

# A Story of Hope: Christians Against Poverty

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[0:00] On a Tuesday and Thursday evening, one of my daughters goes running.

! And whenever she's going running, the gym is right next to it. So instead of me taking her to the running and going home, I go to the gym for a little while. And so it means I've got this hour to myself where I use my time as best as I can.

And as I do it, and as I go to the gym for that hour, it's got TV screens around the gym, all on silent, but you get to see what's on TV at that time, but have only a little bit of a clue about what's going on. So 7 to 8 o'clock on a Tuesday or Thursday night, you get your programmes like your Emmerdale and EastEnders on the screens as you're doing a bit of a workout to it.

Now, that's about the only time I ever watched the dramas and the soaps that are there. And it's quite always interesting trying to work out what's going on whenever you can't actually see or can't actually hear what's going on.

[1:11] But I'll tell you one thing. Today's passage makes Emmerdale and EastEnders look like a walk in the park. In terms of family relationships and chaos going on within family relationships, what we have here is a bit of a mess, to say the least.

You've got people who can't give birth, who give maidservants, they can give birth and then they do give birth and then there's all sorts of relationship breakdown. To the end point that Hagar gets kicked out with her son Ishmael and gets kicked out of the house and says, there's some water, there's some food, go walkies and disappear off.

And so we find ourselves reading the passage and coming across Hagar at a time whenever life is just incredibly complex for her. She's finding herself in the midst of a wilderness with no water, no food, no one to help, no hope.

And I expect she's probably lost her faith in God in the midst of it as well. She is in a desperate situation in the midst of it.

As I said earlier, whenever I was explaining a little bit about Cab, we see people in desperate situations all the time here in the UK. As I say, we get about 15,000 calls a year of people in those desperate situations.

[2:42] You may or may not know that about 1 in 10 adults in the UK are losing sleep every week because of their finances. Now, there's more than 10 people here.

So work out what a tenth of the people here would be and that's roughly around how many people in the room would actually be losing sleep over the finances that are here if we were an average population.

In fact, there are 2.8 million people who are having to borrow money just to pay some of the household bills. And then 1 in 5 that are skipping meals every month because they can't afford enough food.

And those stats aren't much different from Edinburgh. I didn't bring the stats with me for this area of Edinburgh but last week I was actually in West Lothian and they were telling some of the statistics there and some of them are much higher than that as well.

So this isn't something that's far away from us. It's just fairly nearby. And these are the issues that people are coming across. And it has a huge impact on people's lives.

[3:55] It affects every aspect of their life. Let me give you a few quotes of people who have been affected. One person said, To go from a lively, bustling family home to a tiny, lonely flat.

From a healthy bank balance to tens of thousands of pounds worth of debt. It affected my mental health massively. I just wanted to draw the curtains and hide away in the dark. Another person said, Most of my debt was from buying food on credit card. It's a choice. Put it on a card and feed your kids or you'll all sit there going hungry. Sorry, I forgot to put that one up. And another said, Debt destroys everything. Your relationships, your mental health, your confidence. It creeps up and it devastates your life. And these are just very typical quotations or quotes from people who are experiencing the depth of the poverty.

[5:06] One of the problems with what we see, oh, we have a bit more volume. One of the things that we're seeing all the time is because people don't like talking about money, obviously there's a stigma and everything else attached that actually it tends to be a hidden problem in our society.

It tends to be a hidden issue where people actually don't talk about it and then they further and further isolate themselves. So that first quote where people said they just want to draw the curtains and just hide away is quite common.

And whenever you do that, you start losing your friends, you start losing your relationships. You start being robbed emotionally, socially, physically, because there's so many that the physical health is affected by what we're eating and by the sort of all the problems around the debt that are affected, knock-on effects.

And also spiritually as well. you start losing hope. And if you had the faith in God, you start losing that faith that God's ever going to get you out of this mess.

Financial poverty is such a barrier in so many forms just for how we relate to each other. Just think of how much it costs to try and travel and see other people.

[6:27] Think of the cost of the bus fares or let's not even talk about fuel today and what's going on with fuel. But that also creates the stigma and it also creates that isolation and that isolation affects your mental health and your well-being and you can see how things start to spiral further and further and further down.

And as I said earlier, that leads to the point where around half the people that call us have considered or attempted suicide before they pick up the phone and do that.

And that's because poverty has stolen their hope. They are left absolutely hopeless. I've shared Paul's call with you earlier but I'm going to share another story with you just now.

I'm going to let you hear and see from Bea. And Bea will tell you a little bit about her story about how she felt before death and then how did she come to go to the church, have the conversations and what her life looks like now.

So let's see Bea's story. Ever since I was shoulder I've always suffered with anxiety and really really low moods.

[7:51] My way of dealing with it was I tried and do it and if I couldn't do it I'd get angry at myself that I couldn't do it then it would have done something else and something else and something else and I'm not going to fight and other that and the negativity didn't have to come in which was really really hard.

My name's Denise Anybody calls me a big for sure and I ran to my husband King. Last June I was really in a ball of state I was doing the job but there wasn't enough money coming in my husband was struggling himself with arthritis but my mental health deteriorated and then being told would be made redundant so I was scared of being on the streets I was scared of thinking I'm going to leave town home and my husband was like oh my gosh what am I going to do what am I going to do and I'm like I can't I think my anxiety would be through the roof my hair would be banging I feel sick I'm going to cry now I'm so sorry because of the switch sorry it was so hard and me and Keith were at each other and I said we should not get married we should not get married we won't have had all this and I'm so sorry I'm going to cry I don't mind crying so sorry it just broke me down and poor Keith I've never seen him so low and that was just kind of on it and we tried to figure out if we were attacked and if we could get anything and nobody could give us any information and nobody would tell us anything so we were in the dark because we've always been workers we've never had to ask for money we've always worked but I just couldn't figure out and I remember mental health nurses

saying to me why do you punish yourself you can't do that but that's how my anxiety and my depression works

I seem to kick myself and then down I can't expect medication for antidepressants and I had a good chat with the doctor I just cried all day because she was brilliant as I was coming out my doctor's just go for the road from the church and normally I walk around the pathway but today on that day I walked through the church and I'm just about to walk away I didn't know what it was at the time but something made me see if I can go no come on me look at it again and I looked and I went it says hope and I just had this realisation that I've lost all my hope and that's what I needed I remember Barney just saying hello welcome to hope and I just it's been tears I can't start crying and I was like oh I'm sad I'm going to say I'm so sorry and it was like it's okay just crying it's okay you've come to a safe place you've come to somewhere where you can just relax you know but it's been a rainy day and sun comes out that's how it felt like we'd come out the dark into light so Barney came round and explained what Kat did when he explained about all the paperwork we were told that we could get a debt leave order because we're in that much debt and we're on benefits and getting universal credits and also we were told a calculation of how much extra work we could get that sort of all out there were ringing us in between saying we were in the middle of it and they were constantly in touch with us amazing people you know just oh I can't let them know and then we got a debt relief order and it meant that we were clear of debt and it was just such an amazing amazing thing it was just like this amazing feeling of relief and like a relief you know

I've just become a friend at which I'm excited about I've done other courses as well bootcamp as well I did the life skills which was another good one I've learnt to be able to grow again I've learnt to say you know what me you're alright girl you know it's fine people are happy with you your family love you all this love you've got around which you didn't think you had we went through all that hardship and then suddenly that hardship has gone and it made we go forward you know in a better place together poverty steals God restores what part will you play let's inducing poverty better pray from here to me be needed hope little did she know that she would find it in a church literally called hope across the street from her doctors but it wasn't a church building or anything else about it it was actually the people in it particularly

Barney who welcomed her showed her that unconditional love that just transformed who she was and what that looked like hope is something that we all need Hagar in her situation was hopeless she couldn't see where her hope would possibly come from she found herself in tears sobbing she found her boy crying but that wasn't the end of the story because there's two magic words in that passage two key words for us to focus on God heard it says God heard the boy crying let me just read that to you again those couple of verses God heard the boy crying and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her what is the matter Hagar do not be afraid

[13:49] God has heard the boy crying as he lies there lift the boy up and take him by the hand for I will make him into a great nation then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water so she went and filled a skin with water and gave the boy a drink God heard and he sent an angel now you might be surprised whenever I tell you I am very privileged to see angels all the time in fact on Tuesday this week I saw a room full of angels in Northern Ireland where I was meeting with a bunch of our local cat workers because what is an angel literally it means a messenger from God somebody sent from God and so actually whenever I look at a whole group of those in churches who are working with those with debt and with other financial problems

I am seeing a room of angels coming from the church giving the hope that is needed in those situations that's what Hagar saw she saw a messenger of God who gave her hope that's what Bea saw she saw a messenger of God in Barney I don't know how Barney would feel about me calling him an angel but a messenger of God giving her hope that's what we need and that's what the world needs is the church being messengers of hope as I say it is a real privilege whenever I do see people today and they are doing that outreach and as I say whenever we look at our mission statement our mission statement is all about having churches that have people that draw alongside that steadfast presence of a local church that coming alongside because it's actually that that gives hope I've been on a couple of these first visits to those in debt

I don't do too many of them because I feel as if it's always a little bit sort of much if there's too many people that are there but whenever you go on them you see the difference between the start of the meeting and the end of the meeting where they realise that A there's somebody to help them and B there is hope there is real hope about what can actually be achieved in actual fact I found myself in a little bit of discussion with a civil servant from the Scottish government a couple of weeks ago where they were asking about whether it was appropriate for us for somebody to feel hopeful after meeting with us and I said absolutely for people in the situation that they are in beforehand and everything else then absolutely if they don't feel hope then they'd be more worried because we can actually come up with some solutions that actually might mean there's something there and see them at that point of crisis God wants to do powerful things through his church and we have a God who is a

God of restoration he restores people in every aspect of life there's a theological way of looking at this which is about God is a restorer of relationships I'm talking about sin being the breakdown of four key groupings of relationships that need restored our relationship with God our relationship with other people our relationship with our self and our relationship with creation and whenever these are broken they need restored they need to come together and quite often if one is broken then it actually causes the rest to be broken as well if you think about creation being all that God has provided us the resources that he's given us then you can see how that might be where debt is in and everything else where that becomes a bit of an issue not necessarily because of the person themselves it might be just our society and how we live a society is causing that breakdown of relationship with the resources that God has given but we see that that affects our relationships with God our relationships with ourselves and our mental health and our well-being and our relationships with other people and it said that about isolation and mental health and these connections as well but God is the restorer of relationships that's what we see in the biblical message that's what we see in the

Hagar story that we read today that's what we see in the cross and resurrection as we move towards Easter and see what that actually looks like that is the ultimate restoring of relationships that happened on that cross and the resurrection which promises that we can all have the opportunity to be fully restored that we can all have the opportunity to have hope so what about these angels these messengers of hope well in fact I believe that we're all called to be messengers of hope it's something that we can all do in every situation in life there might be people who are living near you or next to you who actually you know they've got issues going on you know that they are hopeless for whatever reason it might be financial debt it might be that they have an illness or something else going on with life and they just need somebody to come alongside them a representative of the church to say there's hope you're not alone we're here to help and so we're all called to do that in every way that that can be in Isaiah 61

[19:45] Jesus read out at the start of his ministry he said well Jesus read out to proclaim good news to the poor to bind up the broken hearted to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners we're all called to follow in Jesus example of that ministry we're all called to be agents of hope in every aspect of life where we're doing this proclaiming good news to the poor and all the rest that's in there as well so what can we do about it so as I say you can have a look around you look around your home your neighbourhood your communities that you're in and say okay well where are the people that need support and how can I help how can I be part of that there's of course ways in which you can help Christians against poverty as well we would tend to say and you saw at the end of that video we would tend to encourage people to pray campaign and donate our ways in which you can support with that wider work

I want to start with prayer prayer is so important it's foundation to everything that we do it is such an easy thing for any of us to do but actually how often do we find it a challenge to do it to spend a couple of minutes in prayer each day or each week to maybe think about maybe the people that we know that are having trouble but also just to pray for the organisation or pray for those 15,000 people that are calling us desperate for help we can campaign we heard it mentioned in the prayer earlier we've got the scholarship elections coming up in May how do we make sure that politicians

and those going for election have issues of poverty and debt at the top of their mind you might not be aware in fact you're probably not aware because it didn't really make many headlines this week for other reasons but there was a new child poverty strategy that was released this week by the Scottish government let's engage with it let's support it let's think through and challenge it where it needs challenged as well and let's make sure that politicians are putting this at the front of their agenda as we go into the

May elections but get involved in it don't just sit back and then obviously we can donate as well and donate financially obviously costs us money to run the phone lines to run the centres that we're doing the amount of support that's needed it costs us around 15 million pounds per year to do that and so I would ask that if you were able to support 15 pound per month or whatever you were able that would actually help us to answer some of those phone lines it would help us to put some of those supports in place around the people that need it most we call the people who give us regular donations each month life changers and that's because we really mean that they really do change lives in that if you do wish to do that I do have some forms in the back hall that you can actually get off me as well and please feel free just to ask me for them I'm more than happy to pass them on but no matter how you want to respond whatever way that is you need to do it to be an agent of hope and what I would like to do is I'm going to pray in a moment but before I pray I'm going to leave a pause

I'm going to just ask for you to reflect for a moment about how you might be an angel how you could be an agent of hope wherever that might be whatever that might look like for you so let's just pause and do that before I pray Lord Jesus thank you for your great love and sacrifice for us we pray that as individuals and as your church that we will walk in the example of love compassion and service you so beautifully modelled for us Lord grant us wisdom boldness and kindness in our words and deeds as we seek to bring your light and hope to those who need it the most help us to serve with humility and joy as we make known your love and salvation to all for we ask this in

Jesus name amen amen we're going to sing together again the hymn all my hope on God is founded and we're going to sing verses 1 2 4 and 5 in that so let's start if you're able let's stand and sing together a song