

Session 2

Defend the Cause of the Poor (Psalm 72)

Focus

To initiate a discussion about poverty and wealth, causes and solutions.

Preparation

- Send invitations and post announcements as needed.
- Refer to “For each session you will need” on page 4. Use the points as a checklist for this session. Arrive early at the meeting place and make sure everything is set up and laid out in the order you and the group will need the copies/books/materials/lists.
- If you held a previous session, make any needed adjustments and review the notes from that session. Are there any tasks outstanding? Any changes to the timelines or sequences? Some groups will want to spend more time discussing the Bible, the personal stories, facts or programs, so use the material selectively as it fits the interests of your group.
- Remember to invite the timekeeper and recorder(s) to do their tasks.
- If you select readers in advance, make sure that they have the opportunity to prepare the assigned selections.

Welcome

If this is a second session, when you welcome the group, briefly summarize, in two or three sentences, what happened at the previous session. Then invite the group to be seated and centered.

Opening Prayer

The leader (or a designated participant) begins:

(L) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **(All)** And also with you.

The leader invites people to greet one or two persons next to them, exchanging names and the peace.

(L) We have greeted each other with God’s name and God’s peace. Let us now pray in that same peace together:

Gracious God, your name is justice; your name is love. Continue to grace us and strengthen us to grow in your likeness. Make the cause of your poor people our cause, and draw us more closely to you and to all whom you love. Help us to act with courage, with faithfulness and with compassion this day and every day. We ask this in the name of your only begotten, who lives and reigns with you, united in the love of your Holy Spirit, now and always. **(All)** Amen.

God’s Story

Double check to make sure that there are enough Bibles.

Then, **share the following information** about Psalm 72 in these or your own words:

Psalm 72 is one of the hymns that was probably written for a royal coronation in the line of David, perhaps Solomon’s, and may have been used for a number of royal coronations in Jerusalem.



A central theme is that the ruler is responsible for justice for poor people and the ones who are otherwise without any help. In this, the ruler is acting on God's behalf, and on behalf of the whole people, to do the will and purpose of God in the world.

Other nations are called to honor the ruler, not only for his military prowess, but because of his works of justice.

Let's close our eyes and listen to each of the petitions as we pray this psalm-prayer for God's justice.



Read (or have a previously designated person read) the portions of the psalm in the “Defend the Cause of the Poor” handout (folder pocket) clearly and deliberately. Pause for a moment after the reading.

Then invite the entire group to turn to their handouts and pray the psalm out loud in unison. Keep your own voice strong and deliberate, but not overpowering, to help the group stay together (or ask the reader to do so).

After a brief pause for reflection, **ask the group** to try to recall (without looking) and say out loud in their own words what the petitions were in the psalm. Write (or ask the recorder to write) them on newsprint.

After you have done this, **ask them** to check their recollections against the psalm itself in the Bible. What differences did they note? What commonalities did they find among the recollections or the restatements? Try to group the petitions broadly as stated by the group.

Encourage discussion:

- Who is referred to in the petitions?
- What is asked for them?
- We have all heard of the “divine right of kings.” In this psalm, what is the real role and “right” of the ruler and where does it come from?
- What do you think the psalmist means when using the word “justice?”

Make sure that the **highlights are noted down**.

Then, invite the group to divide up into small sized units. Each unit should have paper and a pencil or marker to write down a short prayer to God for justice and righteousness. Tell the group that this can be very simple and unpolished.

Ask them to think about what content they want to put into the notion of justice (what are they *really* asking for) and who are they asking to be empowered? Just the ones in high offices? Others? Who? And how? Let them know how much time they have (it should be fairly brief or they will get caught up in a big discussion).

After time is called, ask the individual groups to **share their prayers** with the whole group, and post the prayers where they can later be seen and collected. Are there any commonalities? Major differences? Have these noted down.

Personal Stories

Ask four readers to read the first four personal stories from the handout previously distributed, with a pause between each one. Before they begin, ask the group to listen, rather than read along. Then ask each person to read one sentence of the “Ethiopian Voices.”

Ask the group to reflect together on the following questions:

- Why do they think that the tellers of these stories are in the situations they are?
- What would it take to change their conditions?
- What is the role of government/society/others to provide assistance and help people move to self-sufficiency?
- What business is it of *ours*? (Note that different members of the group may have different ideas as to just *who* the *we/us* is here.)



Make a written record jotting down the basic thoughts and phrases.

Stories of Poverty and Wealth

Ask members of the group to read out loud each of the statements in “Stories of Poverty and Wealth.”

Initiate a discussion:

- Which statements stir up thoughts or feelings in you? Which ones surprise you? Why?
- Psalm 72 keeps referring to poor people. The ruler is bound to respond to poor people when they call. This is a God-given responsibility. Who would you say are the “poor people” in today’s world? How would you describe these people? What are their needs? Are they different than your needs? How?
 - If we are true to the vision of the psalm, what would you say poor people’s claims are on government and society?
 - What special claim do hungry and poor people have on us, a faith community that generally is among the economic and political “haves?”
- Some people say that the golden rule is “The one who has the gold makes the rules” instead of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” How are these two rules different? To what extent are they both true; guides for action?

Ask the recorder to note the answers.

Programs That Respond

The major domestic and international anti-hunger programs are briefly described at www.hungernomore.org. A list for poverty might additionally include housing, education, transportation and health care programs. Since emphases change over time as federal and state programs and funding change, consult www.bread.org for up-to-date policy information.

Copy the programs you would like the group to discuss and hand them out. Ask whether anyone has a personal experience or general knowledge about each program. How do these programs help prevent hunger and poverty or not? Why are they successful, or not?

Our Story

Refer the group to “Our Story” in the handout. This is a good time to remind the group of (and introduce newcomers to) the purpose of this study – hearing and sharing God’s call and responding. Refresh your memory by looking at both the introduction to this guide and the notes from the previous session.

As the group looks at the suggestions for action in the handout, read them out loud. Ask what other ideas the group might have for action.



Start with a “teaser” question. For example “what would happen if for every night for one week, our family....”

- Read and prayed about one news story
- Skipped meat in a meal and put the saved dollars aside
- Tried to imagine the poor at the top of the pyramid rather than the bottom
- Tried to influence one of our political leaders and talked about it as a grace before dinner.

See how many ideas the group can come up with in a few minutes and then see if any of them seem to “click,” and might lead to actual commitments by one or more participants. Write items people have committed to down on newsprint. Ask the group to support their efforts in prayer during the coming week.

Reflection and Closing Prayer

Invite the group to center themselves in God for the closing reflection and prayer. After the group is settled, have two designated readers read parts of the following adaptation of Psalm 72 in tandem with the “Ethiopian” story from “Personal Stories” in the handout, as follows:

<i>Reader I</i>	We are left tied like straw. What is life when there is no friend or food?
<i>Reader II</i>	May we defend the cause of the poor of the people, Give deliverance to the needy and crush the oppressor.
<i>Reader I</i>	We are above the dead and below the living, We simply watch those who eat.
<i>Reader II</i>	For we deliver the needy when they call, The poor and those who have no helper.
<i>Reader I</i>	It is like sitting and dying alive, We have become empty like a hive.
<i>Reader II</i>	Give to your people your justice, O God, And to their children, your righteousness.

After a moment of reflection, ask two participants at random to take the newsprint with the commitments on it to the center of the group and hold the sheet(s). Ask the participants to join in prayer:

(L) Let us pray. O God, you are our God. We are seeking to do your will. Help us to open our hearts, and to stand with and for those who are your special portion. Support us this week in our commitments, and in all we do or undertake in your name. Give to your people your justice, O God, and to their children your righteousness. **(All)** Amen.

Then, three times, with the whole group joining on the second and third repetition.

O God, give us – all of us – this day our daily bread. Amen.

After the Session

Collect the notes. Jot down any unanswered questions, suggestions or requests made by the group. Note anything you would particularly like to remember for the next session. List for yourself anything that needs to be communicated to the larger parish or the parish staff, including a prayer request for the assembly asking God to support the efforts of the study group and anti-hunger programs. Do a quick note to remind yourself after a day or two to think carefully about the dynamics of the group and how they might be changed, improved or supported. Take a moment to pause and thank God for being with you in leading and serving this group, and giving you the gift of being, for these moments, attentive to poor people, who are children of God as are the members of the study group.

