

# LESSON 127 Social Justice

## GROUNDWORK

In this lesson we plan to:

- explore the meaning of justice.

## DIGGING DEEPER

*How does my community of faith work for justice?*



## Key Concept Justice

## Justice

The first element of justice is to recognise that we are totally dependant on God and must therefore place God before everything else in our lives. As a human being, you have worth and value. You have human dignity, no matter who or what you are, no matter what your religion is, or your gender, or what mix of abilities and disabilities you may have, etc. As a human being, you have human rights. To be denied one's human rights is to be denied **justice**.

Justice is about giving people what is rightfully theirs. A good way to describe justice is to say that it is about *right* relationships with other people, no matter who they are. That includes both close friends and people we don't know, even people we don't particularly like or get along with. Building up right relationships means creating the conditions between ourselves and others that will enable everyone to get along together. When relationships are right, justice is the result. You destroy justice when you destroy right relationships between yourself and other people.

### What do we spend more money on?



Labels or the fight against child labour?



Women's make-up or women's food?



Fizzy drinks or clean water?



Pets or child poverty?



- What are your initial thoughts about these pictures?
- Does the stark contrast in images help you to focus on the differences in our world? How?
- Of the choices listed, what do we spend more money on? Is this morally right?
- In your opinion, which pair of images is the cause of most concern in the world? Give reasons for your answer.
- How can you personally make a difference?

- From magazines and newspapers, see if you can come up with one other set of contrasting images.

We live in a very unjust world. However, as the following story illustrates, each one of us can make a difference if we start right here, right now.

### Story: The Starfish

A young man was walking down a deserted Mexican beach at sunset. As he walked along, he saw an old man in the distance. When he came nearer, he noticed that the old man kept bending down, picking something up and throwing it out into the water. As he moved even closer, he noticed that the old man was picking up starfish that had been washed up on the beach and, one at a time, he was throwing them back into the water.

He was puzzled. He approached the man and asked him what he was doing. 'I'm throwing these starfish back into the ocean,' the old man said. 'You see, it's low tide right now and all of these starfish have been washed up on to the shore. If I don't throw them back into the sea, they'll die up here from lack of oxygen.' 'I understand,' said the younger man, 'but there must be thousands of starfish on this beach. You can't possibly get to all of them. There are simply too many. And don't you realise this is probably happening on hundreds of beaches up and down this coast? Don't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?'

The old man smiled, bent down and picked up yet another starfish. As he threw it back into the sea, he replied, 'Made a difference to that one!'

### A World Divided

Our world is divided by enormous wealth on the one hand and great poverty on the other. From the 'wealthy' north to the 'poor' south, we can literally draw a line to show the division.

In 1984, Bob Geldof and Midge Ure brought the Band Aid experience to the world with the release of the song 'Do They Know It's Christmas?', which raised fifteen million euro for famine victims in Ethiopia. This was followed by Live Aid, which in turn raised over one hundred million euro. Similarly, 'Comic Relief' and 'Red Nose Day' raised even more funds.

In 2005, twenty years after Band Aid, Bob Geldof and others organised another major event: Live 8. The injustice caused by poverty and debt remained as fundamental as ever. Live 8 was planned in an effort to urge governments to act. Geldof stressed that the event was about *justice*, not charity. He said:

*'This is not Live Aid 2. These concerts are the start point for the long walk to justice, the one way we can all make our voices heard in unison. This is without doubt a moment in history where ordinary people can grasp the chance to achieve something truly monumental and demand from the eight world leaders at G8 an end to poverty. The G8 leaders have it within their power to alter history. They will only have the will to do so if tens of thousands of people show them that enough is enough. By doubling aid, fully cancelling debt, and delivering trade justice for Africa, the G8 could change the future for millions of men, women and children. Live 8 has always been about combining political, public and media pressure to make poverty history.'*

*Note: The G8 is a meeting or summit that brings together the leaders of eight of the world's most powerful countries – the USA, Canada, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia. In 2005, Britain's then prime minister, Tony Blair, hosted the summit. The Live 8 concert was held at the same time so that the leaders would know that the world was watching and waiting for their plan.*