

Compassion Sunday for Youth

A lesson plan to teach young people about poverty

Dear youth leader,

Thank you so much for taking this opportunity to teach young people at your church about poverty. By doing so, you're showing them why and how to care for "the least of these," and giving them a broader perspective. When young people have the opportunity to put their faith in action, they experience God working in and through them. This, in turn, helps them break out of the self-focus and consumerism that popular culture bombards them with each day.

Thank you for advocating on behalf of children in poverty — and thank you for sharing the gospel with young people in your community! We hope this lesson plan and related activities make your Compassion Sunday an engaging, fun, educational and inspiring day for the teens and tweens in your ministry!

Sincerely,

Your friends at Compassion

Poverty Lesson Plan for Youth Ministries

Age level

Middle school
and high school

Time

45 minutes

Lesson Overview and Preparation

What students will learn

Why your church is hosting a Compassion Sunday, what poverty is, what God says about the poor, and how we are transformed when we live out the call to help people in poverty.

Printable handouts

Ahead of time, print out one Reflection Questions sheet and one Paths to Education sheet for every student. Hand them out as students arrive at the gathering (or have enough copies on their chairs or tables, plus pencils).

Scripture and application activity

Isaiah 58:10 — “And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”

After reading this Scripture together, students will fill out their Reflection Questions sheet to think about how to apply it in their lives.

Free resource: “Compassion: 30 Days of Heartwork,” an immersive devotional experience for church groups and families, includes a study of Isaiah 58:10 as the daily devotion for Week One. Just go to compassion.com/heartwork for free access and inspiration! You can also use the robust resource to guide your group deeper into the poverty conversation over upcoming weeks.

Suggestions for closing prayer

Invite the students to create groups of three to four to pray together. Provide prayer prompts like:

- Pray for a specific country that is close to your heart.
- Ask God to provide opportunities for education, health care and spiritual encouragement to children and youths living in poverty.
- Pray protection over children and teenagers who are vulnerable to hunger, abuse or trafficking.

Poverty Discussion

Why Compassion Sunday? (8 minutes, including an optional 3-minute video)

Millions of children around the world live in poverty. To put it simply, poverty means you don't have enough of what you need. Can anyone give me an example of something you need but might not have if you live in poverty? *[Wait for answers. If they get stuck, you can offer: safe water, food, education, shelter, clothing, medicine, hope, etc.]*

Today our church is having Compassion Sunday, an event where everyone learns more about global poverty and how we can help. So let's talk about the word "compassion." How would you define it? *[Wait for answers. Anything having to do with concern for others' well-being is the idea.]* Interestingly, the Latin root of the word literally means "to suffer with." So it's more than just feeling bad for someone — it's coming alongside them, trying to understand what they're going through, and thinking of ways you might be able to relieve their suffering. The Bible has many Scriptures about Jesus feeling and showing compassion for others.

Basically, sponsors help meet unmet needs of kids who live in poverty. Today we'll talk more about poverty and what we can do to help.

Video option

If you have the technological ability in your classroom, show this video:
compassion.com/AlumniStory

The Realities of Poverty (8-minute discussion)

People who live in poverty face a lot of challenges that can be hard to imagine living in our country. About 767 million people worldwide live on less than \$1.90 a day. What are some challenges your family might face if you had to live on less than \$1.90 a day? *[Wait for answers first, then talk more about the specific challenges below.]*

- Poverty causes a lot of physical challenges. Children who live in poverty are more likely to get sick than children in higher-income countries. Hunger, the lack of safe water, untreated diseases and lack of sanitation are some of the biggest causes of poor health and death among kids in poverty.
- The lack of education is another big problem of poverty. An estimated 61 million primary-school-age children worldwide don't attend school. Can you name some factors that might keep a child out of school? *[Wait for answers. Examples: Their families can't afford school supplies, tuition or uniforms; kids have to work jobs to earn money for their families; there isn't a school nearby and they have no transportation; they're too busy collecting water; they are sick; in some cultures education isn't valued, especially for girls; in some countries, gangs make it dangerous to go to school.]* Children need school so that someday they can get good jobs and break the cycle of poverty.

You received a handout called Paths to Education, which talks about some of the biggest obstacles that kids in poverty face when it comes to school. Take a few moments to look it over. *[Allow about 3 minutes.]*

- Something you don't hear about much in the news is the spiritual aspect of poverty. Children who grow up in difficult circumstances start to lose hope. They start believing life will never get better — that they may as well give up hope for a better future. Sharing the gospel of Jesus with people in need shows them that there IS a reason to hope, and that God has a plan for their lives. Hope is needed if they are to ever get out of poverty.
- Thankfully, at churches around the world, Compassion-sponsored kids learn about health, receive regular checkups, study the Bible and receive letters from their sponsors telling them about God's love. It gives them the hope they need.

Scripture and Application (15 minutes)

Scripture Reading (3 minutes)

In your Bible, turn to Isaiah 58:10. *[Read it to the students as they follow along or have one of them read it out loud.]*

“And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”

Application Activity (10 minutes)

Reflection Questions

Wouldn't it be great if everyone spent their energy and time helping others? Let's do an activity to reflect on how our lives and our world might be different if we took this Scripture to heart. Look at the Reflection Questions handout you received. Let's take about 10 minutes to fill it out. If you finish early, go back and give each question some more thought or prayer. *[After everyone is finished writing, you can ask if anyone wants to share their thoughts on the questions.]*

One way we can spend ourselves helping people who suffer in poverty is by sponsoring a child through a charity called Compassion International. People like you and me, who live in wealthier countries, can choose to sponsor a child who lives in one of 25 impoverished countries, where Compassion works with local Christian churches. Being sponsored allows your child to go to a church for program activities like Bible lessons, health checkups, meals, games and education. Teenagers in Compassion's program get vocational training in

areas like sewing, computers and mechanics to help them get good jobs as adults. They learn that God has a special plan for their lives, which gives them much-needed hope.

Prayer (5 minutes)

One powerful way we can help children who live in poverty is by praying for them.

Let's spend some time praying for kids who live in poverty. *[You can either have a few moments of silence or lead the following prayer.]*

Father God, thank you for meeting all of our needs. Thank you for clean water, food, medicine and the chance to get an education. Most of all, thank you for sending Jesus to die for us so that we may have hope here on Earth and in heaven.

We pray for children around the world who don't have everything they need. Please show us ways we can help alleviate their suffering. And we pray that you would draw us even closer to you and show us our true identities as we spend ourselves on those in need. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.

End of lesson plan

All Scripture verses are taken from the New International Version.