

CHRISTIANS
ON THE **LEFT.**



PRESENTS

Truth to Power series



Five Videos and Additional Study Resources for Group and Individual Use

1/5 HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS



Welcome



Welcome to The Truth to Power Series, five videos and accompanying resources especially commissioned and produced by and for members of Christians on the Left.

Throughout the series you can see the influence of members of Christians on the Left who are just like you; members who are councillors, committee members, teachers, retail workers, nurses, parents, business owners, fundraisers, administrators and church leaders. Each member brings their own perspective and we hope they inspire you to ask more and better questions as we grapple with some big topics and policies.

A great many people invested their valuable time in this project, so on behalf of the Executive Committee and Truth to Power team, thank you all for contributing.

We hope you find this new resource a valuable tool and can benefit from it alongside your friends and colleagues.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Shona'.



Shona Elliott - Vice Chair, CotL
Truth to Power Project Leader



Watch The Video Now

<http://bit.ly/t2pHousing>

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USING 'TRUTH TO POWER'

This is the first in a series of five studies:

Housing and Homelessness

Justice and Prison Reform

Refugees Welcome?

Economics and the 99%

Love not War

Each study features a 10-15 minute video, which can be watched in sections to aid reflection and conversation.

This PDF resource includes thought-provoking questions about the video content and additional resources for group leaders.

We recommend reading some of the content beforehand, then beginning with a prayer or praise before watching the video together, then using some of the questions from the red sections to inspire discussion and prayer.

The red sections are also available as a separate participants guide, for handy printing and reference.



“

**What does the LORD
require of you? To act
justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with
your God.**

MICAH 6v8 (NIV)



"As a Christian I believe I should care about issues of justice and peace in our world and I should try and do something about it where I can. But I do that because I believe in God, not because of a political bent. I don't think I am politically minded because hopefully I am God minded."

But is this Christian misguided?

Shona writes: This was an actual email I was sent from a faithful Christian after they had read an article I had written. **It cut me to the core** because it made me desperately sad that someone who had grown up in the church believed that their faith had nothing to say about politics, and therefore potentially the whole world around them.

Politics was simply not a God issue for them.

Our Christian faith is our starting point and naturally informs our understanding of justice, but to engage in issues of injustice is to actually model our faith authentically. A holistic understanding of the Kingdom of God develops into a response to human need (Psalm 82v2-4) for we have been enlisted in the joyous task of enabling God's kingdom to come in all areas of life. It is God's gift but our task; we work for it, even as we wait for it. It is not a self-righteous theology but a humble recognition of God's wisdom and active love already present in the world.

Christians are called to be a very part of God's story to restore, redeem and reconcile all of creation. What an awe inspiring call on our lives!

Christians on the Left stands firmly in a tradition which has always proposed that the gospel should be lived out in the political and economic structures of society. This short course has been put together to help you reflect on policy and political issues from a theological and biblical perspective, to excite you to discover what God might have to say about the pressing issues of our day.

CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO
BE A CENTRAL PART OF
GOD'S RESTORATION STORY.
WHAT AN AWE-INSPIRING
CALL ON OUR LIVES!

Truth to Power strives to help you chart this journey with friends, to **prayerfully wrestle** with the questions it will inevitably raise but to help us avoid dualistic thinking, where God has little to say about the material world. In ancient Hebrew, there was no distinct word for "spiritual" - a hint that we could be in danger of creating an unhelpful secular/spiritual divide in our thinking.



WHY NOT PRAY INTO EACH QUESTION BEFORE YOU ASK IT?

The accompanying videos share the thoughts of some of our members on different policy areas. We have chosen to look at subjects such as housing and finance to ensure this is more than just an academic exercise over a coffee but a start of a deep conversation about bringing God's truth to bear upon politics. Is rehabilitation more important than punishment? Is housing a public good? Should states have a nuclear arsenal?

Truth to Power is about helping us reflect upon how we can apply biblical and theological truths to fundamental questions about how we should structure society and govern well, and to suggest this should form part of our understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ.


FOR THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD IS WISER THAN MEN (1COR 1:25)

More importantly, I hope and pray this course could be a way for you to join us as we seek to provide support, resource and fellowship for those who are engaging politically.

It may well encourage you to share truth to power or perhaps to go and be the truth, modelling the Kingdom of God within the political realm. Politics is indeed holy ground, where God is calling faithful men and women to serve.

As John Newton wrote to William Wilberforce in July 1796 :

"You have the [far greater] honor of being a Representative for the Lord, in a place where many know him not, and an opportunity of showing them what are the genuine fruits of that religion which you are known to profess."

A black and white photograph of a city skyline at night, featuring several tall buildings and a prominent, illuminated, bullet-shaped skyscraper (The Gherkin) on the right. The scene is reflected in water in the foreground.

**We have a building
from God, a house not
made with hands,
eternal in the heavens.**



A Place to Call Home

“OUR SOJOURN INTO A VIOLENT AND HURTING WORLD IS SHAPED BY THE MEMORY OF CHRIST WHO WAS BORN IN A STABLE BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR HIM AT THE INN.” CHARLES MARSH





My people will live in safety, quietly at home; they will be at rest.

ISAIAH 32v18 (NLT)

"Living arrangements" is one of those phrases that leaves me feeling cold.

Housing is so much more than shelter. It is about belonging to a place, enjoying access to a community and having the anchor of home from which you can begin to flourish. This complete definition resonates in scripture through the themes of security, land and place and we have a rich spiritual heritage that emphasises home and place in theology.

The biblical narrative through both the old and new testaments contain a relational perspective on housing. People and land are inextricably linked, as all property is received as a gift (Genesis 17v8). No Israelite could simply buy or sell a freehold

in land due to the Jubilee laws; using land for exploitative purposes such as selling food for profit, was also strictly forbidden (Leviticus 25v37). The tribes of Israel were to cleave to the gift of the promised land as it was their inheritance from God, for all their descendants to enjoy and for the needy to benefit from. This perspective is also at play in Acts when Christians, part of a community only in its infancy, chose to give any proceeds from property sales to the apostles to distribute according to need.

Home-based hospitality became essential to the spread of the gospel and making disciples of all nations, as housing was physically used or sold for this very work (Acts 18v26).



FOR WE KNOW THAT IF THE TENT THAT IS OUR EARTHLY HOME IS DESTROYED, WE HAVE A BUILDING FROM GOD, A HOUSE NOT MADE WITH HANDS, ETERNAL IN THE HEAVENS.

2 CORINTHIANS 5v1 (ESV)



Security of home is an important theme both physically and as an eternal concept. Christians enjoy a future sense of residence, as Jesus conveyed to the disciples at Passover:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you."

John 14v2 (CSB)

It would be wrong to view our lives and thus our home here on earth simply as a temporary abode en route to another eternal home. As Laurie Braaten writes, the grace of God cannot reach us in a "placeless void."^[1] Jesus' incarnation is central; he chose to dwell among us recognising the place of the daily bread in our lives and announced that the Kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1v15).



Bible in Focus

Read Psalm 49

1) What is the warning contained in this passage and who is it aimed at? Has the teaching been designed to awaken people from a false notion of security?

2) Have we fallen into the trap of linking our place in society, or even our identity, to ownership? How do our attitudes to investment contradict the values contained in scripture?

3) How do these verses identify land as a public good?

4) In what ways should Christians partake in the property market? How can our actions and attitudes better reflect a biblical perspective?





Housing Today

I think the biblical vision of *shalom* pointing to every family dwelling in peace and security (Micah 4v14) is helpful to bear in mind, when considering the landscape of housing policy and provision in the UK. Housing is a moral issue facing our society. Can we support families to thrive without safe and affordable housing? It is the basis from which individuals can have access to a better future with evidence showing it greatly impacts on relationships, health and educational prospects.

However, following a major change of ideology over the last few decades where the belief in the market has trumped the role of the State in the provision of housing, the Government have prioritised the building of “affordable homes”, which can be rented at up to 80% of market rate. Central funding has therefore switched from supply capital to demand subsidy. This has served to inflate prices whilst housing support is given mainly through means-tested benefits to access the private rental market. In 2017, the number of homes for social rent in England dropped by 11% [2] and as of 1st April 2017, 1.16million households were on the housing waiting list. [3]



The Grenfell tragedy spoke volumes about the adequacy, nature and quality of social housing provision but also to the priority we have given this area of policy.

Housing in an asset-driven market is a source of wealth and status. Homeowners are more influential over prospective development and have disproportionate power over planning policy given that the constraint of supply serves to increase house values. This, in turn, means affordable housing is out of reach for all bar the highest earners in many areas, with many enduring the insecurity of renting and tenures inappropriate to their needs. 1 in 5 households in 2015/16 were in the private rental sector. [4] Knight Frank has estimated this will increase to 1 in 4 by 2021. [5]

PRIVATE
SECTOR
RENTS HAVE
INCREASED AT
3X THE RATE
OF WAGES





Bible in Focus

Read Psalm 49

Try reading it in a traditional and a contemporary version, such as KJV/ESV and NLT/MSG. You can use BibleHub.com to easily compare versions.

5) Although we live in a very different system, what can we learn from Israel's understanding of land?

6) Is land and housing unique compared to other goods we own?

7) Is this message peculiar to those that are blessed with divine revelation or does even the light of nature witness to it? What therefore are the implications for our housing system?

8) What can death not strip us of?





Given the severe housing shortage, models of rent have become increasingly divorced from earnings and unscrupulous landlords are able to operate in a demand fuelled sector with limited regulation. In 2016, 27% of homes in the private rented sector were classified as non-decent. [6] Private sector rents in England have gone up three times as much as wages since 2010 (apart from in the north and east midlands) while in London costs have risen by 24% - eight times the average wage increase. [7] It is therefore not surprising that almost a third of tenants receive some form of welfare assistance to help pay their rent. [8] Shockingly, since 2011 the rise in the number of households evicted from a privately rented property accounted for a 78% rise in homelessness. [9]

Of course, for an increasing number, a home is simply out of reach entirely. It is to our national shame that the number of rough sleepers has increased by 169% since 2010, and the figures do not include those in shelters or hostels, or those simply jumping from one friend's sofa to another. [10]



In the great resource *More than Bricks and Mortar?* by the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) it states “Justice is present in society insofar as the members of society are treated with the dignity and respect that their worth requires and can enjoy the goods in their life or history to which they have a right.”

Do we therefore not need to question the accepted societal narrative of housing as the preserve of those with the economic means to purchase it rather than as a common good? Possessive individualism and consumerism (no more obviously displayed than in the current property market) has and is preventing families from reaching their God-given potential and is contributing to the continued growth of economic inequality in the UK.

Therefore, the call to love your neighbour must mean we need to work to ensure all experience home as God intended.

How can we therefore model the Kingdom of God in the arena of housing policy?



Further Discussion

(1) Do you believe the church has moved away from its rich history of housing provision, which led to nineteenth century organisations such as the Octavia Hill Trust and the Peabody Trust?

(2) What other organisations might be involved in housing provision? Are there equivalents today to the Cadbury's of the late 1800's who built affordable, high quality housing for their workers? [11]

(3) What actions can the church take to make housing accessible in our communities?

(4) Do you believe community landowners and religious leaders have a duty to explore how they can support the delivery of affordable housing? Could your church actually provide affordable housing? Could you raise this with your church leadership for consideration?





Further Discussion

(5) Read together Frank Weston Bishop of Zanzibar's concluding address to the Anglo-Catholic Congress in 1923. [12] How does this inspire you to conclude that we work for improved housing because we believe in the incarnation?

(6) Why would/wouldn't you agree with the statement: "If we really mean *"Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"*, then this is a direct call to work towards appropriate, affordable and safe housing for all."

(7) What does the Bible have to teach us about the pitfalls of the over-commodification of land?

(8) Why do you think the early Christians placed as equal an emphasis on property and hospitality as prayer and miracles?





Further Discussion

(9) Do you see your home as primarily providing emotional or financial security? How does this affect your life?

(10) What is the significance of housing to our national well-being?

(11) Do you agree that the UK housing market is broken? Why or why not?

(12) How are you involved in challenging housing policy? Is your local authority developing plans you can engage with? What is the housing need in your local area?

(13) Should the state play a role in the provision of housing?

(14) How would you define affordability? Could rent caps or a system of living rent be a good measure to address persistent market failures?





Further Resources

Grace and Truth Blog
- by CotL Member John Kuhrt
<https://gracetruth.blog/>

Grove Books Pastoral: Homelessness
- by CotL Member John Kuhrt and Chris Ward
www.grovebooks.co.uk [Booklet P135]

A Duty of Care? An article and reflection on the church's biblical responsibilities.
- by CotL Member Matthieu Lambert
christiansontheleft.org.uk/t2p_housing_a

Two great online bible resources:
www.biblehub.com - (Great for comparing a verse in multiple translations)
www.biblegateway.com - (Nice design for exploring and reading online)

Need a regular reminder to get into the bible? Try using a Bible reading plan, on your own or with a trusted friend(s) on your mobile device. Download the "YouVersion" Bible app.





Credits and References

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- [1] Earth Community in Hosea 2 in The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets (Norman C. Habel ed., Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2001)
- [2] <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/social-housing-homes-properties-rent-let-drop-year-government-cheaper-families-a8185456.html>
- [3] Social Rented Housing: Waiting Lists: Written Question - 128785 - UK Parliament
- [4] English Housing Survey 2015 to 2016: private rented sector
- [5] Knight Frank Multihousing 2017 PRS Research
- [6] English Housing Survey Headline Report 2016 to 2017
- [7] National Audit Office Homelessness Summary 2017
- [8] <http://blog.shelter.org.uk/2017/05/are-private-rents-in-england-going-up-or-down/>
- [9] https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/eviction_from_a_private_tenancy_accounts_for_78_of_the_rise_in_homelessness_since_2011
- [10] <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/homelessness-in-numbers/rough-sleeping/rough-sleeping-our-analysis>
- [11] <https://www.cadbury.co.uk/about-bournville>
- [12] <http://anglicanhistory.org/weston/weston2.html>

A simply huge thanks to CotL Members Matt Wilson, Shona Elliott and Daniel May-Miller for pulling this all together. Daniel runs our Office and Communications day-to-day, Shona is one of our two busy Vice-Chairs and Matt runs Goodlabs, as well as shooting video in his spare time.

Visit www.goodlabs.uk to find out more.

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Helping you to
do good better

CHRISTIANS ON THE LEFT.



The Truth to Power Series has been especially commissioned and produced by and for members of Christians on the Left.

Bringing biblical perspectives, key thinking from members of Christians on the Left and the Executive Committee, alongside thought provoking questions and additional resources for group leaders, the videos can be used at home, with friends or colleagues, at an event or individually to inspire further study around five key topics:

Housing and Homelessness
Justice and Prison Reform
Refugees Welcome?
Economics and the 99%
Love not War

The series focuses on how our faith should guide the principles underpinning government policy, preparing us to speak the Truth to those with Power. This will look different to each member of Christians on the Left, as we live out the calling God has for our lives.

Visit our website for the complete series and additional resources:

christiansontheleft.org.uk/truth_to_power_series



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