



# UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to “*Understanding Poverty*,” a six-week study that we hope will provide basic information about why more and more Americans are living below, or barely above, the poverty line.

It is difficult for most of us not to have a simplistic, or at least outdated, view of why the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, as the saying goes. Basically, it centers on the foundational American belief that if you work hard and make good choices you can accomplish anything. What it doesn't consider are the realities of an uneven playing field that exists in our society, cultural and contextual prejudices that are endemic, economic and educational inequalities, and the suburbanization and then globalization of the free marketplace. In this study, we'll discuss each of these factors. We'll also look at the alphabet-soup of government aid programs that are the lifeline for many marginalized families as well as some of the loopholes in the welfare system that often bypass people most in need.

This series consists of six lessons, titled:

- “*The poor will always be with us.*”
- “*Not everyone deserves our help.*”
- “*If they'd just get a job, they wouldn't need help.*”
- “*We all have the same opportunity in America.*”
- “*She can afford that and she's on welfare?*”
- “*What can one person do about poverty?*”

In addition, the unit includes a glossary titled “Welfare 101: Language of Poverty.”

As you participate in this study, our prayer is that you'll be open to considering and re-considering the assumptions that have shaped your understanding of poverty. May God fill us all with compassion for people living in poverty.

### A PRAYER AS WE BEGIN

*Woe to us indeed if we forget the homeless ones who have no vote, no power, nobody to lobby for them, and who might as well have no faces even, the way we try to avoid the troubling sight of them in the streets of the cities where they roam like stray cats. And as we listen each night to the news of what happened in our lives that day, woe to us if we forget our own homelessness.*

*To be homeless the way people like you and me are apt to be homeless is to have homes all over the place but not to be really at home in any of them. To be really at home is to be really at peace, and our lives are so intricately interwoven that there can be no real peace for any of us until there is peace for all of us.*

Source: Frederick Buechner, *The Longing for Home*

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“Understanding Poverty” was written by Heather Deal and Courtney Drew, MSW 2008/MDiv students, Baylor University School of Social Work