

# Crisis



## Preparation:

- *Print copies of the list of crises in Appendix A for group members*
- *Have ready a large sheet of paper, a marker pen, and a copy of the Bible*

## Introduction

*5 minutes*

If some members of the group don't know each other, invite everyone to introduce themselves.

Confirm the practical arrangements for the sessions, including agreeing an end time for today's session.

## Explain that:

- This is a six session course, and there are benefits to attending all sessions, though this is not essential.
- There will be lots of opportunities for participation and discussion, and this is to be encouraged, but is always optional.
- You will not necessarily always reach agreement – and this is fine! Aim to listen respectfully and gain new insights from each other, and bring unresolved differences to God in prayer.
- While the focus of the course is on economics, no background in finance or business is necessary. In fact, one of the aims of the course is to encourage the view that economics is a subject with which we should all be concerned.

## Getting started

*3 minutes*

Invite the group to quickly say what words come to mind for them when they think about economics. Capture these on a large piece of paper.

## Why does economics matter?

*20 minutes*

The Collins Dictionary's word of the year for 2022 was "permacrisis", the sense of being in seemingly permanent crisis. Many of the issues that our society is currently facing are related to economics.

Invite the group to read out the list of crises in Appendix A, and discuss what order of priority they would put them in. As you do so, discuss:

- Which of these crises is of most concern for you? Why?
- Are there any other things you would add to the list?
- How are these crises linked?
- From your perspective, are we in a state of crisis?

Clearly what you perceive as a crisis is determined by where you sit and how you experience things. But what is very apparent that a number of interlinked facets and features of our current economic situation, nationally and globally, are having significant implications for society, for democracy and for the environment. These make them a concern for everyone, and particularly for people of faith.

## **Is economics spiritual?**

*5 minutes*

Read this quotation:

“As Christians, we know that the relationships between ourselves and other humans matter, and so does our relationship with the planet. It matters enough for the Creator to have jumped right into the middle of it all in the person of Jesus Christ, becoming human, becoming part of our living planet in all its interdependence. So how we live together, work together, manage our resources together, it all matters to God. Economics is spiritual.

Many of us have considered economics to be boring, irrelevant, and best left to the experts. We might think that the church and the Christian faith have little to do with it. But if our economic system is unjust, we can challenge it. If it devalues people made in the image of God, we can correct it. If it celebrates fame and excess while disregarding the poor, we should refocus its attention. We think economics is the work of everyone, not just the experts.”<sup>1</sup>

This was written by Jeremy Williams and Christine Bainbridge, some of the founders of the ‘joy in enough’ movement, which encourages Christians to think in new ways about the economy.

➤ Invite people’s reactions to this quotation. Do you think ‘economics is spiritual’?

So what does our faith have to say about economics?

## **The purpose of the economy**

*15 minutes*

Read Deuteronomy 8:6-18.

This provides the Israelites with instructions on what they are to do when they escape from slavery in Egypt into the ‘promised land’. Then discuss:

- What does it say about what God intends for his people?
- What role does economic activity play in this?
- What is the relationship between the environment and the economy here?
- What do you like about this vision? Is there anything you find uncomfortable?

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Bainbridge and Jeremy Williams, *Let’s build a bridge: bringing theology and economics together* (<https://joyinenoughblog.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/lets-build-a-bridge.docx>)

This passage offers a vision of an abundant land, teeming with productive economic activity, where there is no scarcity. It is because the environment flourishes that God's people flourish. The people are to remember that their prosperity comes about as a result of God's generosity.

## **Rethinking the rules of the economy**

*10 minutes*

The instructions to the Israelites also include a number of rules and regulations about the economy. Ask group members in turn to quickly look up and read out the following passages of scripture:

Deuteronomy 25:13-15

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

Deuteronomy 22:8

Leviticus 19:9-10

Leviticus 25:2-5

Deuteronomy 15:1

➤ What is the purpose of these rules and regulations?

It is easy to think that the way the economy works is like the laws of physics – unchanging and set in place by a higher power. But societies have always made and remade the basic rules of the economy to reflect what was important to them.

➤ How could thinking in this way about the economy help address what you identified as the most concerning crises earlier?

Over the coming sessions we will explore this in more depth.

## **Homework and closing prayer**

*2 minutes*

Ask everyone to think about and then write down a short definition what they think the purpose of the economy should be, and bring this to the next session.

Close with a prayer.

## **Global inequality**

Despite a world of abundant resources, 670 million people globally are categorised as living in extreme poverty, and more than one in ten of the world population face severe levels of food insecurity. These numbers have been rising over the last four years.

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## **Climate crisis**

The planet is currently on track for temperature rises of 2.8°C by the end of the century, with devastating impacts on all forms of life, including human life. These impacts are already being felt in many places.

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## **UK productivity**

Since the global banking crash of 2008, the British economy has seen low growth and productivity levels compared to other similar countries. Many commentators say that this has been exacerbated by the impact of Brexit.

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## **Living standards**

Real wages and family living standards in the UK have stagnated and fallen to an unprecedented extent since 2008. These trends are set to accelerate, with predictions of a 7% decline in living standards over the next two years.

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## **Cost of living**

Exceptional rises in food and energy prices since the spring of 2022 have affected everyone, and forced impossible choices on many of the poorest in society.

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## **Public finances and public services**

Many public services are struggling in various ways following the Covid pandemic and a period of austerity in public spending. Despite this, there are record levels of taxation and government borrowing.

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## **Financial markets**

A loss of confidence in the financial markets in September 2022 put borrowing costs up for homeowners and the Treasury, and played a significant role in forcing Liz Truss's government from office.

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