

The GlobalChurch Project

www.theglobalchurchproject.com



John Perkins

College and University Class Resource

This resource is designed to help your classroom discussion. It has specific application questions appropriate to local church ministry contexts. Questions are organized in themes. They are ideal for paired discussions, group-forum style discussions, and personal reflective responses. Consider using a discussion method most suitable to your classroom setting. Select questions most appropriate to your group. Consider isolating particular themes.

Materials:

1. Video: John Perkins, 70 minutes.
 - John's **experiences of poverty**
 - **God** in the **context of poverty**
 - The **gospel in poverty**
 - **Advocacy** and **defending the poor**
 - **Contextual issues**: inequality, racism, terrorism and extremist faith.
2. Scripture reference: Galatians 3:27-4:7

Preliminary discussion

1. What were the major themes in John's responses?
2. How does John describe the gospel and the impact of the gospel in poverty?
3. Discuss the difficulties of the content. What was difficult to understand? Was there anything you would like to clarify with the group?
4. Theological method: How do John's experiences influence his responses? What perspectives does he have, and what approaches does he take as he shapes his theology?

Explore and analyze

Consider isolating a particular theme of interest for your classroom discussion. You might allocate topics to particular groups or pairs. Or, raise particular questions in a forum style for group responses.

1. **Experiences of poverty:** What experiences did John draw on to explain his views and perspectives? What examples from his personal narrative shape the way John understands the gospel of Christ?
2. **God in the context of poverty:** Discuss the extent to which John's experiences of poverty influence his theology. How does John understand God in the context of poverty? What truths are specific to his own experiences?
3. **God in the context of poverty:** How does John describe the character of God in the context of poverty? How is his theology shaped and understood in the context of poverty?
4. **The gospel in poverty:** How does John explain Christ's ministry in the context of poverty? In what terms does John describe God's personal and redemptive love? How does this differ from the love humans experience from one another? How does John understand the gospel to be unique in these terms? Describe what is unique about the gospel in contexts of poverty.
6. **The gospel in poverty:** Describe the term: the holistic gospel. How is gospel "not just for the salvation of souls"? What is John criticizing about the "inefficient gospel"? What does he mean by this term?
7. **The gospel in poverty:** How does John suggest that people have misunderstood the gospel's efficiency? Explain what he means by the following statement: "the gospel doesn't itself change social situations, rather the development of our skills will". How does he suggest reconsidering "efficiency"?
8. **The gospel in poverty:** Describe Christ's ministry of reconciliation, as explained by John. What does it mean to be Christ's ambassadors in his ministry of reconciliation? Describe the gospel in these terms.
9. **The gospel in poverty - discipleship:** According to John, what is the role of discipleship in the church in contexts of poverty? Discuss examples from John's personal narrative. What does he view as the purpose of discipleship? How does he describe it to strengthen the church?
10. **Advocacy and defending the poor:** How does John describe that God advocates for equity? Describe God's reconciliatory heart through the Scriptures. How significant is Galatians 3:27-4:7?
11. **Advocacy and defending the poor:** What is the role of advocacy from Christians and churches in contexts of poverty? Describe the ways in which John's advocacy exemplifies God's concern for the poor?
12. **Advocacy and defending the poor:** How did John reflect on his experiences of harassment as opportunities for ministry? How did these experiences encourage him in his work and heart for advocacy?
13. **Advocacy and defending the poor:** "Suffering undeserved can be vicarious". Explain how John describes that through suffering we can enter into one another's sufferings. How does this example the work of Christ?
14. **Contextual issues - inequality:** How does John describe that the value of diversity is becoming evident in American society? How are multi-racial churches an encouragement to the issue of equality? How is this changing the contexts of poverty?
15. **Contextual issues - inequality:** How serious is the urban problem of inequality and materialist accumulation? How does this contribute to the global situation of poverty?
16. **Contextual issues - racism:** "There are structures of racism and inequality that need to be worked at in society." How is racism a systemic issue? How does racism and inequality pervade cultures and communities, as described by John?
17. **Contextual issues - terrorism and extremist faith:** How can churches meet violence and hatred with radical love? How does John suggest that prevention and slow discipleship can mitigate terrorism and extremist expression? What is the significance of this in contexts of poverty?

Application

Discuss the various ways in which the content of the video influences life and ministry.

1. **Experiences of poverty:** How does John's personal testimony encourage you? In what way does his narrative inspire your class?
2. **Experiences of poverty:** "In the experience of being beaten, I discovered face to face, the constitution of the bible and my own reality. I saw what was happening to me, and I saw the hatred". How does the reality of the experiences of those in poverty challenge you are your faith? How does Christ's ministry of reconciliation offer a ministry to suffering persons? How is this significant in your personal contexts?
3. **God in the context of poverty:** How does growing up, or not growing up, in the midst of poverty influence the way you understand God, societies and the world? Draw on some of your own experiences and reflect on how they have influenced your faith and doctrine.
4. **God in the context of poverty:** "I had no idea I would be so deeply informed by my past". How do you recognize your experiences to have shaped yourself Explore the impact of your own personal narratives on your communal faith? What has influenced and informed you and your personal and communal faith in Christ?
5. **God in the context of poverty:** Discuss this statement: God shows humanity the depths of his love. What implications do this have for cultural contexts of discrimination, racism, oppression and poverty? What is significant in your own ministry contexts?
6. **The gospel in poverty:** "My reaction was as deadly as the action". How do feelings of hatred between people complicate the ministry of reconciliation? How does John suggest we overcome this? What is the significance of Galatians 3:27-4:7 in these contexts?
7. **The gospel in poverty:** How are we are culturalized to an "inefficient gospel"? What is your understanding of the efficiency of the gospel? What are the challenges of presenting a holistic gospel?
8. **The gospel in poverty:** How does John encourage "loving those who hate us"? How do we overcome the barriers of hate, to love others with God's generous, redemptive and reconciliatory love? What can the gospel offer persons of Christ's grace and truth?
9. **The gospel in poverty:** How is the gospel relevant and communicated to communities in poverty? How significant and unique is the gospel in contexts of poverty? How are you engaged with ministering the gospel in poverty?
10. **Advocacy and defending the poor:** How does John's advocacy challenge in class in the area of advocacy? How does advocacy involve changing in our perspectives and reassessing how we steward our resources? Why does John exhort the church to give our "whole lives"?
12. **Advocacy and defending the poor:** "When I was beaten, I asked the Lord to help me preach a gospel that is stronger than my black interest, and that can reconcile the gospel with people to one another." How is John an example of an advocate for Christ's reconciliatory work?
13. **Advocacy and defending the poor:** Describe what it means to build a new culture: the culture that Peter was talking about as the royal priesthood and the chosen generation. How does John encourage the church in this? What does this look like in your class' personal contexts?
14. **Advocacy and defending the poor - churches:** Why does John encourage the church to become 1. urgent, and 2. committed? How can churches become more thoughtful about the past to better engage with the needs of the present?
15. **Advocacy and defending the poor - churches:** How should churches begin discussing the seeds of the problem of poverty? What does this conversation look like in your contexts, and how would you encourage this discussion?

16. **Contextual issues:** Discuss the major contextual issues in your own settings. What is challenging about your context, and what are attitudes you want to see shift in society, culture, churches, yourself and your ministry settings?
17. **Contextual issues:** How can the church be encouraged to engage with communities to address contextual problems of inequality, racism and terrorism and extremist faith?

Classroom ministry

Facilitate an opportunity for students to respond to the video in light of the classroom discussion. Consider inviting students to write their responses to the following questions.

1. What is God encouraging our class and me, to do?
2. In response to the issues raised in the video, what are areas I want to ask God for forgiveness in and correct my understanding in?
3. How do I need God to minister to me and my community for us to better engage with our communities?
4. What do I seek God for, in contexts of poverty? What do we ask that God would do?

Prayer

Spend time in prayer over what you've learnt. You may encourage your class to pray for one another. Or, in light of your discussion, you may choose to pray over your class.

Links

Website: www.theglobalchurchproject.com

Book: Graham Hill, *GlobalChurch: Reshaping Our Conversations, Renewing Our Mission, Revitalizing Our Churches* (IVP Academic, 2015)