

**Guarantee our Essentials**

**Sample Sermons**

Included here are three sample sermons you can adapt to speak to the Essentials Guarantee in services or groups with your church.

There is sermon material and suggestions on passages from the books of Deuteronomy, Micah and the Gospel of Mark. Bible passages are taken from the NIV.

Deuteronomy Sample Sermon

*The following is a sermon you could use based on Deuteronomy 24:19-22. The sermon is about seven minutes long when read out.*

**19**When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. **20**When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. **21**When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. **22**Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.

Deuteronomy 24:19-22 (NIV)

Sermon

I wonder what the word ‘justice’ means to you and what images it brings to your mind.

For me, when you say the word ‘justice’, I think of a courtroom. In the UK, we have the Ministry of Justice which is the Government department that looks after our legal system- it sentences criminals and awards damages when someone has been wronged.

In the Old Testament, when the word justice is used, its meaning is much broader than punishing people who have committed crimes. It’s about making sure the way we treat others around us is right. Isaiah 1:17 says “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed; take up the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.” Justice, for the Old Testament prophets, was about what sort of society we should live in. People had a responsibility to stand up for and alongside people who faced injustice because that’s what God wanted.

And so in our passage today we see what justice looks like in the law of Moses. In ancient Israel, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow were people who had no means of supporting themselves and, as a result, faced hunger and poverty. Therefore, the law instructed the Israelites to leave behind some of their produce when harvesting to ensure that everyone had access to the essentials. And its inclusion in the Jewish law meant that was what a just society looked like in the context in which Jesus grew up.

But what about now?

We can see an injustice in our society through what’s happening in food banks up and down the country.

In the last financial year, food banks in the Trussell Trust network gave out almost three million food parcels– this is the highest ever and more than double the number of parcels distributed five years ago. Food banks are under more and more pressure as the need for support grows and many are drained, exhausted and running on reserves after four years of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

For many Christians, working or volunteering in a food bank is one way we show the love of God to our communities. But we also know that churches and charities cannot do everything to prevent people from falling deeper and deeper into poverty. The Trussell Trust’s research shows one in seven people in the UK are facing hunger.

The reading from Deuteronomy showed us caring for people in poverty and seeking justice is a collective responsibility. It is a way of organising society that we have now delegated to politicians and other decision makers.

In the same way that people harvesting crops were restricted from being too thorough to ensure that people who didn’t have their own land to grow things could still have access to the essentials to live, today we have social security which is distributed to people on low incomes to ensure everyone has the essentials… *except it doesn’t*.

I talked about the rising need for food banks earlier. We know from talking to the people who are referred to the food banks in the Trussell Trust network that, by far, the most common reason for people needing to visit a food bank is that they don’t have enough money to afford the essentials.

A social security system that supports anyone in need of help is the bedrock on which we can end hunger for good, but more and more people are finding it impossible to make ends meet because a key part of that system, Universal Credit, is falling short – and pushing people to food banks.

The Trussell Trust, working with other charities, are calling for the Government to review the rates of Universal Credit so that it covers the essentials of life. At the moment, someone living on their own only gets £85 a week to pay their bills, buy food, essential travel and clothing. It is not enough. Calculations show that people need at least £120 to get by. That is why they are calling for the Government to set basic rates of support at levels that make sense and keep people out of hunger and poverty. The campaign is called Guarantee our Essentials, and supporting it is one way we can bring about a society that reflects the justice which is so often talked about in the Bible.

We all know from the news that in churches all over the country, and all over the world, there are people who do not have enough money to eat while others can still afford luxuries and huge expenses. As a church, I believe we are called to challenge this across the UK and to embody a different way of living with our neighbours – that recognises we are all God’s children and of huge worth and value.

Churches up and down the country have been doing many things to support their neighbours over the cost of living crisis; some are supporting food banks, others are helping provide money advice, and others have opened their buildings up to their communities as a warm space or a place to belong. And whatever we decide to do as a church, there are things we can do as individuals – however much we earn. Each of us can look at people as God looks at us – with love and compassion. Each of us can offer time for conversation and space for people to feel they are seen and heard.

But beyond whatever action we take as individuals or as a church, the Bible calls us to seek justice by challenging oppression. The levels of poverty we are seeing across the UK are a clear sign of injustice and as Christians we should be leading the call for a society that supports people who face hardship. Our current system is driving people deeper and deeper into poverty. The instructions in Deuteronomy were given to make sure this didn’t happen in Israel during the days of the Old Testament. Together, by calling for an Essentials Guarantee, we can create a society that reflects God’s ideal of justice for everyone and especially for those at the forefront of the struggle against poverty.

*It would be good to finish the sermon by encouraging the congregation to take a practical step to support the campaign. Some ideas can be found in the information pack for churches.*

Micah Sample Sermon

*The following is a sermon you could use based on Micah 6:1-8. The sermon is about seven minutes long when read out (this doesn’t include playing our four-minute film: trusselltrust.org/Church-GOE-Film).*

“Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.

**2**“Hear, you mountains, the LORDS’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.
For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel.

**3**“My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me.
**4**I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery.
I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.
**5**My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Beor answered.
Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.”

**6**With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?
**7**Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
**8**He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humblywith your God.

Micah 6:1-8 (NIV)

Sermon

I wonder if you made any New Years Resolutions in January. If so, have you kept them up for the whole year so far? I’m not going to do a show of hands. However, I know many people find the New Year a good opportunity to reflect on our priorities in life and what might need changing, whether or not we manage to keep to it. You might look back and find your priorities have changed over the years. We no longer care about things that were once really important to us, and we find out more about what we really value in life.

What we prioritise is very important to God. There are a number of occasions when Old Testament prophets get to the heart of the type of religious practices which God prioritises – and this passage is one of those occasions.

Micah 6 is very clear that the sacrifice of livestock or the giving over of gifts are not God’s priorities. He boils God’s priorities down to three things: to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

So what does this look like? Let me take them each in turn.

Acting justly.

Justice is something the Old Testament talks about a lot – and it’s not just about our own behaviour. It’s about how we interact with society. In the Western culture in which we live, we often think about justice in an individualistic way: “as long as I’m not cheating anyone or exploiting anyone, that’s my job done.” That’s not how the Old Testament prophets saw things – justice was everyone’s responsibility. If someone was being taken advantage of, that was everyone’s problem.

I believe that poses a challenge for us as we see so many people facing hardship today.

Love mercy

We respond to the call to love mercy by showing compassion to people in our communities who are facing hardship. That can be giving them food to eat or other essentials, providing them with a listening ear and helping them access financial support.

If you look at the work of charities like the Trussell Trust, we see how faith inspires so many people to get involved and loving their neighbours in a practical way. Well over half of the distribution centres in the network are based in churches and almost all food banks receive support from churches in some way, whether that is through providing volunteers, food donations or money.

Beyond that, many churches are involved in providing other food projects, places of welcome and money advice.

For so many of us these acts of mercy are such an important way we show the love of God to people in our community.

Walk humbly with your God

But this isn’t to say that we are just humble before God, but that we’re also humble before others. If we truly put this into practice it will mean we treat people with dignity when they come to our church needing support. We won’t ‘other’ people, but treat them like we would treat Jesus. It challenges our attitude so that social action isn’t something we ‘do to’ people but something we ‘do with’ people.

It might mean we need to do things differently in church too. Maybe we need to think how coming to this church would feel for those of us facing financial hardship. Would someone who came to church hungry, leave hungry? Can people talk about their money issues here? Do we expect people to pay to join church social occasions or even have a cup of tea after church?

(If you have facilities to show a film, you could show our Guarantee our Essentials film trusselltrust.org/Church-GOE-Film). This film invites us to listen to the voices of people who have experienced financial hardship who are talking about some ways the church can respond.

Every week, food banks meet people on the lowest incomes. Some people are in-between jobs, have health conditions or are caring for relatives and children. Other people are in work that’s insecure or doesn’t pay enough to live on. Our social security system is supposed to be there for us in situations like these, but right now it’s not providing enough to cover the cost of life’s essentials. This is pushing people to need food banks. But we know how to change this.

Supporting the Guarantee our Essentials campaign is one way we can act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God. The campaign calls on the Government to ensure that Universal Credit is set at a level where everyone, whether in work or unable to work, can afford the essentials.

This embodies all three of God’s priorities as they’re laid out in Micah 6:8. It calls for a just society by making sure everyone has enough money to afford the essentials, it shows mercy by protecting people hunger and poverty and it reflects humility by giving people dignity so that they don’t need to turn to a food bank because of their low income.

*It would be good to finish the sermon by encouraging the congregation to take a practical step to support the campaign. Some ideas can be found in the information pack for churches.*

Mark Sample Sermon

*The following is a sermon you could use based on Mark 12:38-44. The sermon is about five minutes long when read out.*

**38**As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, **39**and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. **40**They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

**41**Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. **42**But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few pence.

**43**Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. **44**They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of

Mark 12:38-44

Sermon

The story of the widow’s mite can be a hard passage to understand. I’ve heard people teaching on this who hold the widow up as an example to follow – she’s a model of faith, she trusted God with all she had!

But is that really what the passage is saying? If she really did ‘put in everything she had to live on’, isn’t that an odd thing for Jesus to encourage – for a person who is already facing poverty to give away her means of feeding herself?

I believe the key to understanding the second part of our passage today is in the first part. Jesus doesn’t pull any punches with his verdict on the behaviour of the scribes, the religious teachers of his time – obsessed with appearances while ‘devouring widow’s houses’.

In this context, we can understand that Jesus was making an observation, illustrating that the widow was someone who was being oppressed. While the rich people were making a show of putting large amounts into the collection, and large amounts that they could afford, the widow had taken the teachings of the scribes at their word by putting in what she *couldn’t* afford.

This is quite a bleak picture. So what would Jesus have wanted instead?

In summary, according to the law of Moses, the widow shouldn’t have been put in the position where she was giving all she had to the temple. Instead, the leaders of the temple should have used what they received to ensure the widow had the essentials she needed to live. Deuteronomy 26:12 says, “When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.”

So the law of Israel instituted protections for the widow so that she shouldn’t have needed to go without the essentials, but these were being ignored – and, instead, she was being exploited by the religious leaders. No wonder Jesus was so angry!

We can see the similarities today on a number of levels. There are still religious leaders who cheat people on low incomes out of money using coercion. Outside the church, we’ve seen that people referred to food banks are more likely to owe money to a pawnbroker, payday loan provider, doorstep lender, money shop or unlicensed lender such as a loan shark.

But beyond that, during the last financial year, 760,000 people turned to a food bank for the first time in the UK, and the most common reason people turned to a food bank is because they didn’t have enough money to afford the essentials.

Even where people aren’t being exploited by another person, the fact that so many people in our society are going without the essentials challenges us to ask ourselves is this the just society that we want to see. I don’t believe it is.

Like the scribes, we have a choice when we’re confronted by hunger and poverty. Do we allow things to carry on as they are, or do we use our voice and our influence to try to bring about the type of society the verse from Deuteronomy reflects?

The Guarantee our Essentials campaign seeks to do this. While Deuteronomy puts in requirements to ensure the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow can eat and be satisfied, the Trussell Trust’s campaign shows a way we can ensure that, through the social security system, everyone can afford the essentials, and no-one need face hunger and hardship.

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