

JUBILEE  
CENTRE

# BEAUTIFUL ENTERPRISE

A BIBLICAL AGENDA  
FOR GOOD BUSINESS,  
A FAIR ECONOMY &  
DIGNIFIED WORK



# JUBILEE CENTRE

Biblical insight & enterprise for social purpose

**jubilee** noun

a time for celebrating | a year of liberation and restoration

**We are building a movement for good business, a fair economy and dignified work. The Jubilee Centre is a ‘think and do’ tank which uses biblical insight, research and collaboration to pioneer new ways of working, for the good of all.**

The Jubilee Centre is an independent Christian charity which is working with Christians, churches and other partners to build a movement for good business, a fair economy and dignified work.

We are inspired and informed by a biblical vision of economic justice, a strong society and environmental flourishing, drawing on nearly 40 years of theological work and relational analysis. We combine this biblical insight with research and collaboration to pioneer practical new models and behaviours, for the good of all.

We believe that good purpose-driven business is one of the best long-term solutions to poverty, social breakdown and environmental degradation. We want to engage and support workers and entrepreneurs, investors, innovators and activists – from the shopfloor to the boardroom – to bring positive social change to their businesses and the marketplace and contribute to the cultural renewal of our nation.

We believe that Christians and churches can play a key role in making this happen, working alongside partners beyond the Church. Our work involves:

- Insight & imagination - We are shaping a biblical vision of ‘good business, a fair economy and dignified work’
- Connecting people - We are building a national movement, as a natural home for workers, entrepreneurs and activists for social purpose
- Experiments for impact - We are developing and promoting the adoption of good behaviours in the marketplace

[www.Jubilee-Centre.org](http://www.Jubilee-Centre.org)

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# Introduction

**This resource is to help small groups explore the biblical vision for enterprise and the marketplace. It is designed for anyone and everyone to use – you don't need any business experience.**

**The Jubilee Centre works with Christians and churches to promote a biblical vision for our national life – particularly in relation to enterprise, business and work. Our new report 'Beautiful Enterprise' sets out a clear biblical vision of what 'good business' could look like.**

In the UK, more people work in the private sector than anywhere else. Millions of Christians also earn their living working in enterprise – everywhere from shops and factories to high tech companies and banks. Yet the Church often has little to say about enterprise – representing a huge missed opportunity. We believe that enterprise is a gift from God and can be purposeful and a force for good. We also believe that there is huge potential for Christians and churches to deepen their discipleship through this.

So, what does a 'good business' actually look like? How can the Church influence the world of business? How can we work together to deliver significant change?

This guide will help you explore what the Bible has to say about business, its relevance to us and its true purpose.

We believe that Christians and churches should be a force for good in the marketplace – strengthening our society, tackling injustice and promoting environmental flourishing. Let's explore how, together.

Enjoy!

# How to use this resource

This guide provides seven sessions designed for a small group to use in seven weekly sessions. Each session explores one of the seven biblical principles for 'good business' set out in our report 'Beautiful Enterprise', which is free to download on our website. (You don't need to read the report to do this course, by the way, but if you are interested it will give you more information.)

Each session is structured in the same way:

- **Opener** – an opening group question to get you started
- **Reading** – readings from the Bible
- **Thoughts & discussion questions** – we've set out some thoughts, but feel free to start with the group questions if you prefer
- **Prayer** – spend some time praying about what you have discussed
- **Action** – there is a simple suggested action for each group member to do in the week before you meet again

You probably need 90 minutes for a session, but you can of course use the material in any way you wish! It's just a resource to help you.

Each session ends with a simple suggested action. We would encourage you to have a go at these, as this kind of practical work is a great way to explore what you've read in the Bible and make it real. It can also be fun! The best fruit from studying the Bible is not just knowledge but deeper discipleship. Set aside the first five minutes of each week to feed back on what you learnt from the previous week's action – you may be surprised how useful this can be.





## Session 1

# Purposeful Enterprise



**Opener:**

What would you say is God's purpose for business?

**Reading:**

Genesis 1:26–31 & Colossians 1:15–20

**Some thoughts:**

You may have already spotted that the subject of business doesn't come up in our readings. That's not a mistake – what we're doing is starting by asking a bigger question: what's the meaning of life?

Firstly, God created us to work, to fill the world and give it order. Humans have a responsibility over plants and creatures. This is *not* about exploitation - we'll cover more on this in Session 7 – but it is about cultivating resources. Business is a creative way of doing this via mutual exchange and innovation. Work is something nearly everyone can do, whether paid or voluntary, formal or informal. All contribute out of what they have been given.

Secondly, the end result of all this work is relationships. This is hinted in Gen 1:26–27 as the Trinity makes diversity part of human nature and makes teamwork essential for the work people are given to do. This becomes clear in Paul's letter to the Colossians, where he tells a big cosmic story: every single thing has its origin in the Son of God and all are reconciled together on the cross. Jesus didn't erase Jewish law; he lived, died for sin and rose again so that *all of us* could fulfil our original purpose of flourishing in relation to God and each other. We fulfil it by the Spirit, which is how the Old Testament comes alive (Romans 8:1–4). And this brings us back around to the role of business, which is about mutual exchange in order to further the task of human and environmental flourishing.

So, enterprise has an inspiring purpose – it is part of our calling by God to work. It is a vocation for some, it is a way of serving others that helps build relationships between us. It is about much more than just the narrow pursuit of financial profits – profit is not a bad thing, but it is not the primary purpose of enterprise.

**Questions for discussion:**

- What do you find most inspiring about how business fits into the biblical story?
- What words would you commonly associate with 'business'? How does this compare to the ideas set out in these bible passages?
- Imagine you wanted to establish a coffee shop, for example: how might you describe its purpose in line with God's purpose?

**Pray together:**

Ask God to deepen your appreciation of the purpose of business.

**Action 1:**

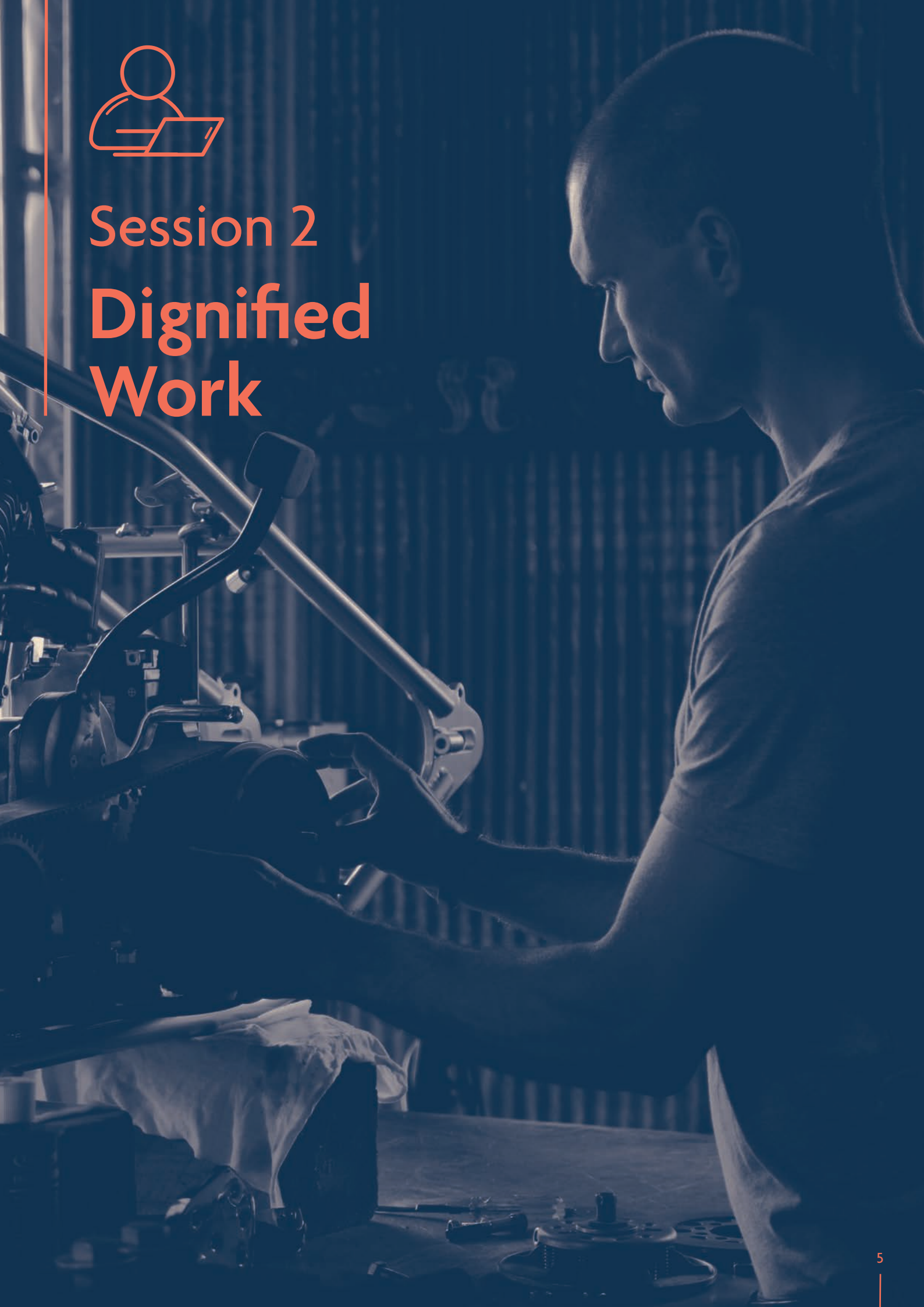
Have a conversation this week with someone who works in some kind of enterprise, whether a plumber or someone in a big business, and find out from them what they think the primary purpose of their business is.





## Session 2

# Dignified Work



**Opener:**

Share with others how you got on with the action from last time.

This session we are going to look at business from the perspective of the worker. What do you think makes a job ‘dignified’? Have you ever done a job and felt aspects of it were undignified?

**Reading:**

Exodus 5:1–21

**Some thoughts on Exodus:**

Dignity is freely given to people made in the image of God. This is the basis for our understanding that people have inherent worth (whether it’s acknowledged or not). But what does it mean in practice for work to respect this dignity? In Exodus, we get an example of what it does not mean.

Israel’s treatment by their Egyptian bosses violates their human dignity in some pretty obvious ways. We can pick out four main ones, which are then turned to positive values elsewhere in Scripture.

1. The Israelites have no real **agency** in what they do. They are working in slavery and there is no freedom for them to choose what they do or benefit from their work. People are not just a means to someone else’s end; they are imbued with creativity. Ownership over work helps retain this agency – Israelites were later given land and not forced to work for someone else.
2. There is no sense of **mutual relationships** in this situation. Israelites are told what to do and, when they complain, are ignored and forced back to work. The relationship is a one-way street only.
3. The Egyptian masters show no concern for workers’ **safety**. We don’t read much about employment conditions except that they impose heavy work and beat them. But even Israel’s animals were to be kept from hurting people (Ex. 21:28–32).
4. Israelite workers are given a constant task without **limits**: “make bricks all day every day (Ex. 5:19)!” One of the unique things about the Israel’s law compared to other cultures is the provision for a weekly day of rest (Deut. 5:12–15).

**Questions for discussion:**

- What is dignity?
- Can you think of an example of workers being treated without dignity today?
- Are there some jobs which you think are considered culturally ‘undignified’ today? Why do you think this is?

**Pray together:**

Acknowledge where you have been treated, or treated others, with a lack of dignity (feel free to do this in silence). Pray for change in this area.

**Action 2:**

This week make a point of thanking workers who serve your daily needs and take note of each occasion that you, or a worker you meet, is treated with less dignity than they deserve.



# Session 3

## Fair Pay



**Opener:**

How did you get on with action 2? Share with the group...

Is it right that one employee in a business might earn 60 or 70 times more than another in the same business? What are the arguments for and against this?

**Reading:**

James 5:1–8

**Some thoughts on James:**

Rarely does the New Testament use such scathing words as James does here – only his brother, Jesus, surpasses him in this way. Paying workers properly is something that God is extremely serious about. It's not a matter of employers being nice; it's about doing what's right and doing it promptly. But what does 'fair pay' mean?

There is no minimum wage set in the Bible, and no formula for working out what might be excessive. What we *do* know is that the overall purpose of business is for people and communities to flourish. The value of people's labour is part of their inherent value and dignity. If pay leads to luxury for some workers and poverty for others, something is wrong.

The heavenly perspective is important in our passage. Taking huge wages to live luxuriously shows that people are materialists with no sense of God's future kingdom. At the same time, those who are short-changed can know for sure that if all attempts to get justice fail before Jesus' coming, everyone will eventually get their due. James afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted.

Tensions around the issue of fair pay are never far from the surface of society. In the UK, the Living Wage movement has been particularly successful in drawing attention to what wages are needed for a person to flourish in life. The Living Wage has plenty of impact outside the Church, but is rooted in biblical principles – do check it out! (see [www.livingwage.org.uk](http://www.livingwage.org.uk))

**Questions for discussion:**

- What are the indications that someone is not being paid fairly?
- Why does James talk about 'the last days' and how is it relevant to wages?
- Where have you seen issues of fair pay being dealt with constructively?

**Pray together:**

There are millions of people in the UK whose pay does not meet their basic needs. Lift up this situation to God and pray for ways to engage with it.

**Action 3:**

Do some research on a business that you work for or interact with regularly and find out whether they pay the Living Wage (or more) to all of their staff. Note that discussions about pay can be sensitive, so tread gently!





## Session 4

# Relational Use of Capital



### **Monopoly?**

Did you know how “Monopoly” started life? It was originally called “The Landlord’s Game” and was designed by early American feminist Lizzie Magie to show the dangers of unrestrained monopolies. Originally there was another set of rules included, which involved taxation to level the playing field during the game. When the Parker Brothers bought the game and called it Monopoly, this version of the rules was jettisoned. It has been a huge commercial success since its release in 1935.

**Opener:**

How did you get on with action 3? Share with the group...

This session we are going to think about the subject of capital – that is, how money or other financial assets are owned, used or distributed in a business. If you have any money in a bank or a pension, do you know how or where this is invested?

**Reading:**

Deuteronomy 17:14–20

**Some thoughts on Deuteronomy:**

For many people, financial dealings work like a game. You play to win, and as long as you follow the rules, there's no reason why you shouldn't aim to win big.

The Bible always takes into account relational power dynamics. When someone is in a position of power and could use it to benefit themselves financially, the Bible calls for limits to protect exploitation. Leaders in the nations around Israel tended to use their political office in a way that our passage warns against. Doing so was simply playing the game by the accepted rules of cultural convention, but the law was given to make God's people different, holy.

Kings are in a unique position of social and political power. But notice that their economic power is also meant to be curbed: they must not amass wealth for themselves. Anybody who has played "Monopoly" will know that the one with the most capital finds it easiest to make more money. When there is no limit on how much property we can buy or how much rent we can charge, nothing stops us gaining control of everything and everyone. Just by following the world's rules, we can become like the kind of king that God didn't want: someone who is enriched by his own people rather than serving them; someone who is the opposite to Jesus, the servant king.

Biblically speaking, capital is not meant to be used to just accumulate more, where the best players win and the rest lose. This approach pits people against each other; and can leave some people with little or nothing. The 'play to win' attitude ends up justifying individuals using their power for their own advantage whilst others suffer, and rarely takes into account the fact that the 'playing field' is often not level to start with. Capital should be used in a responsible way to benefit the wider community, since every business is an integral part of its community.

**Questions for discussion:**

- Have you ever experienced a situation where you have felt exploited by a business or a financial relationship? How did you feel about this?
- In what ways does Jesus use (or relinquish) power for the sake of relationships?

**Pray together:**

So much of our economy depends on current conventions in the management and pursuit of financial profit that it is hard to imagine another way. Pray for God's people to develop the imagination to see a better way.

**Action 4:**

Play a game of Monopoly and pay attention to how it works, how people feel, and how it compares and contrasts to what happens in real-life business.





# Session 5

# Rooted Communities



**Opener:**

How did you get on with action 4? Share with the group...

This session we are talking about the importance of place. What are the advantages and disadvantages of 'putting down roots' and staying in one community for a long time?

**Reading:**

Leviticus 25:8–17

**Some thoughts on Leviticus:**

If you've wondered where the Jubilee Centre gets its name, wonder no longer. This whole chapter of the Bible is incredibly rich in the social vision that it communicates.

Some of this passage may seem alien to us today: talk about the Day of Atonement and blowing rams horns? The purpose is simply this: as part of Israel's collective inheritance of the land, each household was allotted a place to live. Every half century, people who had moved or sold their land would return home to their original land.

This provision was the social outworking of a deeper principle: freedom in relationship to God, a freedom from sins achieved through the sacrifice made on the Day of Atonement (v.9). A system of perpetual family land might seem quite constricting, but it meant that nobody ever had to lose control over their own means of production (i.e. land). Put simply, nobody had to become a slave, because every 50 years, families who had lost their land would have it returned – protecting them against enduring poverty and giving them a close link to a particular place. (There were different rules around property ownership in the cities which meant that people could still freely move and resettle there when needed.)

The point of this is not that moving house is bad or unbiblical. Rather, the point is that there are benefits to individuals, social groups and the land itself from cultivating a long-term home. Businesses committed to an area and a community can help those communities flourish more, as well as receiving benefits themselves. On the other hand, businesses which treat people and places purely as interchangeable economic 'units' can leave a trail of social destruction in their wake.

**Questions for discussion:**

- What does this passage suggest about the role of family in rooted communities?
- What does this passage suggest about the role of 'land' in our society?
- How has the business landscape in your area changed in your lifetime?

**Pray together:**

Pray for those people in your area that do not have a stable home (which may include you) and ask God to provide ways to establish community.

**Action 5:**

Choose a big local employer, find out about their commitment to the local community and write to them to encourage them about an aspect of this.



## Session 6

# Fair Taxation

**Opener:**

How did you get on with action 5? Share with the group...

This session we move on to the age-old issue of tax. Why should people give away hard-earned cash? And who should benefit from this money?

**Reading:**

2 Corinthians 8:1–15

**Some thoughts on 2 Corinthians:**

When Paul writes this letter, there's a poverty problem in the church in Jerusalem. Paul is arranging for help to come to the heart of the Jewish church in Jerusalem from Gentiles over a thousand miles away in Macedonia and Greece. It's the first recorded example of international aid. But what does it have to do with tax?

Notice the rationale here: this isn't a temporary charitable gift, but rather a long-term commitment to equality (verses 13–14). More than just an isolated ethical principle, this commitment stems from the heart of Christianity, the saving work of Jesus (v. 9). If we have received everything we need by grace, then life is about giving for the needs of others, not grudging obligation.

Paul's vision for the church builds on the Old Testament vision for Israel, where provision was made for those who were unable to provide for themselves (Deuteronomy 14:28–29). This encourages us to see others as people that we are called to love, with financial provision as one way to do that.

When we, as workers, employees, employers or business owners, fill in our online HMRC forms, it might not feel very relational. But this is an opportunity to love others (even if the system isn't perfect). It is also a recognition that we have benefited from public services. We can also go further than Paul could: he lived in an empire, but we live in a democracy where we can influence how taxation works and where there are many public services. Fair taxation ensures that we can take care of each other in different ways.

**Questions for discussion:**

- Why is it important to Paul that the Corinthians give support?
- In what ways do individuals and businesses benefit from taxpayer-funded public services?
- Where do you think the current taxation system succeeds and fails?

**Pray together:**

Give thanks for how our society cares for the vulnerable and pray for change in the areas where it fails.

**Action 6:**

Go back over your or your company's last tax year (if you can bear it!) and try to work out how much tax you paid, and how. What might this have purchased?





Session 7

# Environmental Stewardship



**Opener:**

How did you get on with action 6? Share with the group...

In this final session we move to consider the environment. How is the environment being supported or harmed by business activity?

**Reading:**

Genesis 2:4–15

**Some thoughts on Genesis:**

We finish where we began – in the account of creation. If we read only the first chapter of Genesis, we might think that the earth is a finished work; all human beings have to do is fill it and use it. But this second chapter introduces the idea of cultivation.

God has created the world so that processes are needed for it to reach its potential. Some of those processes are environmental (like the rain), whilst some are human and require labour (v. 5). It's the interaction between people and nature that allows everyone to flourish. When this is done well, with an attitude of stewardship, then vegetation can be sustainably used for food and gold mined without polluting rivers (v. 11). When it is done badly, all the planet's inhabitants suffer.

Businesses add value to creation by finding useful or beautiful ways of combining resources from different people and different places. Unfortunately, stewardship has often been left out of the equation. Business can only truly have a positive impact when they take into account the environment and its role in human development.

There are three key areas where natural resources have been used in damaging ways: energy production (an over-reliance on carbon-based fuels), resource consumption (some nations consuming more than their fair share), and biodiversity decrease (carelessness over habitats and the species living in them).

Addressing these things will not be detrimental to the economy. A biblical approach always ends up promoting the common good, which is people and environment flourishing together. It also enriches our lives both materially (by maintaining a healthy ecosystem) and aesthetically; enterprise should be beautiful and not just functional!

**Questions for discussion:**

- What attitudes towards creation are encouraged in our passage?
- What are your biggest challenges in living a lifestyle that respects the environment?
- How could greater 'creation care' help to bring communities closer together?

**Pray together:**

Give thanks for the natural world you can see from your window.

**Action 7:**

Find one product you buy regularly which does not have good environmental credentials and find a replacement that is better for the planet.



# What next?

Hopefully you have enjoyed these seven sessions and have been inspired and motivated. If you are looking for ways to keep moving forward in this direction, then why not:

- Keep meeting as a group to discuss these issues together and try and find a practical 'project' to do together.
- Read more – we suggest as a starter:
  - Tim Keller's *Every Good Endeavour* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012) You can buy this from any good bookshop.
  - Calum Samuelson, *Just Pay* (Jubilee Centre, 2019) You can download this for free from our website.
  - Our new report, *Beautiful Enterprise* (Jubilee Centre, 2022). This is also on our website.
- Please do consider joining us in the movement to renew business culture in the UK. There is more information on our website – [www.Jubilee-Centre.org](http://www.Jubilee-Centre.org) – where you can sign up for our free monthly newsletter and explore other ways to get involved.
- If you have worked through this course with a group, please do email us and let us know how you got on. We love to get feedback.

# Acknowledgements

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