



# CHILD HEALTH NOW

## *A Congregation Session*

### *Overview*

**THIS SESSION EXPLORES** the causes of under-5 mortality around the world, and invites congregants to reflect on the character and promises of God within this context and to take action calling for an end to preventable child deaths.

» **KEY CONCEPT**

Having the faith to stand up and stand out brings healing.

» **KEY PASSAGE**

Matthew 8:1-17

» **INTENDED AUDIENCE**

As this session is interactive it should work well with all ages. For children, you may wish to conduct separate activities or presentations during the Bible talk portion of the session.

## » LEADER NOTE

Feel free to pick, choose and adapt the activity ideas provided and to add in time for prayer and worship. We have included suggested timing and referred to any preparation that will be required. Although child mortality is a sensitive subject, the session is intended to be fun, engaging, interactive and thought provoking.

## » SCHEDULE:

ACTIVITY 1:	Crime Scene Investigation	20 minutes
ACTIVITY 2:	Stand Up, Sit Down	20 minutes
ACTIVITY 3:	Bible Talk	20 minutes

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- » T-shirt
- » Map of Africa with Zimbabwe circled
- » A medicine bottle labeled 'Antibiotics'
- » Baby doll labeled 'Many children die before their fifth birthday'
- » Fly swatter labeled 'Mosquitoes'
- » A cup of dirty water
- » AIDS ribbon (red ribbons are fine)
- » Five copies of Resource 1, "Crime Evidence," found on page 9
- » Playing cards (enough that each participant has one)
- » Three copies of Resource 2, "Prayer Inspirational Stories," found on page 10
- » Blank sheets of paper, one for each participant
- » Pens or pencils, one for each participant
- » Bibles (optional)
- » Copies of Resource 3, "Prayer Cards," found on page 11, printed on cardstock (one card for each participant)

## *Preparation*

» **PLACE THE MEDICINE BOTTLE**, baby doll, cup of water, fly swatter, ribbon, map and t-shirt on a table in the front of the meeting space.

» **INVITE THREE PARTICIPANTS** to assist in the prayer portion of this session by providing them with a copy of Resource 2, "Prayer Inspirational Stories," and ask them to write a prayer for children with similar illnesses.

# Session Steps

1

**BEGIN BY NOTING** that the Bible is full of crimes and consequences. The group will have the chance to play detectives, by investigating a modern-day mystery.

2

**SELECT SIX VOLUNTEERS** to choose and describe one of the clues on the table. Have the other participants take turns guessing what each clue represents. Then ask them to use any combination of clues to come up with a creative theory about what the crime was and how it was committed. Facilitate feedback on theories.

3

**DISTRIBUTE TO FIVE VOLUNTEERS** copies of Resource 1, “Crime Evidence,” and ask each to read aloud one of the descriptions noted on the resource.

4

**ASK AND DISCUSS:**

- » How different were the crimes to people’s theories?

5

**PRESENT AN OVERVIEW** of the issue of child mortality using the key points noted below:

- » Every day, more than 22,000 children die before reaching their fifth birthday. Most of these children live in developing countries and die from causes that are preventable or treatable.
- » The main identified causes of death are: pneumonia, diarrheal diseases, pre-term births, asphyxia and malaria. In many of these deaths, malnutrition is an underlying factor.
- » Many factors make it difficult to reduce child mortality. Lesser-developed countries struggle with inadequate health services, lack of clean water and sanitation, illiteracy (especially among women and girls), gender discrimination, and isolation of communities due to poor infrastructure, natural disasters and conflict.
- » A significant proportion of under-five child deaths occur in the newborn period, the first 28 days of life. Of an estimated 8.8 million deaths of children under five in 2008, more than 40 percent occurred in the newborn period. That is more than 2 million children dying the day they are born, and another two million in the first month.
- » Preventing the deaths of millions of children requires an integrated approach and low cost interventions such as: nutrition training; distribution of Vitamin A, iodized salt, and iron; education in breastfeeding, hygiene, and sanitation practices; birth spacing and skilled birth attendants; access to antibiotics and immunizations; oral rehydration therapy (ORT); and ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs).

- » Changes are also needed to improve healthcare facilities and systems, remove social barriers for women, and address indirect factors, such as illiteracy, that cause poor health.
- » *Child Health Now* is World Vision's first global campaign focused on a single issue: reducing the preventable deaths of children under five. In two minutes, more than 30 children under the age of five will die. Most of them will succumb to preventable causes, such as diarrhea, pneumonia, childbirth complications, and malaria.
- » This is more than just a problem facing the developing world. It's a "silent" emergency. And it is the greatest child rights violation of our time.
- » That's why World Vision has launched its *Child Health Now* campaign, a five-year commitment to reducing these deaths. Our campaign will draw on the lessons learned in our 1,600+ community programs where our development strategies are fully linked to our advocacy efforts with local and national government bodies.
- » Through this campaign, World Vision encourages communities to raise their voices about their right to quality healthcare and press national governments to meet their responsibilities to children, mothers, families, and communities throughout their country.
- » We will also join hands with local government and NGO partners to cooperatively address the critical health-related issues in specific communities.
- » But working locally won't be enough. As Christians we must also urge wealthy nations to fulfill their promises to improve conditions in the developing world. More than 190 world leaders have committed to achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals by 2015. World Vision's *Child Health Now* campaign calls on the international community to rededicate itself to these goals.
- » World Vision wants you to join them by then urging our elected leaders to put child health at the top of their agendas. Let them know we believe 22,000 child deaths every day are not acceptable, and ask them how they're going to help.

*OPTIONAL BIBLE-SEARCH: Invite the participants to work in pairs or small groups and to identify one or two 'crimes' from anywhere in the Bible. Lead a discussion regarding the Scripture verses chosen.. Close with a Bible verse that explains God's attitude towards injustice.*

## 6

**DISTRIBUTE A PLAYING CARD** to each participant. Then note the following:

- » Although this scenario is fictional, the characters are real because everyone will be playing themselves.
- » It is Monday morning and you are running late. As you are about to leave the house, another family member tells you that they are feeling ill. You are the only two people left in the house. Visualize who the family member is.

- » Stay standing if you, or the family member, have been vaccinated to prevent serious illness.
- » Stay standing if you can choose to buy your family member anti-inflammatory drugs, or pain-killers.
- » Stay standing if you can choose to get information and advice about their symptoms.
- » Stay standing if you can choose to keep your family member warm and comfortable.
- » Stay standing if you can choose to miss a day's work/school to look after them.
- » Stay standing if you can choose to call a doctor's office.
- » Stay standing if you can choose to get an appointment for your family member within the next week.
- » Stay standing if you can choose to take them to see a doctor within a 20-mile radius.
- » Stay standing if you can choose to take your family member to a free hospital, or call for emergency help.

7

**NOTE THE FOLLOWING:**

- » So far the game has been dependent on your ability to make your own choices.
- » Most people/everybody is still standing.
- » Now let's see what it would feel like if your choice was limited by external forces beyond your control. I wonder who will still be standing at the end of the game this time.

8

**REPEAT AS ABOVE.** But this time ask people to pick up the playing card that you have distributed first. After each question, ask all the people with a particular card to sit down i.e. all the queens, all the aces etc. Each time explain by saying: "I'm sorry but you live in a country where the majority of the population is too poor to have these choices available to them."

9

**NOTE THE FOLLOWING:**

- » Where we are born is something that we have very little control over yet it affects every aspect of life, including our ability to make choices.
- » You could call it the card that we have been dealt by life. But, all of us, whatever life we were born into, are given the choice to follow the call of God.
- » If we happen to be born or live in a country where resources are plentiful we are also given the choice to stand up against the injustices we see happening all around us. Injustices against humanity, like hunger, lack of medical care and preventable child deaths.

## 10

- » We are given the opportunity to be like Christ. We can stand up against injustice and stand out, on behalf of those who have fewer financial resources than us, but who need the same things.

**INVITE THE PARTICIPANTS** to open their Bibles to Matthew chapter 8. Read aloud (or invite someone to do so) verses 1-17. Then offer the following commentary:

- » Following the message to the multitudes in The Sermon on the Mount, creating as it does a real picture of the principles and values of the Kingdom of God, Jesus goes on to show his followers that his ministry will be about so much more than a series of heart-stirring sermons. He lives out God's plan of salvation in both practical and spiritual terms. In so doing, Jesus provides his disciples with evidence about the calling of the church and gives his modern-day followers and example to live by.
- » Matthew's Gospel shows Jesus moving from teaching large crowds to ministering to people's individual needs. The short encounter with the leper, in verse two, immediately highlights:
  - » The leper's courage in standing out in faith
    - Jesus' compassion for human need
    - Jesus' authority over both spiritual and physical disease
    - Jesus' holistic ministry and his concern with both body and spirit
- » The leper only has to stand out of the crowd and speak up, for Jesus to bring him freedom from his condition. When the leper says, "If you are willing, you can make me clean," he demonstrates immense faith and courage but also a radical refusal to accept the barrier of his outcast status. If Jesus had been caught up in Jewish legalism, his own state of health and remaining ritually 'clean,' he would have refused to touch the man. Instead his response is immediate and unstinting. When he says "I am willing," he acknowledges the leper's courage, breaks down any remaining barriers of religiosity and provides, not just physical healing, but also spiritual cleansing.
- » The events that follow the healing of the leper shout loud and clear that Jesus' ministry is going to be a holistic one. His guidance to those around him is not just about spiritual nourishment for the masses. It is also about immediate 'life application.' By ministering to both the spiritual and the physical needs of the lost and hurting, Christ's actions teach us about balancing the physical and spiritual needs of those around us, as we live out our calling to follow him.
- » It is possible that Matthew's purpose in highlighting this encounter was to show how Jesus related to the people that lived outside the Jewish box marked 'socially acceptable.' Matthew may have wished to challenge Jewish legalism and to encourage the faith of the non-Jewish believers in the early church. He may also have been reminding the 'Christian' Jews, that non-Jewish believers had a vital part to play in the church's mission. If so, Matthew's message is reinforced by the miracle that happens when Jesus is stopped by a Roman centurion.

- » When Jesus helps the centurion, the power of God within him is so great that he does not need to touch the sick man to bring healing. He does not even go to the sick man in person. Instead, he only has to say the word and a man, lying ill miles away, is healed.
- » As with the healing of the leper, this brief exchange between Jesus and the centurion testifies to a healing God who is concerned with the well-being of his children, regardless of their racial or religious background. It is significant that the centurion who shows such faith should be another of those men it would be all too easy for the disciples to hate. As an unwanted reminder of the foreign occupiers ruling the roost in Palestine, the centurion was part of an army responsible for quelling Jewish uprisings and maintaining the Roman rule of law and order.
- » From the perspective of both the common man on the street and the religious leaders of the day, a non-Jewish servant, especially one employed by an enemy soldier, was about as low down the social pecking order as it gets! Another person, another situation, and yet another really good reason not to get involved. For religious Jews of the time it would be unthinkable to do a good deed for a man like this. The centurion must have known this but he had the faith to stand up and stand out, in order to help someone else and his faith brought healing.
- » When the centurion first tells Jesus about his servant, Jesus does not waste time asking the soldier for credentials, or demanding that the Roman justify his request for help from a Jew. Instead his response is both a test of the centurion's faith and another compelling example of 'loving your enemy.'
- » The NIV translates Jesus' response in verse 7 as '*Jesus said to him 'I will go and heal him,'*' but Jesus' response in the Greek is translated instead in the form of a question, '*Shall I come to him?*' Perhaps when Jesus asks the centurion this, he is also speaking to his disciples? Perhaps he is reminding them that, while Jews were careful not to enter the homes of Gentiles, he was more than willing to do so? Reconciliation was, after all a major part of God's plan! Or perhaps he simply wanted the centurion to be clear about what exactly he was asking Jesus for.
- » During this conversation the centurion, unheeding of the crowd of onlookers, openly confesses his own unworthiness, '*Lord I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.*' He acknowledges that Jesus will render himself unclean, under Jewish law, by coming to his house. The centurion's humility, coupled with his experience of his own authority and an immense faith in Jesus' divine authority, allows him to nail the issue on the head. He says, '*...just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*' At the heart of his willingness to stand up, stand out, and put his faith into action, is his recognition of the divinity of Christ.
- » As if to leave us in no doubt of the significance of what has just taken place, Matthew closes this account with his comment that Jesus' ministry fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah who said: '*He took our weaknesses and he bore our diseases.*' Isaiah 53:4
- » Just as the parable of the Good Samaritan shows physical salvation as a precursor to spiritual salvation, so the healing of both the leper and the centurion's servant, show physical healing as a precursor to the spiritual healing of the cross.

- » As with the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus uses an episode that brings physical healing to teach a moral and spiritual lesson about all people being equal in the sight of God.
- » Having the faith to stand up and stand out in the crowd is what brought healing. The centurion claimed the word of life for his servant. His faith and courage were abundantly rewarded.
- » In a world of poverty and injustice, where children will continue to die needlessly unless people have the faith to stand up and stand out on their behalf, this episode reminds Christians that we must fuse together our 'believing' life and our 'doing' life.
- » The centurion didn't just believe in the power of God and leave it at that—he went out and claimed it in the best interests of someone else.
- » The centurion's faith was built on solid foundations. He was utterly convinced of the power and compassion of Jesus. He was also utterly sure of receiving divine justice and mercy. We can be just as sure of this today.
- » Do we have the courage to be like the centurion by standing up and claiming a better life for others?

# 11

**CONCLUDE THE SESSION** by inviting the volunteers to read their prayers in front of the group. Then distribute a copy of the prayer card to each participant and pray the prayer together.

*This session is adapted from resources created by World Vision United Kingdom.*

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**RESOURCE I**

# *Crime Evidence*

In case you haven't guessed yet, the crime created here is actually the worst one you could imagine—murder! The doll represents the fact that more than 8.8 million children under the age of five die every year from illnesses like measles. These illnesses are either preventable, treatable, or both!

- » **THE FLY SWATTER** represents one of the most powerful killers of children under five. Mosquitoes may look pretty harmless but they most certainly are not! Approximately 2,000 children die every day from malaria. Most die because they are not able to access the simple, anti-malarial treatments that could help them to recover from this illness. Many of these children live in countries where healthcare is limited or too expensive for those living below the poverty line to pay for. Many families can't afford insecticide-treated mosquito nets. These nets would help people not to get bitten.
- » **THE CUP OF WATER** represents the fact that more than one in six people around the world don't have access to clean water. Young children who drink unsafe water are particularly vulnerable to parasites and waterborne illnesses. Approximately three children die every minute of diarrhea. They die because their families can't get a cheap salt, sugar, and water formula that helps dehydrated children to recover.
- » **THE MEDICINE BOTTLE** represents pneumonia. This kills more children than any other illness. Close to 2 million children, under the age of five, die from the disease each year. Children already weakened by one illness are more susceptible to pneumonia. In many homes where people are living below the poverty line, dung and rubbish are burned as fuel. This air pollution can cause respiratory illnesses that often lead to pneumonia. Children with signs of pneumonia need to be treated promptly with antibiotics. Pneumonia can be prevented by ensuring that children are well nourished and by immunizing them against childhood illnesses.
- » **THE T-SHIRT AND MAP** represent a little girl called Princess Mwanza and the country that she comes from. Mwanza is four and a half years old. She lives in Zimbabwe and could easily have become a victim of child-killing diseases. The AIDS ribbon represents the disease that was most likely to kill her. Her mother contracted HIV before Mwanza was born and could have passed it on to her. Thankfully, World Vision was working with local people in her area to prevent the spread of HIV. When Mwanza was born, the doctor took precautions to ensure that she didn't contract HIV. These included making sure she was delivered by Caesarean section. Like her mother, she was given anti-retroviral medicines to help her body fight off infection. In Mwanza's case, the killer that was stalking her was caught in time. Mwanza is HIV free!

**RESOURCE 2**

## *Prayer Inspiration Stories*

Instructions: Read the story and then write a prayer for all the children suffering from a similar illness.

**»» STORY 1**

'Hi. I am Mai. I am seven years old and I live in Cambodia. My family is very poor. In my village, we didn't always have enough clean water or soap for washing our hands. We did not have proper toilets to go to. The bugs from the dirty water made me sick and gave me a tummy ache. I was very ill. I couldn't eat anything or play with my friends. Then a charity called World Vision helped me and the people in my village. They gave us special drinks to make our stomachs better and to nourish us. They trained ladies from the village to teach us about washing our hands. They worked with the men from my village to build proper toilets and drains. Now, I am not weak or ill anymore.'

**»» STORY 2**

'Hello. My name is Jendy. I am 12 years old. I live in Uganda. Many people that live in Uganda are poor. My family does not have much money. Only a few weeks ago I was in so much pain that I couldn't eat and I couldn't sleep. No one knew what was wrong! When I first became ill my mom thought I just had a cold. Then, one day, my eyes went a strange, yellowy color and mom realized I had a horrible illness called malaria. You get malaria from being bitten by flying insects, called mosquitoes. Mom asked Selina to come and help me get better. Selina is a lady who lives in my village. She has been trained by a charity called World Vision. Selina looks after children with malaria. She took me to a clinic to get medicine. She saved my life! World Vision also gave mosquito nets to the rest of my family. My family did not have enough money to buy the nets themselves. The nets help to make sure that we don't get bitten by mosquitoes while we are asleep!'

**»» STORY 3**

'Hello. My name is Felix. I come from Zimbabwe. I live in a village where many people are poor. My dad does not have a job. I am hungry a lot of the time. The longest I have gone without eating is five days. When that happened, all I could think of was food. My tummy hurt, so my mom told me to eat the leaves from the tree outside our house. She thought it would fill my stomach up, but I got diarrhea. Now a charity called World Vision, is helping us to grow vegetables. They have also given us pineapple seeds and tools. Pineapples grow well in hot countries like Zimbabwe and don't need lots of water. This has provided my family with another source of food. We can also sell the pineapples for money or swap them for other things we need.'

**RESOURCE 3***Child Health Now Prayer Card*

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of our world as only your love can make it:  
 A world where the vulnerable are protected,  
 Where the hungry can eat their fill,  
 Where the oppressed find comfort and rest,  
 And where the poor have the same chances as the rich.  
 Please give us courage to stand up and work for a better world,  
 And help us to make it a place where peace is built with justice,  
 And justice guided by your love.  
 Amen.



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 Amen.



## About World Vision

**WORLD VISION** is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. Motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ, World Vision serves alongside the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God's unconditional love for all people. We see a world where each child experiences "fullness of life" as described in John 10:10. And we know this can be achieved only by addressing the problems of poverty and injustice in a holistic way. That's how World Vision is unique: We bring 60 years of experience in three key areas needed to help children and families thrive: emergency relief, long-term development, and advocacy. And we bring *all* of our skills across many areas of expertise to each community we work in, enabling us to care for children's physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Partnering with World Vision provides tangible ways to honor God and put faith into action. By working, we can make a lasting difference in the lives of children and families who are struggling to overcome poverty. To find out more about how you can help, visit [www.worldvision.org](http://www.worldvision.org).

## About World Vision Resources

**ENDING GLOBAL POVERTY** and injustice begins with education: understanding the magnitude and causes of poverty, its impact on human dignity, and our connection to those in need around the world.

World Vision Resources is the publishing ministry of World Vision. World Vision Resources educates Christians about global poverty, inspires them to respond, and equips them with innovative resources to make a difference in the world.



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