

Poems by People with Lived Experiences

Challenge Poverty Week 2024

Overview of CPW24

This collection of poems is designed to be used during Sunday services, particularly during Challenge Poverty Week 2024 (CPW24). CPW24 calls on churches, individuals, and communities to confront the systems that perpetuate poverty and work together to create lasting change. With nearly 90% of people in the UK believing more needs to be done to tackle poverty, this resource aims to explore how Scripture speaks to the issues of poverty, power, and justice. Through these poems, believers are encouraged to reflect on how God calls us to respond to these challenges in our communities and the world.

Poverty is many things

(Written in 2016, based on stories and reflections shared by participants in Church Action on Poverty's Poverty Media programme)

Poverty is not entertainment, it's not noble or romantic.
Poverty is... heavy.
It's heavy hearts and heavy legs.
It's sore skin and hollow eyes.
It's upset and downhearted.
It's hunger. Malnourishment. It's always thinking about the next meal.
Poverty is bailiffs, it's food banks, it's queues and lists, it's never being told what you're entitled to but always being told.
Poverty is being shown up then put down.
It's missed payments and mistrust.
It's always answering questions but never answering the door.
Poverty is hiding in plain view. It's hiding.
Poverty is high bills and low pay.
It's higher costs and lower self-esteem.
It's invisible scars and visible pain.
Poverty is living nextdoor, it's living on your nerves, it's not living, it's... barely surviving.
Poverty is... everywhere. With... nowhere to turn
It's a gut-wrenching silence, screaming.
Poverty is depressing, demotivating and dehumanising.
It's degradation, desperation and despair.
Poverty is feeling... worthless, it's feeling anxious, it's feeling excluded, it's feeling rejected, it's feeling ashamed, it's feeling trapped, it's feeling angry, it's feeling frustrated, poverty is.... exhausting.
It's not feeling anything. It's... numb.
Poverty is... crushing. Empty. Lonely.
Poverty is cold. It's damp. It's ill health. Bad housing. Sadness, fear and human misery.
Poverty is ignored and abandoned. It's sanctioned and sectioned. It's late payments and early deaths.
Poverty is not something that happens to... 'others'.
Poverty is our old people, our young people, our sick people, our disabled people, our mentally ill people, our homeless people. Poverty is people seeking asylum, it's people who are refugees, people who are migrants. Poverty is over-worked, under-paid everyday people.
Poverty is people. It's children. Babies. Not... 'them'. Us.
"Poverty is the worst form of violence." (Mahatma Gandhi)
Poverty is growing in our country. In 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021.
Poverty is many things, but
it is not
acceptable.

Tony Walsh

To restore one's soul

To restore one's soul
is to have a sense of pride in what you do
to take back control
over your own image
to be positive about yourself
your self-respect
your self-worth in everything that you do.

If poverty gets you down
and humiliated to the extent
that you feel ashamed or judged
for how you look, how you talk,
or how you are perceived by others –
because poverty can just simply fry your brain –
then stop for a while.

Take time out
to just go out
and reconnect
and be at one with nature.
For me, I am an animal lover
so I reconnect by being close to my dog
and go horse riding.
It gives me back my pride,
my self-esteem, my self-worth
and most importantly my dignity too.

To believe in someone
is to also give them back their dignity too,
their self-respect, honour and humanity.
It feeds their soul.

I am what is known as a renegade
because I have a backbone
and I am prepared to stand up
for what is right and just.

I will not be silenced
nor will I cower down to the powers that be
nor will I be downtrodden underfoot like a piece of dirt
that they have just stepped in.

They can criticise me all they want for the way I look
or for the way that I speak — I don't care.
My strength is in my self-belief
for I know in myself what matters to me:
that is my self-respect and my dignity.

My positive power is to stand up and be counted
not only for myself

but on the behalf of others and I can also be their voice too
because I have the courage to be able to say “enough is enough”.

I am not going to, nor am I prepared to, take it any more.

So the powers that be:

Take notice of me.

Sit up and listen to my voice
and heed my words that I have to say to you.

Because I am not a number
nor am I a commodity
that you can push from pillar to post
or pick up and drop again
when it suits you.

Because after all is said and done
I am a person
I am a human being just like you
Because I have a voice too.
I will stand up and be counted.
You will not silence me.
I will not go away,
I am here to stay,
and I will have my say.

Amanda Button

Untitled #1

worry
fear
worry
fear

round and round in my head
can't sleep
can't stop thinking

bills
eat
bills
eat

round and round in my head
the voices say, what should I do?
shut up
shut up!

hunger
shame
hunger
shame

round and round in my head
are they judging me?
I can't ask for help

hope
guilt
hope
guilt

round and round in my head
food boxes
thanks
feed the kids

worry
fear
worry
fear

round and round in my head
every week
nothing changes

joy
understanding
joy

understanding

round and round in my head
a helping hand
no judgement passed

peace
relief
peace
relief!

Grace Collins

Shame echoes

My best friend in P2 was posh
And her mum didn't like her hanging out with me.
She had these gorgeous white winter boots with the fluffy insides,
and when it snowed, she looked at me and said matter of fact –
your feet must be freezing.
So, she traded me her left boot for my left plimsole,
so we'd be cold together.
Later when I was in foster care, the foster mum bought me a pair of shoes
'cause I didn't have any.
When my social worker collected me – I was being transferred homes,
I was told to take them off,
Leave them here,
they don't belong to you!
I walked out as barefoot as I came in.
Two decades later, my daughter has more than 20 pairs of shoes.
Most she'll never wear.
I feel guilt at hoarding and excess.
But I can't help it.

Shame echoes

5pm is still my favourite time to go for a walk.
As a child, I would walk up and down the streets,
stopping outside houses,
to enjoy the buffet of delicious smells cooking inside them.
Now, I am grown up, I still don't know when to eat
because I taught myself to fill up on smells.
I cook something and it smells so good,
I feel awkward when I sit down to eat.

Shame echoes

It's your daughter coming home from a sleepover to tell you Sarah's mum doesn't keep
tinned food under her bed.

Shame echoes

It's feeling the sickly, cold rush of anxiety seize hold of your being at the sound of a knock on the door.

Shame echoes

Poverty is a stigma that haunts you like a stench – it stains everything you touch.

As a child, the world seems like an Argos catalogue,
full of shiny promises for everyone else, but you.

You can't quite figure out the secret handshake to enter the 'good enough to deserve stuff club'.

Growing up you find out that even if you escape,
you don't belong on the other side.

You still don't know that secret handshake.

You don't belong where "we" ☐ ☐ ou don't belong where ☐ e.

He knows what I really mean

My Creator created me
He knows what I really mean
He fills me with faith
He knows what I really mean.

My Creator created me
And my thoughtful mind
My intentions are honourable and pure
He created me kind.

My Creator created me
And my moving legs and arms
My actions are wholly sincere
He created me to cause no harm.

My Creator created me
He knows what I really mean
He fills me with faith
He knows what I really mean.

My Creator created me
And my bleeding heart
My compassion is always there
He created me to care.

My Creator created me
Filling this vessel with water
Love I always poureth
He created me to treat you as my son and daughter.

My Creator created me
He knows what I really mean
He fills me with faith
He knows what I really mean.

My Creator created me
With a soul that's glowing
Humility and acceptance
He created me with these flowing.

My Creator created me
With my door always opening
A place for bread, water and rest
He created me to be welcoming.

My Creator created me
He knows what I really mean
He fills me with faith
He knows what I really mean.

My Creator created me
He knows what I really mean
He fills me with faith
He knows what I really mean.

Rahela Khan

I have a voice

i am hidden small and dainty
issues with health and motivation
my world is crumbling around me
my pain is hidden from all to see
i have a voice
abused and berated downcast
shunned by government and society
unloved and forgotten
i have a voice
i use my voice
loud and clear
shout and scream
for all to hear
more articulate
more knowledge
and more motivation
i am here to help to use my voice
to speak up for those who can't
who are hidden like me
who feel that there is no hope
i have a voice

Penny Walters

Poverty needs

(Written in 2016, based on stories and reflections shared by participants in Church Action on Poverty's Poverty Media programme)

Poverty needs bravery and pluck, resilience and pride, it needs defiance.

Poverty needs understanding and support, communication and information, it needs security.

Poverty needs motivation and unity, tolerance and inclusion, it needs togetherness.

It needs community and compassion, it needs mentoring and motivation, it needs resolve.

Poverty needs hope. It needs love. It needs determination.

It needs you, it needs us, it needs action. Today.

Tony Walsh

Poet Biographies

Amanda Button has been an activist with ATD Fourth World for 15 years. Since 2019, she has been part of a group supporting ATD's National Coordination Team. Her lived experience of poverty informs her public speaking, which includes events hosted by Amnesty International, the University of Birmingham, and Parliament.

Grace Collins is a carer to her two autistic adult children. She is also a volunteer teacher with St Mary's Timebuilders project in Sheffield, where they support people who need to learn English as they want to integrate more in society. You will often find Grace with dirt under her fingernails as she is passionate about gardening and growing fruit and vegetables. She belongs to different community growing projects where she loves to share her knowledge and enjoyment of providing food from seed to plate.

Taliah Drayak is a mum to eight children and the director of the International Parent Advocacy Network. She is grateful for the opportunity to work with the wonderful community at ATD Fourth World.

Rahela Khan has always enjoyed writing poetry and has clear memories of reading some out in junior school assemblies when she was seven years old. She first had two poems published in the 1980s which she wrote as part of a political campaign against the Primary Purpose Rule. She then had a poem published in the *British Poetry Review* in 1995. She enjoys writing in both English and Urdu.

Tony Walsh is one of the UK's leading spoken word poets. Manchester-based, he is a regular on TV and radio, and reached a global audience of millions in 2017 with his poem 'This Is The Place' performed at the vigil for the victims of the Manchester Arena bomb. Raised in poverty and ill as a child, he worked on inner city housing and regeneration projects for 18 years until 2011. His brother and sister-in-law are United Reformed Church ministers.

Penny Walters has worked alongside Church Action on Poverty, Sustain and Food Nation on the Food Power programme for over four years. During this time she has used her own lived experience to campaign both locally and nationally on food poverty issues. She has co-designed participation tools as part of the Leapfrog project with Lancaster University, attended the 'Closing the Hunger Gap' conference in North Carolina and spoken to MPs, alongside local and national media. Since Covid-19 she has given evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment, whilst also becoming involved in online creative workshops, giving her another way to express her feelings during lockdown.

Scripture from the Margins: [Click here](#)

Politics in the Pulpit CPW24 Episode: [Click here](#)

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