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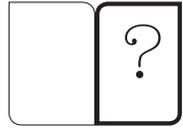
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- 7 **all who believed were together**
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SPORT

AWESOME

# why read **this book?**



This is the rule of most perfect Christianity, its most exact definition, its highest point, namely, the seeking of the common good ... for nothing can so make a person an imitator of Christ as caring for his neighbours.

The common good is central to the Christian imagination – in the words of the fourth century preacher, John Chrysostom, ‘its highest point’ – because God calls people to live in relationship with him and each other.

We live in a time of political turbulence and social division which is challenging our common life. We desperately need a culture of encounter, and the common good offers a way forward for Christians of all traditions. Rooted in relationship with God, we are called to foster a culture of encounter where people who are very different meet each other and estranged groups can be reconciled.

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah said ‘Seek the welfare of the city ... for in its welfare you will find your welfare’ (Jeremiah 29.7). It isn’t always easy to respond to God’s call to live for the common good. It requires us to be people with the courage to ‘stay in the room’, negotiate and keep dialogue going by recognising the humanity of everyone. By working to make God’s vision for the common good a reality we witness to the Good News.

## THE COMMON GOOD IN THE BIBLE

This book helps thoughtful Christians explore the common good in the Bible.

We have chosen six short passages which indicate how the Spirit moves us towards relationship and community, how God is concerned for well-being in all areas of society, and how God himself is an 'eternal common good'.

**Acts 2** highlights when the first Christians received the Holy Spirit and how the common good is experienced with others—it is a common rather than individual pursuit.

**Genesis 11** tells a story of people working together, but for the wrong purpose: they sought their own glory rather than God's.

**Amos 5** teaches us that the common good has a spiritual dimension as well as including areas of life like business and legal dealings.

**John 17** records Jesus' prayer that 'they may all be one', both because his followers are reconciled to each other and because they know God.

**1 Peter 2** makes a strong connection between the common good and witnessing to God. It delves into the Old Testament to show that living for the common good is a model of God's purposes for us all.

**Revelation 14** shows an angel proclaiming the eternal Gospel, a vision which reveals the wide range of our work for the common good.

The aim of this book is not to provide neat and tidy answers to all possible questions about the Bible and the common good, but to prompt reflection, discussion and action. These texts provide a good introduction but we are sure you will think of other passages to add colour to the ones suggested here.

It's helpful to note that the 'common good' is at work in various ways in these passages and throughout the Bible. **The common good** can be understood as the



**conditions** necessary for everyone to thrive, it can also be seen as an **aim** that we aspire to or work for together, and it's also a **practice**, the steps we take to build the common good. This rich conception of the common good clearly shows it is not a utopian ideal as is sometimes thought: it is definitely not something to be imposed by one group on another. At the end of the book you will find a summary of 'Common Good Thinking' which you might like to refer to alongside the scriptural reflections.

## **CALLING PEOPLE OF GOODWILL**

The common good is not simply an idea but something we do together. So the passages are followed by some questions to help you discern what actions you might take, either as an individual or as a group.

God calls all people of goodwill to join in his mission to bless the world. In a time of division and instability we are encouraged to build alliances of goodwill, and we hope and pray that this book blesses you as you respond to God's call to work for the common good.

## **USING THIS BOOK**

Our hope is that the idea of the common good comes alive in the context of personal reflection and conversation with others.

You may like to start by looking at the image and then reading the biblical text slowly and prayerfully.

When you're ready, move onto the reflection.

Choose any or all of the questions. If in a group, allow an hour or so for a good discussion.

When you're ready, say the closing prayer (silently or aloud, as you wish).

It's up to you if you wish to do more than one chapter at a time, or take each one over a number of weeks.

We encourage you to use your favourite version of the Bible. The passages in this book are from the New Revised Standard Version.



*COMMENDATIONS - Calling People of Goodwill: The Bible and the Common Good*

**Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury**

"This little book is a wonderful introduction to the Common Good and its importance in Christian thinking. At a time of uncertainty and challenges to our shared values and practices, this is a timely reminder that we are called as the church to seek the common good of all in our communities, whether local, national or global. I am pleased to commend this study guide and hope that the reflections offered will inspire many to commit to being people who strive for the common good."

**Cardinal Vincent Nichols**

"Vivid images; crisp and insightful commentary; sharp pointers for discussion; clear progression of thought and ideas; evocative prayers: "Calling People of Goodwill" is a real treasure! I hope it is widely used and deeply pondered for it can truly help us all to get to grips with faith in action today. My thanks to all who have produced this great resource."

**Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool**

"The God of the Bible is a fountain of sending love - love with the capacity to transform all we are, individually and as a society, my personal good and our common good. This collection of scriptures and reflections will help you to integrate your own journey in holiness and our common journey to true justice and peace. I strongly recommend it!"

**Billy Kennedy, Leader, Pioneer Network and Co-President, CTE**

"In recent years the church has been learning again what it is serve the least, the lowly and the marginalised in our society. The church has 'left the building' and is playing its part in the transformation of peoples lives. This resource is timely and will inspire and strengthen the church's resolve to be all its called to be. I'm pleased to recommend it."

**The Revd John Proctor, General Secretary, The United Reformed Church**

"This Bible study material is thoughtful, practical and serious without being heavy or wordy. It would work well in many a small group, and will help Christians to contribute confidently to a complex world in testing times."

**Timothy Radcliffe OP, Former Master of the Order of Preachers**

"This beautiful and wise book explores the most important issue of our day, how we may flourish together...I love the expression that 'God is our common good.'"

**Dr Ruth Valerio, Global Advocacy and Influencing Director, Tearfund**

"In a me-focused, high-consumer society, the common good is a radical and novel concept: one that could transform our lives and our churches if we were to get hold of it properly and live it out. This little book will help you do just that and I warmly commend it to you."

**Rev Dr Chris Wright International Ministries Director, Langham Partnership**

"What does the Bible say?" Too often, when that question is asked about any social or ethical issue, the answer comes in the form of one or two verses quoted at random. The great merit of this study guide is that it takes the Bible for what it is - the grand overarching story of God's plan and purpose for creation as a whole and our identity and mission as human beings, created in God's image and redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. The careful selection of texts from major sections of the Bible's story will help any individual or group to have a stronger grasp of the message of the Bible as a whole on how we are to live together in God's world, and a greater curiosity to dig deeper into the riches of biblical revelation and wisdom elsewhere.'

**Jane Williams, St Mellitus College**

"This important and accessible study encourages us to see God's big picture of the human race, rather than our smaller vision, which often only contains people like ourselves. By reflecting on a number of key Bible passages, this pocket book challenges us to seek the Common Good."

**The Very Revd Dr Pete Wilcox, Dean of Liverpool**

"This is an opportune reminder, in an increasingly fractured world and an increasingly fractured Britain, of the Christian calling to the common good. Here are accessible reflections on Holy Scripture, with helpfully intriguing questions and imaginative invitations to prayer. The call to invest in the wellbeing of our neighbours and our neighbourhoods, our nation and our planet is integral to authentic Christian discipleship, as every user of this brief but substantial guide will appreciate."

**Dr Hugh Osgood, Free Churches Moderator and Co- President of Churches Together in England**

"Endeavouring to put the Bible's teaching into practice on a daily basis is not just a matter of personal piety. There are immense benefits that can flow to society when we take the Bible's teaching seriously. 'Calling People of Goodwill' is a powerful reminder that we should be outward looking, and provides an excellent resource for developing such thinking in thoroughly biblical and practical ways."

**Jean Vanier, L'Arche**

"This book is about peace. Peace is not just in the hands of politicians and the military. It is in the hands of each one of us. We are all called to work for the common good and universal brotherhood and sisterhood and to open our hearts to those who are different and feel excluded. Thus breaking down the barriers of fear around our hearts.'

**The Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain**

"One of the areas where we see God at work at the moment is in drawing various Christian traditions and networks into creative partnerships. Working together in this way enables us not only to engage in mission within our communities but offer prophetic insight into the life and values of our nations. This is a timely opportunity to be reminded of the core principle of "Common Good" and the Biblical narratives that underpin it. This set of Bible studies will enable individuals and small groups reflect on our theology and our practice as we seek to engage in the public square."

**Revd Prebendary Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons**

"I once heard a Film Director say that he had stopped being a Christian and had become a Buddhist because Buddhism was a way of life, whereas Christianity was just something that you did once per week. I was shocked to the core, and remembered thinking – 'what poor example of Christianity he must have had to arrive at that conclusion.' This short bible study is accessible and will enable everyone who is serious about living out their faith to easily engage with it."

**Bishop Eric Brown, Pentecostal President, Churches Together England**

"God in his great and generous love wants us to work together with others of goodwill to build the common good. With helpful bible study reflections and questions for discussion, this excellent little pocket book empowers us to direct our prayers and actions to work for the flourishing of all."

**Major David Taylor, Spiritual Life Development Secretary, Salvation Army**

"'Calling People of Goodwill: The Bible and the Common Good' is a timely and highly accessible study guide, with aptly chosen readings and insightful reflections. It offers an excellent opportunity for group discussion that leads to shared vision and action. It is to be recommended for all churches seeking to live the gospel, serving as a vital antidote to consumer Christianity and indulgent individualism."

**Rt Revd Dr Jo Bailey Wells, Bishop of Dorking**

"When Jeremiah urges his people to seek the welfare of the city, he offers a vision for how God's people in all times might relate to society as a whole. This booklet succinctly conveys how Jeremiah's words resonate not only throughout Scripture but into the shape of our lives as disciples today."

**Dr David Landrum, Director of Advocacy, Evangelical Alliance**

"How do we live together with our deepest differences? What kind of society do we want to see? The Bible addresses these questions, and the common good gives us a vocabulary to suggest ways forward. I recommend this excellent resource to all who have hope for a better tomorrow."

**Pastor Agu Irukwu, The Redeemed Christian Church of God**

"At this time God is calling Christians to play an active part in the transformation of their communities; our country needs us to be a church that is open, reaching out to all. Rooted in Scripture, this fabulous little bible study booklet is practical, informal and pitched just right for our culture of prayer - it is exactly what is needed and I strongly recommend it."