



Goal 1: **NO POVERTY**

The fight against poverty is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Poverty is often associated with a lack of money, but it is also about access to other goods that are important for living with dignity. Extreme poverty is a lack of vital resources. Currently, you are considered to be living in extreme poverty if you have an income of less than USD 1.90 per day, adjusted for the price level in the country you live in. This means that you don't have enough money to cover very basic needs such as food, clothing and housing. The proportion of people living in extreme poverty worldwide was more than halved between 1990 and 2015.¹ This is one of the reasons why many people believe that the Millennium Development Goals, the forerunner of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were largely achieved. In the SDGs, UN member states have set a much more ambitious goal, namely to end extreme poverty altogether. They set this goal because they believe that we now have the resources to do this.

The causes of poverty can be on an individual level (e.g. illness or substance abuse problems), on a national level (e.g. unemployment, corruption or great inequality), or on an international level (e.g. capital flight or unfair trade rules). To achieve SDG 1, we must look at all three levels. No one left behind – this is the overall vision of the SDGs and at the core of the goal of abolishing poverty. Everyone born on this earth must have the opportunity to live a good life and participate in society.

Biblical reflection

“For you always have the poor with you” (Matthew 26:11). Some interpret this as if Jesus affirms poverty as a given order of nature or as an unavoidable fate. That is clearly a misinterpretation; the fact is that Jesus here quotes Deuteronomy where this statement is followed by a clear commandment: “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land” (15:11).

The Bible presents a realistic understanding of poverty; it acknowledges that injustice and oppression often are what causes people to become poor. Especially the prophets are unambiguous when criticising the powerful who “turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right” (Isaiah 10:2). They also proclaim that God sides with the poor and defends their rights (Isaiah 1:17; 3:14–15).

Jesus clearly places himself within this prophetic tradition when announcing his vocation to “bring good news to the poor” and to “proclaim release to the captives” (Luke 4:18). To follow Jesus implies taking part in this vocation; it motivates Christians and churches to engage in action in order to eradicate poverty, acknowledging that there will always be poor with us – as long as systems and the powerful allow space for injustice and oppression.

Challenge

Is poverty a problem where you live?
Is there anything you can do to learn more about this and help reduce poverty?

Questions

- How should we interpret the statement “You always have the poor with you” today – locally and globally?
- The Bible presents poverty both as an ideal and as disgraceful suffering. How can we maintain both perspectives?

Prayer

*Lord, giver of all good things,
Teach us to be generous so that no one
need suffer from want,
Teach us to invite others in so that no
one be left behind.
Show us again that we are all your
creation, your beloved children.*

*We commit everything and everyone,
into your hands, Lord. Amen.*