



*Facilitators may like to share their own preliminary thoughts or experiences, and/or throw it open for discussion.*

### PART 1 (approximately 45 minutes total)

#### WATCH



**The Good Samaritan: How a story shaped our world** ([cpx.video/samaritan](https://cpx.video/samaritan)) (5 minutes)

**The invention of charity: Jews, Christians, and the God of the poor** ([cpx.video/charity](https://cpx.video/charity))

(7 minutes)



#### Discussion (15 minutes)

1. What are your initial impressions from these clips? Was there anything that surprised you? Was anything unclear?
2. Why do you think the story of the Good Samaritan resonates so strongly with us? Have you ever acted as a Good Samaritan (of sorts), or received care from a Good Samaritan?



*Facilitators may like to share their own preliminary thoughts or experiences, and/or throw it open for discussion. Different parts of the story will resonate with people differently—some may want to comment on religious coldness and apathy, others on the kindness they have found from others, whether religious or not.*

**Further Thoughts:** The clips first provocatively challenge the assumption that charity has always been considered a moral benefit or obligation in society. Initially, the story of the Good Samaritan, and the broader principle of caring for all who cross our paths, challenged the early Christians to establish a food roster that supported thousands of destitute people from a variety of cultural

backgrounds: Jews, Samaritans, Greeks and Romans, believers and unbelievers alike. In the early centuries this led the imperial authorities to exempt the church from paying tax, so that they could deploy all their money to maintaining the poor in society. In later eras, as only intimated here, it led to the creation of healthcare and other social goods, provided by churches and Christians. It also changed the prevailing cultural ideas around charity in ways that led to the development of institutional welfare, social security, and the like.



**WATCH** Being poor in the ancient world ([cpx.video/poverty](https://cpx.video/poverty)) (8 minutes)



**Discussion** (15 minutes)



*The following content should be presented by the facilitator, raising any questions that seem appropriate.*

### 3. Ancient norms were very different from those given to the West by the Bible:

- There was a generally accepted concept of looking after your loved ones, but not of showing compassion to the poor and marginalised.
- Plato and Plotinus—huge figures in ancient thought—used logic to argue against caring for the poor: Plato said that the poor were an unwanted blemish upon society and should be banished; Plotinus believed that the poor and downcast deserved to be poor because of their bad deeds in a previous life.
- Emperors and other wealthy benefactors did give to the needy, but only to citizens, and out of a love of honour - in order to receive public praise - rather than for the sake of the poor.
- The Stoics had a concept of courtesy which acknowledged the plight of those less fortunate but in a polite and guarded way that studiously avoided ground-level involvement.

By contrast, hundreds of biblical texts urge compassion and involvement in redressing the plight of the poor and needy. Here are just a few (facilitators may like simply to read out a selection, making any brief comments they feel appropriate about the context and content of the passages):

From the Old Testament



**Deuteronomy 24:19-22** *When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do*



*not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.*

**Proverbs 19:6** *Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done.*

**Proverbs 21:13** *Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered.*

**Proverbs 22:7-9** *The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender. Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity, and the rod they wield in fury will be broken. The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.*

**Isaiah 58:6-7** *Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

From the New Testament



**Matthew 25:31-40** *(Jesus speaking) “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”*

**James 1:27** *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world;*

**James 2:14-17** *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*



**1 John 3:16-17** *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

## PART 2 (approximately 30 minutes total)



### WATCH Why you need Christian neighbours: Faith and social capital

([cpx.video/socialcapital](https://cpx.video/socialcapital)) (5 minutes)



### Discussion (25 minutes)

1. The first clip had some inspiring ancient examples of Jews and Christians caring for the poor and marginalised in the time of antiquity. And there are several other clips from later times that are available to watch. But the last clip showed an average Australian church getting on with the business of caring for its poorer neighbours without much fuss. It might include the provision of meals or groceries, or perhaps just inclusion in social environments where conversation and care can be found. None of these things seems revolutionary; they are examples of what Francis Spufford described as “applying love in small individual practical ways”. But they nevertheless reveal that modern Christians consider the principle of the Good Samaritan has ongoing application to their lives and the life of their local Christian community.

If the “religious bump” is real, why don’t we hear about it more? And could it actually make you more favourable towards a bunch of Christians moving in down the street?

**Further Thoughts:** The statistics are revealing. Higher rates of volunteerism and charitable giving cannot be easily dismissed. It doesn’t mean that Christians are better than people who don’t believe, but they might be better than they themselves would be without their Christianity, and the church does seem to bring a positive influence upon society, especially for those on the margins of society.

2. A central issue in Christianity’s tradition of charity is the question of “motivation”: What inspires the Christian practice of caring deeply for those in need? This is one of the most misunderstood features of Christianity today. Many have said that charity motivated by “fear of hell” or “divine reward” is hardly very charitable. But this misunderstands one of the central tenets of biblical faith. The practice of love (for all) is motivated by the love God has already shown to us in Jesus Christ. Consider the passage read earlier:



**1 John 3:16-17** *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

Here it is clear that God's love—displayed in Christ's death on our behalf—is the driver for Christian behaviour. Just a few paragraphs later, the same author (the apostle John) reiterates the point:



**1 John 4:9-11** *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

Why do you think Christians sometimes have a reputation for believing that their good works—their charity for the poor, and so on—will earn them a place in heaven?

What differences might it make—practically, psychologically, and so on—to believe, in fact, that the charity we show others is inspired not by *fear of punishment or hope of reward* but by the confidence that God himself already loves us and all those around us?



*This is such a crucial issue in Christian teaching, the facilitator may wish to add their own thoughts and experiences around this topic, as well as throw it open to further conversation from the group.*

## CONCLUSION (5 minutes)



*Facilitators may like to finish up the session by reading the summary below, and then offering any other personal reflection that seems relevant.*

Charity has not always been universally practiced, or even regarded as a social good. But the early Christians, inspired by their Jewish heritage, had a strong sense of caring for the poor and needy, and they took this into all the world. There is no doubt the church also sometimes failed the ethic of the Good Samaritan. Yet the notion of charity spread beyond the walls of the church and is now seen as a universal obligation. The specifically Christian motivation for charity, however, can sometimes be lost: we are to show love toward those in need because that's how God has already treated us in sending Jesus Christ to die and rise again for our salvation. Whether or not we accept this theological motivation, this is the intellectual origin of the West's great love for charity.

## EXTRAS

For further investigation:

- To investigate how the example of the early Christians went awry,  
**WATCH** Treasures on earth: The medieval papacy and its opponents ([cpx.video/popes](#))
- To see how the idea of the Good Samaritan influenced modern healthcare,  
**WATCH** The origins of Western healthcare ([cpx.video/health](#))
- To view a story about one Christian's fight for the working poor in industrialising England,  
**WATCH** A heart for the poor: The 7th Earl of Shaftesbury ([cpx.video/shaftesbury](#))
- To learn about one man who literally moved into a leper colony,  
**WATCH** The leper priest: Father Damien of Molokai ([cpx.video/damien](#))