

## SERMON OUTLINE: LESS IS MORE

### Preparation:

- Distribute Tearfund's World Relief Sunday bulletin inserts
  - Visit [www.tearfund.ca/lessismore-resources](http://www.tearfund.ca/lessismore-resources) to download:
    - The video
    - Powerpoint presentation
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### (SLIDE 1)

I've got good news for you today!

Since 1980 the percentage of people facing extreme poverty around the world has been falling - for the first time in history!

### (SLIDE 2)

40 years ago, half of the world's population lived on less than the equivalent of \$2.50 CDN / day!

But the world said "this is not good enough". Governments got involved. Diseases were addressed. The church and Christians mobilized.

There were great success stories for countries like South Africa, Mexico, Brazil, Thailand and Malaysia. Life has changed radically for four billion people!

Poverty was reduced significantly. And while this was happening the evangelical church blossomed across the Global South

Today – less than 10% live on less than \$2.50 CDN per day. In extreme poverty. That's about 785 million – or 21 Canada's!

In many ways we live in a golden age!

Millions of families around the world have made a 'great escape' from poverty. Life expectancy is increasing. Diseases such as malaria and measles are retreating. More children are in school than ever before. And the daily infant mortality rate has more than halved since 1990: that's 17,000 more children, every single day, who will now live to realize their potential.

Isn't that amazing?! Something to celebrate!

### (SLIDE 3)

But this golden age does not yet extend to everyone.

Almost a billion people remain trapped in extreme poverty. And to make things even more difficult 82 million or 2.5 Canada's are refugees.

But there is more good news – You are part of changing that!

### Empathy:

### (SLIDE 4)

I would like you to pick up the card on your chair/pew. The woman on the inside flap is called Amarech and she lives in rural Ethiopia. Amarech is one of those almost (1 billion) still living in extreme poverty.

Amarech is married with seven children, all of them still living at home with her and her husband.

**(SLIDE 5)**

They live in a very poor community in a remote area. It is a 40-minute walk to the closest local market and 3 hours round trip with the donkey to get water.

**(SLIDE 6)**

Their village has experienced high soil erosion and the rains are intermittent. Some years it is 3 months of good rains and then 9 months of drought. Changes in weather patterns and difficulty accessing water means that harvests are poor and Amarech's family experience a hunger gap of least seven months every year – where they eat only one meager meal per day!

During that time, every day is a struggle for Amarech and her husband to know how to feed the family.

With her children begging her for more food and falling behind because they can't pay for schooling, Amarech was desperate for her life to change.

She needed a breakthrough. Let's watch this little video that shows the story of Amarech's life.

**[Show film SLIDE 7)**

**(SLIDE 8)**

One of the main struggles that Amarech and her family faced was feeding her family. Just imagine how you would feel

- if you had to get up every morning and tell your children there was no breakfast or lunch
- and sometimes there was even no dinner.
- if the money for school fees had run out and your children had been sent home from school?
- if your child was ill but you could not afford medicine or a doctor's bill?
- I cannot imagine how that would feel.

Those are the harsh realities of living on less than \$2.50 CDN a day. Those are the facts of life for nearly a billion of our fellow human beings. How do you feel about that?

I ask you how do you think God feels about that? **Nearly a billion hungry mouths to feed.**

**(SLIDE 9)**

Tearfund, through our Ethiopian partner Terepeza Development Association (TDA), began working in Amarech's village just two years ago.

The church leaders in the community identified 2 main problems:

1. **Not enough food** - High food insecurity meant malnutrition, poor health, and no ability to earn a living in an agricultural area
2. **Bad economic situation** - No way to save money, get a loan, or have any banking services. They had no electricity or even addresses.

But they felt that if they could solve those two problems:

1. Eating better would improve everything
2. People could have crops to sell and make some extra money
3. People could afford school fees and education of children would improve.
4. The sick could afford health care

5. Housing could improve
6. They could buy donkeys, goats or other animals
7. People could save for a rainy day
8. Businesses would improve
9. Generosity towards others and the church could increase.

They started a church and community transformation programme teaching about whole life transformation.

Through learning

better farming techniques,

diversifying crops to cover the hunger gap,

and by saving money with her self-help group

Amarech and her husband Mathewos began their journey. Their hope was to see their family transformed with more food for their children, a metal roof for their home, and money to send their children to school.

**Insight:**

**(SLIDE 10)**

There is such chronic need across the world. Doesn't it seem wrong that we live in the 21st Century and there are millions of people like Amarech suffering like this?

Our passage of scripture that we had read to us this *morning/evening* is one that speaks powerfully about these things. It's a familiar story and we are going to look at it in a way you may not have considered before.

**(SLIDE 11)**

The passage describes a situation where there was a great need:

- There was a **Spiritual hunger** – people following false prophet's, Baal worship was normal, beginning with King Ahab
- There was **Material hunger** -no rain, supplies running low, people were hungry and, in many cases, desperate.

It's the same today:

- Spiritual hunger - the world is full of people hungry for spiritual reality, for hope, for peace, for meaning to life. Whatever the national statistics tell us about Canada, the church is growing rapidly across large parts of the world. The church in Ethiopia has seen explosive growth with churches starting all the time because people are spiritually hungry.
- Material hunger - across the world, there are one billion people like Amarech and her family living in extreme poverty. Many unsure of where the next meal will come from. Every day brings this struggle for daily bread. Even eating two meals a day is considered a luxury.

This story addresses situations where there are great needs and raises questions about:

1. our responsibility to those in need,

2. how we can best help those in need.

I want to explore those two questions this morning....

**(SLIDE 12)**

**Turn to 1 Kings 17: 7-16**

**1) Our responsibility to those in need?**

Elijah the prophet is coming out of hiding after delivering a challenging message to the king. He has been living under difficult physical conditions and comes to this town for food. He meets this widow and asks for water and food as God has instructed him to do. She replies, I have almost nothing.

***Vs. 13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid."***

This was a statement of compassion. I see your situation and your desperation. I recognize the difficult place you are in. I feel your uncertainty and questioning about the future. He is not bothered by the depravity that he is confronted with here in Zarephath. Nor is he bothered by the extreme place this widow is in.

I am reminded of Jesus when he was confronted by both large crowds of people and individuals in need. Those who had followed Jesus to a remote place and where far from any sources of food in the feeding of the 5000. Or, those with a physical ailment who fight the crowds just to grasp the hem of Jesus' coat.

The scripture says on those occasions that Jesus had compassion on them. This is in contrast to the disciples who often were bothered by people and inclined to let people fend for themselves and wanted to stop them from bothering the teacher.

Jesus was not only concerned about the spiritual side of people, but he was also aware of their hunger for physical food! He demonstrated clearly that God is concerned about every aspect of a person's life and wants to meet all our needs!

Elijah asked the widow at Zarephath for some water and a piece of bread. She makes this bold, transparent and very vulnerable confession of her current situation. She is at the end of her rope!

***V 12, "As surely as the Lord our God lives, I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."***

As we enter into this story we encounter her extreme poverty. She is about to eat her last meal. The cupboard is bare, there is nowhere else to turn. Up until this point, no-one had showed her compassion.

She is going home to die. How do we even begin to feel her pain, especially as a mother unable to feed her son? Where is the hope?

What is our responsibility when we come face-to-face with people in extreme poverty? When we become aware of people living in places like Ethiopia? Perhaps Jesus would be saying to each of us, "Don't be afraid."

I know I often feel like that when faced with someone in need. I imagine you do too. I don't want to be inconvenienced. There are limits on what I am prepared to do. I'm happy to help, but I really love my own comforts. It's easy to look away and switch off.

The problem is, Jesus challenges us to respond.

He calls us "love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength". And Love your neighbour"

We have a responsibility to those in need. We can't just turn a blind eye, absorbed by the appetites our culture creates and feeds; oblivious to the fact that there are people living in poverty, whether in our country or further away. We need to be careful not to limit the scope of the gospel/the Kingdom of God.

It is far reaching and Jesus challenges us to consider how to care for those in need as part of our responsibility as Christians.

Throughout scripture we see that God's has 'a bias to the poor', a special concern for widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor.

## **2. The second question is to do with "HOW to help people in need?"**

It's a deeper question but there are some fascinating insights for us in this story.

Interestingly in our Old Testament passage Elijah asks a widow to give him food and water. God had told him he would be looked after by her. She tells him they had almost run out of food because of a drought.

Like Jesus' disciples the widow was asked to have a change of mind-set and steps out in faith to use what little she has in God's service. The result - amazing things happened. **She fed her whole household including Elijah until the famine was over.**

This story wonderfully illustrates how Tearfund works. At the heart of our Church and Community Transformation work we help people to see their situations differently and focus not on what they DON'T HAVE, but on what they DO have.

On what God has blessed them with-their skills, talents and abilities and on what they can do.

Every miracle always begins with a simple and often small act of faith. Imagine this widow in her futile situation, ignoring the prophet's instructions and simply giving up! There is this act of following through on what she had been told to do, resulting in the ongoing provision of food!

We might ask, how can we solve the world's problems?

How can the problems in Ethiopia ever be solved?

When Elijah responds to the needs of this widow, he has something very different in mind.

What do you have?

It was almost laughable, she had almost nothing!

Elijah says, we are going to use what we have! With our Father in heaven that's just fine!"

Elijah instructs her to make a small cake for him and then one for herself and her son. From her small supply of grain and oil a never-ending supply of food flows! It is not simply enough, but it is

more than enough! Something amazing happens in that moment in that humble room! **With God less is more.** The book of James tells us the drought lasted 3.5 years.

**They ate from a little jar of flour and a little jar of oil for at least 2 years!**

The miracle takes place because Elijah sees the situation differently and finds a totally different way of addressing it! He doesn't focus on her lack; on what she DOESN'T have. Instead, he looks at what she DOES have, relaying the instructions that God has given him!

This brings about a change of mindset which results in extraordinary transformation.

**This is what happened to Amarech!**

**(SLIDE 13)**

When TDA started working with Amarech's church she was helped to understand through this story and other Bible passages how God is concerned not only for her spiritual life but for the struggles she and her family were experiencing.

Just like the widow in our story, Amarech had a fresh encounter with God as she was helped to see the little she already had! Amarech was helped to discover God's love and care for her.

**(SLIDE 14)**

By making a few small changes to the way they farm their fields, it will make a huge difference to the volume of crops Amarech's family can harvest.

Using new planting methods that she learnt at her Church, they dramatically increased their yields! Last year, for the first time in their lives, they had surplus to sell at market. Through learning how to diversify her plants, Amarech was able to harvest beans at different times of year to her maize, this provides food during the usual hunger gap. **Less became so much More for Amarech.**

**(SLIDE 15)**

Amarech's church started Self-help savings groups, one of the ways Tearfund helps people lift themselves out of poverty. These are groups where people learn to share every area of their lives together.

They grow in faith, support and pray for one another; and they have an economic side to them too. Each person in the group pay a tiny amount every week – as low as 4 cents per week - into a loan fund from which they can take loans, with very low interest.

As a result, she was able to get a small loan to start a coffee trading business. Because of her coffee business she was able to send one of her daughters to college to study English.

**(SLIDE 16)**

Now she and her husband have the dignity of meeting her family's needs and not depending on hand outs. Amarech's story shows how God can take whatever we can give and use our gifts to transform people's lives.

We give and he multiplies our efforts. She has learned to use the little in her hands - just as the widow at Zarephath used the little she had in her hands.

**So how do we apply these lessons from Amarech and the woman of Zarephath to our lives today in this church?**

1. We need to examine what we have – not what we don't have.
  - a. What can I share with a neighbour, or how can I help a neighbour?
  - b. What resource or skill do I have that God can release for Kingdom use?
  - c. Engage in our community – personally and corporately
2. God calls us to look beyond our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth.

**Options**

**(SLIDE 17)**

Now I am guessing there are some disciples of Jesus here in this room?

I would like you to pick up the card that is on your pew/ seat. What is in your hand now. Just a piece of paper? I would suggest that it has the potential to be much more than that. At Tearfund, we believe that it is possible to see the end of absolute poverty in our lifetimes. Just a few cents a day can help to transform the mind sets that hold people like Amarech in that poverty trap.

It only costs \$14 per month for 2 years for people like Amarech to receive skills training through a Self-Help Group and Conservation Agriculture to feed and provide for their family. That's less than 50 cents a day! \$28 per month for 2 years could help 2 people!

**Over to You:**

**(SLIDE 18)**

I would like to invite you to open the leaflet in your hand. There is a pen for you to complete your details there. Some of you will want to commit to monthly giving and others will want to make a one-time gift. If you like, we can send you updates on how your money transforms lives, but you are in control of how much information you get and how you get it.

This is your opportunity to see how the little in your hand can be multiplied by God to do the miraculous. Let us pray

**Prayers:**

***A prayer for Amarech:***

Loving and faithful Father we praise you for your love and mercy. Thank you for listening to us, for taking an interest in every area of our lives. Thank you that you understand our needs and that you provide ways for us to help others in need.

We lift up Amarech and her family to you. Thank you for the way you have dramatically changed their lives! We pray that she will continue to feel God's guidance and protection. With expectant faith we pray for millions still living in extreme poverty in Ethiopia, and across Africa, that they too might experience total transformation.

We place our gifts and lives in your hands and ask you to use us for your glory.

Amen

***Benediction:***

May God the Father, remind you of his promises of abundant love and provision. May God the Son, teach you more about his generosity and joy. May God the Holy Spirit, inspire you to have confidence in your gifts. Now and forevermore. Amen

**Other Quotes:**

- If you make more than \$34,000 a year, you're among the world's richest 1% on planet earth.
- Although extreme poverty is shrinking, nearly half of the world still lives on less than \$3.50 a day.
- 400 million children live in extreme poverty.
- In Africa, childbirth is the leading cause of death for adolescent girls.
- Every year, 6 million children die from malnutrition before their 5th birthday. – That's like every child in Canada under age 16 dying this year.