



Seeking Peace

PARTICIPANT STUDY GUIDE: I



Faithful Priorities

The Federal Budget as a Moral Document

Rationale

THIS STUDY GUIDE places federal budget priorities in conversation with Biblical principles of economic justice to empower Christians to explore the federal budget as a moral document.

Objectives

- to educate participants about the federal budget
- to discuss federal budget priorities from a values perspective
- to place Biblical concepts of the Sabbath and Jubilee in conversation with U.S. budget priorities

Outcomes

- participants will be able to identify Biblical principles of economic justice, including the concepts of Sabbath and Jubilee
- participants will be able to differentiate between mandatory and discretionary elements of the federal budget
- participants will evaluate the federal budget as a moral document from a Christian perspective of economic justice

God, make me an instrument of your peace;
 where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine One,
 grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled
 as to console;
 to be understood, as to understand;
 to be loved, as to love;
 for it is in giving that we receive,
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.
 — St. Francis of Assisi
 13th century





Women
of Faith
in Action

Women of Faith in Action is a program of WAND Education Fund that seeks to reorder national priorities — away from militarism toward peace and real security. We do this by educating women of faith and engaging their voices and values in the political process.



WAND EDUCATION FUND

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EXERCISE 1

Group Introductions

Choose a Text

Mutual Invitation — Instructions

Move around the room and read each posted text. Then stand or sit beside the statement that “speaks” to your understanding of Biblical priorities. The facilitator will begin by using her/his chosen text to introduce her/himself. Then the facilitator will invite a participant to do the same. The participant may either pass or share, then invite another participant to introduce her/himself using a chosen text.¹

Deuteronomy 24:17-18

Do not be unfair to a foreigner or an orphan. Don’t take a widow’s coat to make sure she pays you back. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord your God saved you from there. That is why I am commanding you to do this.

Amos 5:23-24

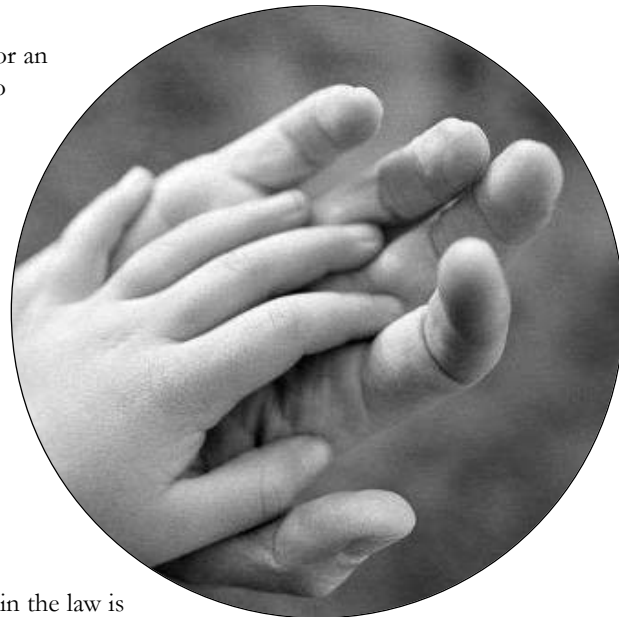
Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Matthew 22:36-40

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Luke 4:16-19

On the Sabbath day Jesus went to the synagogue, as he always did, and stood up to read. The book of Isaiah the prophet was given to him. He opened the book and found the place where this is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”



¹E.H.F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993), pp. 79-88.

²Richard H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 106.

³Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanPrayer, WomanSong* (Stone/Crossroad, 1987).

EXERCISE 2

Sabbath and Jubilee Principles

Biblical Principles of Economic Justice

Exodus 23:10-12

“For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat...Six days shall you do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the foreigner may be refreshed.”

Leviticus 25:39-42

“If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves. They shall remain with you as hired or bound laborers. They shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. Then they and their children with them shall be free from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property. For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold.”

Deuteronomy 15:1-2, 7-8

“At the end of every seven years, you must tell those who owe you anything that they do not have to pay you back. This is how you must do it: Everyone who has loaned money must cancel the loan and not make a neighbor or relative pay it back. This is the Lord’s time for canceling what people owe...If there are poor among you, in one of the towns the Lord your God is giving you, do not be selfish or greedy toward them. But give freely to them, and freely lend them whatever they need.”



Discussion Questions

1. One Jubilee principle is liberation for the working poor from debt and forced servitude. In a globalized economy, the working poor might labor down the street or in a foreign country. What humane limits do these Biblical excerpts set on debt and labor for the poor, and how would you envision the establishment of humane limits in our national and global economy?
2. Sabbath principles outline a mandatory rest on the seventh day of the week for all who labor, including animals, in an effort to revitalize even the most vulnerable laborers.² In a market economy, why does it make practical and ethical sense to build rest into our labor, especially for the working poor?
3. According to theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “the ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world it leaves to its children.” List the government programs that serve the more vulnerable members of our society and discuss their effectiveness. What more could be done?

Facilitator Wrap-Up

By taking a closer look at God’s emphasis on economic justice in the Bible, we know that as Christians we must be concerned with the ways in which our economy and federal budget function in our society. Sabbath principles remind us that rest and dignity for laborers, especially the poor, is Biblical. Jubilee principles call for liberation for the poor from debt and forced servitude. Economic justice in the Bible prioritizes caring for the most vulnerable, including widows and orphans. As a moral document, we must assess whether our federal budget reflects our national priorities and work to bring it in line with our common values of justice and liberty.

EXERCISE 3

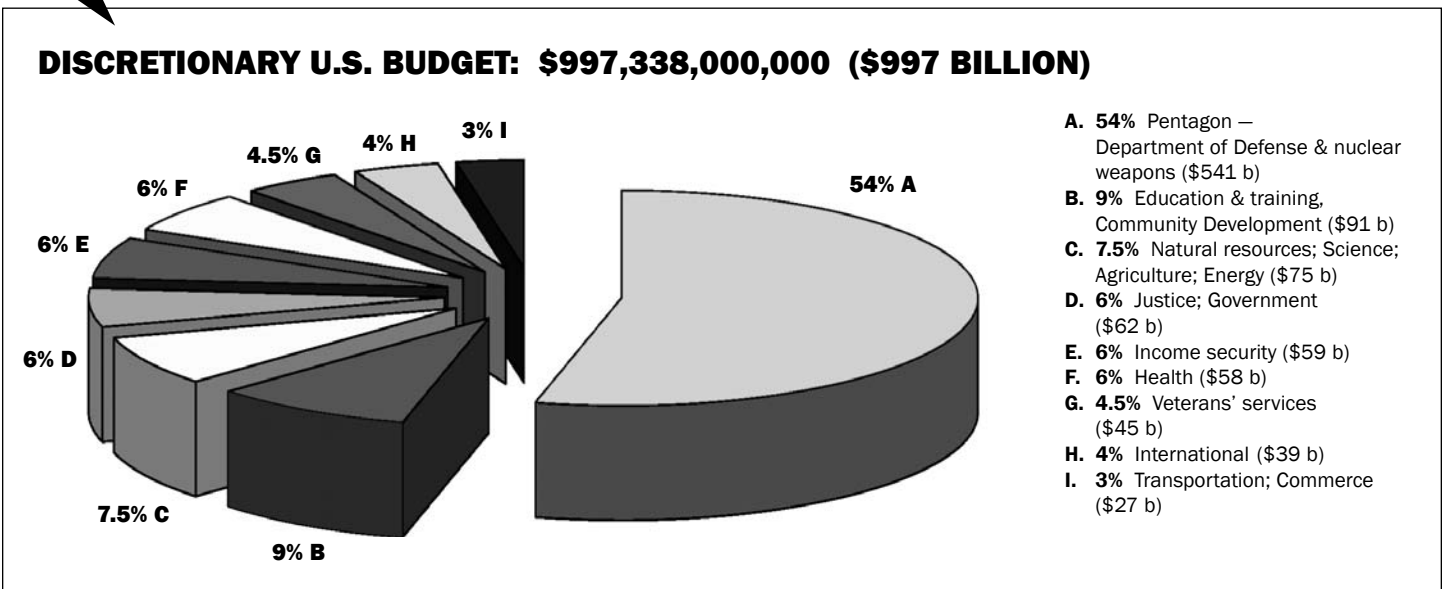
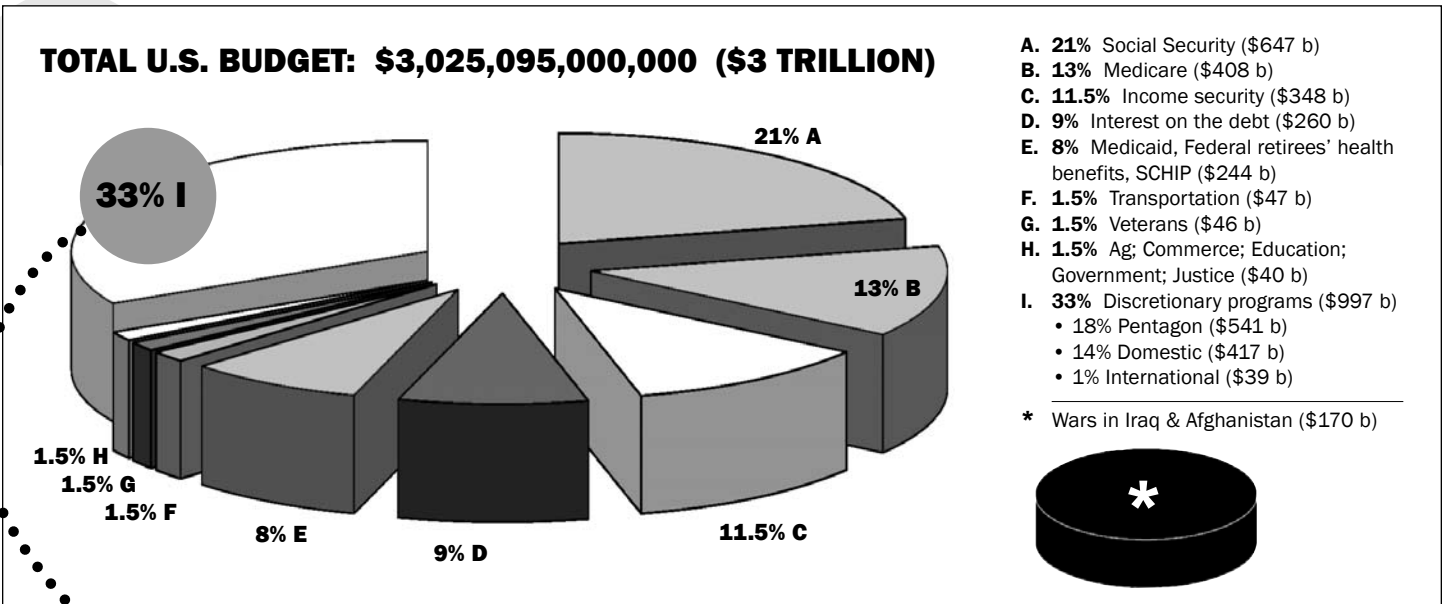
Taking a Look at Our Nation's Checkbook

Introduction by Facilitator

The federal budget is a statement of our nation's moral character. People spend money on the things they care about, the things they need and value. You can tell a lot about a person by looking at their checkbook. The same is true of countries. Our nation's checkbook (the federal budget) reflects the priorities of our country. Let's take some time to examine the budget pies.

Discussion Questions

1. Do the priorities reflected in the current federal budget reflect your needs, priorities, and values?
2. Do these pie graphs contain information that is new or surprising to you? If so, what?



EXERCISE 4: SLICE THE AMERICAN PIE!

Ingredients in Slices of the Budget Pie...

Introduction by Facilitator

Let's look at the ingredients in each slice of the discretionary budget pie, starting with education. Please follow along, using the recipe cards below, as we examine each slice.

Education & training; Community Development

Sample Ingredients: Elementary, secondary, vocational and higher ed, children and families services; community and rural development, FEMA.

Natural resources; Science; Agriculture; Energy

Sample Ingredients: Land management, pollution control, water resources; Space, National Science Foundation; Ag research; Energy R&D, conservation.

Justice; Government

Sample Ingredients: Law enforcement, courts, prisons; IRS, Congress.

Income security

Sample Ingredients: Housing, Women, Infants and Children food program (WIC).

Health

Sample Ingredients: National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control, Food and Drug Administration

Veterans' services

Sample Ingredients: Hospital and medical care.

International

Sample Ingredients: Foreign Military Financing/Economic Support Fund, HIV/AIDS, State Department, development & humanitarian assistance.

Transportation; Commerce

Sample Ingredients: Air, water, and ground transportation; commerce advancement.

Pentagon – Department of Defense & nuclear weapons

Sample Ingredients:

- **Operations & maintenance: 33% (\$180 billion)**
Training, logistics, facilities management
- **Personnel: 23% (\$125 b)**
Pay and benefits
- **Procurement: 20% (\$104 b)**
Purchase of weapons systems, goods, services
- **Research, development, test & evaluation: 15% (\$80 b)**
New weapons systems
- **Military construction: 4% (\$24 b)**
Bases, buildings, family housing, golf courses, gyms
- **Nuclear weapons: 3% (\$16 b)**
Research, maintenance, cleanup
- **Other: 2% (\$7 b)**

What about jobs?

It is tempting to justify weapons programs by the jobs they provide; yet military programs are not efficient jobs producers.

In 2007, economists at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst looked at how many jobs are created by military vs. civilian programs.

They found that each billion dollars invested in...

- **Mass Transit** yields 19,800 jobs
- **Education** yields 17,700 jobs
- **Health Care** yields 12,900 jobs
- **Construction** for home weatherization and infrastructure yields 12,800 jobs
- **Investing the same amount in the military** creates 8,500 jobs

Discussion Questions

1. Should job creation be a factor in decisions about whether or not to fund a weapon system?
2. Do we fund unnecessary weapons for the sake of jobs?
 - Do we cancel unnecessary weapons and disregard the suffering of job loss?
 - Or, is there a third way?

Facilitator Wrap-Up

The eight non-defense slices of the pie are quite small compared to the Pentagon slice, which consumes 54% of the discretionary budget pie. As large as this is, the Pentagon budget does **not** include money for current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are funded through extra spending requests called “supplemental appropriations.”

Mini Session

How would you slice the pie differently?

EXERCISE 5

The Struggle for a New World

Introduction by Facilitator

The following excerpt comes from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s historic address at a meeting of Clergy and Laity Concerned at Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967, exactly one year before he was assassinated. His public address, which linked the civil rights movement with opposition to the war policy in Vietnam, was entitled "A Time to Break Silence."

Discussion Questions

1. What is King saying?
2. How might the biblical principles of economic justice inform our federal budget priorities?
3. What actions might Christians and congregations take today to speak out about federal budget priorities and work for change?

A Time to Break Silence

"A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death..."

There is nothing, except a tragic death wish, to prevent us from reordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war...

War is not the answer. Communism will never be defeated by the use of atomic bombs or nuclear weapons... our greatest defense against communism is to take offensive action on behalf of justice. We must with positive action

seek to remove those conditions of poverty, insecurity, and injustice which are the fertile soil in which the seed of communism grows and develops...

If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight. Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter – but beautiful – struggle for a new world. This is the calling of the [children] of God."

— Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



God of the Jubilee
 We give thanks that we are all
 Part of your family circle,
 Forgiving one another,
 Loving one another
 Because you first loved us.
 We give thanks that your Spirit
 Has banished distinctions
 Between Jew and Greek,
 Between slave and free,
 Between female and male,
 Between those who are in power
 And those who are powerless.
 We give thanks that we are one
 In the love of the one
 Who loves in us,
 Forever and ever.
 Amen.
 —adapted from Miriam Therese
 Winter³