



I DANIEL BLAKE

A film by Ken Loach

Prayers, Bible Readings, and Questions for
Study and Reflection



About This Booklet

This material aims to provide a framework for Christians to engage in conversation around 'I Daniel Blake'. The questions assume that you have seen the whole film, and that the clips are there as a reminder of particular scenes. The DVD has not been released at the time of writing, so finding the clips will need to be done by searching, an extra challenge for you!

We have used a simple format of choosing a scene from the film, posing some questions to stimulate discussion and suggesting a task to do to help the group to think more widely. We have then suggested one or two Bible passages with parallel themes. Each session ends with a prayer from the book 'Prayers Encircling the World' published by SPCK. The six sessions are independent. None of them rely on the others to make sense, so you can use as little or as much as you would like. It is not necessary to use every element of every section and the leader may look through the questions beforehand and select which parts to use. The material is available on the CMD section of the diocesan website www.newcastle.anglican.org/cmd and on the resources centre website and is copyright free.

About the Director, Ken Loach

Loach is a social campaigner who communicates through his work as a television and film director. In 1966 he directed the screen play 'Cathy Come Home', about one family's catastrophic slide into homelessness. It was watched by over a quarter of the population and was instrumental in the launch of the charity 'Shelter'. Despite its success, Loach was unhappy with the impact of the film. He was disappointed in the lack of long term change it effected in the lives of the poorest people in Britain. 50 years later, Loach brings 'I Daniel Blake' to our screens, a film about one man's battle to receive the welfare benefits he needs. Loach chose Newcastle for its 'strong, rich, well defined character, an area built on struggle, and a keen sense of dignity' (BBC news 21st October).

It is his hope that 'I Daniel Blake' will draw the attention of the government, and the country at large to the plight of those who struggle to survive at the mercy of a system which leaves little room for respect or humanity.

Loach's style of film making is notable and participants may wish to consider this as part of their reflections on each scene. His film making is stripped out (there are no special effects for example) and can have a 'home made' feel compared to most films released in mainstream cinema today. He allows actors to improvise much of what is said so it can often feel very raw, truthful and emotive. He pays great attention to how each scene is shot to encourage the viewer to concentrate on the point/emotion he is trying to get across – who is in the camera frame, where the actors are in relation to each other and the use of natural sounds rather than a musical score to accompany or accentuate the plot.

For Course Participants

When looking at each scene in these notes it may be useful to ask '*how* is the film encouraging me to respond in this way?'. It is likely that you are responding to more than just the words or the plot – other, often unconscious triggers are the art of the film maker and a full appreciation of the film may allow some reflection on this as well as the plot-line.

1. Daniel Meets Katie



Watch: The scene at the job centre where Daniel meets Katie for the first time

Daniel first meets Katie and her two children when, new to Newcastle, they get lost on the way to the job centre and miss an appointment to sign on to receive benefit payments. Katie is threatened with a sanction, meaning that she will not receive the money she needs. Katie becomes upset and a member of the job centre staff tells her that she is creating a scene. Daniel steps in to support her.

1. What do we learn about Daniel's character in this scene, and how is what we learn important in the rest of the film?
2. From the evidence you see in the clip, why does each character in the scene behave as they do?
3. What has each character got to lose? Does anyone have anything to gain?
4. Recall a time in which you have witnessed or been part of a scene in which a member of the public stood up for a stranger. What happened and what was the effect on you?

To do: Split into three groups and each take the part of one of the characters/groups of characters; the job centre staff, Katie and her children, and Daniel. Imagine you are talking about the scene to a friend. How would you describe it? Share with the group.

Bible Reading

The Parable of the Good Samaritan Luke 10:25-37

- a. Where do you see similarities between Jesus' parable and Daniel's actions in this scene?
- b. What would Daniel's answer be to the question 'who is my neighbour'?

Prayer

Give us courage, Lord, to stand up and be counted,
To stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves,
To stand up for ourselves when it is needful for us to do so.
Let us fear nothing more than we fear you,
Let us love nothing more than we love you,
For thus we shall fear nothing also.
Let us have no other God before you,
Whether nation or party or state or church.
Let us seek no other peace
But the peace which is yours,
And make us its instruments,
Opening our eyes and our ears and our hearts,
So that we should know always
What work of peace we may do for you.

Alan Paton, South Africa

2. Katie's Hospitality



Watch: The scene where Daniel makes repairs to Katie's house and Katie gives him food.

Daniel makes repairs to the rather dilapidated house which Katie has been given. Katie gives food to Daniel and the children, and has only a piece of fruit herself.

1. When Daniel tries not to accept the food which Katie clearly can't afford to give him, Katie says 'please, it's the least I can do'. Why might it be so important to Katie that Daniel accepts her hospitality?
2. The Oxford English dictionary defines hospitality as 'the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.' There are other examples of hospitality in 'I Daniel Blake':
 - Daniel's night with the neighbours,
 - Katie's reception at the Food Bank
 - The strangers who help Daniel in the library
 - The woman in the Job Centre who tries to assist Daniel with his forms

Do we see these examples as hospitality? Are they all of equal value? What do they tell us about the world in which Daniel lives?

3. The asset based community development model (ABCD) encourages us to think about what's strong rather than what's wrong. What is strong in this scene? Where is the hope and light?
4. In what ways can we offer hospitality as churches and as individuals?

To do: Design a poster welcoming people to your church. It doesn't have to be pretty, but what is the message it needs to give?

Bible Reading

The Widow's Mite Luke 21:1-4

'She out of her poverty has given all she had to live on'. The stories of Katie's generosity and the widow's mite are hard to hear. What point is Jesus making in this story, and how does it inform the way in which we give and receive as Christian disciples?

Prayer

Open my eyes that they may see
The deepest needs of people.

Move my hands that they may feed the hungry;
Touch my heart that it may bring warmth to the despairing;
Teach me the generosity that welcomes strangers;
Let me share my possessions to clothe the naked;
Give me the care that strengthens the sick;
Make me share in the quest to set the prisoner free.

In sharing our anxieties and our love,
Our poverty and our prosperity;
We partake of your divine presence.

Canaan Banana, Zimbabwe

3. At the Food Bank



Watch: The scene set in the foodbank.

Daniel and Katie are directed by the job centre to go to the food bank. After waiting in a long queue they are welcomed, treated kindly, and offered food. Katie is so hungry that she opens a tin of fruit in the corner, and breaks down in tears when she is seen eating from it. The food bank volunteers are kind and Daniel comforts her. He accepts no food for himself.

1. How is 'goodness' shown in this scene?
2. What strengths do we see in the characters in this scene, both Daniel and Katie and the food bank volunteers?
3. This scene takes place in the hall of the Venerable Bede church in Benwell, and the church plays a major part in the work of the food bank. The role and presence of the church in the story is not acknowledged within the film. Does it matter that the church is hidden in plain sight in 'I Daniel Blake'?
4. Is it important that the church not only does good, but is seen to be doing good?
5. What does your church do, visibly and invisibly, to support those in need in your parish and beyond?

To do: In your group reflect on today, or on the last few days... When were you able to receive, or offer, an act of kindness? How did it make you feel?

Often acts of kindness go unnoticed or are quickly swamped by acts of unkindness. Being grateful, noting these positive acts can improve mental health and relationships. Consider creating a 'Blessing Jar' for yourself or for someone that you think might find it of help.

There are lots of suggestions for how to do this on the internet, here is one:

www.stockpilingmoms.com/2013/01/blessings-jar-a-great-way-to-remember-the-little-things/

Bible Reading

The Beatitudes Matthew 5:-1-12

"Beatitude is a possession of all things held to be good, from which nothing is absent that a good desire may want. Perhaps the meaning of beatitude may become clearer to us if it is compared with its opposite. Now the opposite of beatitude is misery. Misery means being afflicted unwillingly with painful sufferings."

St. Gregory of Nyssa, a mystic who lived in Cappadocia in Asia Minor around 380 AD.

Go through the Beatitudes verse by verse. How do you see each of the actions of the blessed being demonstrated in this scene of the film?

Prayer

O God, may your Church discover, then identify, its life with groups of people who suffer injustice and remain unheard. May your Church be the voice of the voiceless. Let your Church find them, and struggle with them, and so find the way of your cross, and the way to true responsibility.

Emilio Castro, Uruguay

4. An Alternative Economy

Watch: The scene in which Daniel's neighbour is selling trainers from the back of his car, or the scene in which Daniel visits Katie in the brothel, or both.

Daniel tries very hard to work with the benefits system and comply with its requirements. His friends find ways of working round the system and getting money by other means. His neighbour sells illegally imported trainers from the back of his car, and Katie turns to prostitution.

1. How do you react to this scene/these scenes?
2. Do you think this character/these characters are wrong in how they make money? What other options might have been open to them?
3. Why do you think Daniel doesn't seek ways of making money which are illegal or outside the system in some other way?
4. As well as Daniel's neighbour and Katie, this film shows a number of people in compromised situations, including most of the job centre staff featured, and the 'health care professional' in the voice over at the very beginning of the film. Can you identify with any of them?
5. Where is the hope and light in this scene/these scenes?

To do: Look through a newspaper and see whether you can identify articles about people involved in illegal activity or acting in a way society perceives as wrong. How might you read the articles differently if you knew more about the individuals involved?

Bible Reading The Woman Taken in Adultery John 8:1-11

'Let anyone who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her'.
At whom might we want to throw a stone in 'I Daniel Blake'?

Prayer

God of life,
We pray to you for all people:

For all women who have been excluded from a full-fledged life for the only reason that it has been always like that.
Empower us to take all iniquity away.

For all people who are oppressed and abused.
Empower us to take all iniquity away.

For all people whose freedom and dignities are denied by systems and authorities.
Empower us to take all iniquity away.

For all those who are driven away from their houses and their homes because of their conscience and their convictions.
Empower us to take all iniquity away.

For all those who are in search of the meaning of their life within their own culture and religion.
Empower us to take all iniquity away.

For all those who have to labour too hard for too small a salary.
Empower us to take all iniquity away.

For all those who- from sheer necessity – have to sell their own body.
Empower us to take all iniquity away.

For those many desperate women and men who are at the mercy of the rich and the powerful.
Empower us to take all iniquity away.

For all those who suffer, we pray to you.
Empower us to take all iniquity away.

Andre Quintelier, Philippines

5. Daisy Visits Daniel



Watch: Daisy visits Daniel at his home and shouts through the letterbox when he doesn't answer the door.

Daniel is at his lowest ebb. He has sold all his furniture and he is ill at home, wrapped in a blanket in his empty house. Daisy, Katie's daughter, comes to visit to find out why he hasn't been to see them.

1. Daisy shouts through the letterbox 'you helped us, why can't we help you'? What do you think is the answer to that? Why does Daniel find it impossible to accept help from Katie and her family at that time?
2. This scene could be described as the low point of the whole film from Daniel's point of view. Of all the things that have happened to Daniel, why is this scenario uniquely difficult for him?
3. We know that, basically, Daniel is a good communicator, but in this scene he can't communicate. What are the barriers preventing him from talking to Daisy?

5. This scene stands in stark contrast to the earlier moment of protest when Daniel writes his name on the job centre wall. Daniel has lost hope. How can we, as individuals and as churches, stand alongside those who feel they no longer have a voice?

To do: You can work on your own, (or as part of group), to consider what it feels like to be in a place of darkness. This may be a place of shades of darkness or with shards of light.

In this dark place - what colours/images/words come to you?

Could you take these and turn them into something: poster, altar-cloth, model, banner, T shirt design, music, length of knitting or crochet?

You can use any form of materials you are comfortable with (or challenged by): fabrics, newspaper cuttings or images, colours: chalk, paint, crayons or pencil, playdough / plasticine / papier mache, instruments, online or mobile phone apps.

It does not have to be perfect, it does not have to be public... it does however need to be, in the style of Ken Loach, 'real' and 'honest'.

Bible Readings

Psalm 139:1-12

‘Surely darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night’.

What does Psalm 139 teach us about God’s presence with us in the darkest times?

Jesus is Mocked Matthew 27:35-44

‘And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots’.

At the end of Jesus' life, everything is taken away from him.

In what ways is it helpful to draw parallels between Jesus' situation and Daniels?

How does that help you reflect on Daniel's story in the light of your faith?

Prayer

Jesus, each of us is both the thief who blasphemes
And the one who believes.
I have faith, Lord, help my lack of faith.
I am nailed to death, there is nothing I can do
But cry out: 'Jesus, remember me
When you come with your kingdom.'

Jesus, I know nothing, I understand nothing
In this horrific world.
But you, you come to me, with open arms,
With open heart,
And your presence alone is my paradise.
Ah, remember me
When you come with your kingdom.

Glory and praise to you, you who welcome
Not the healthy but the sick,
You whose unexpected friend is a criminal
Cut off by the justice of men.
Already you are going down to hell and setting free
Those who cry out to you:
'Remember us, Lord,
When you come with your kingdom.'

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church

6. Daniel's letter



Watch: Daniel's funeral.

Daniel writes a letter which he intends to be read out at his appeal, but is in fact read out by Katie at his funeral.

"I am not a client, a customer, nor a service user.

I am not a shirker, a scrounger, a beggar nor a thief.

I am not a national insurance number, nor a blip on a screen.

I paid my dues, never a penny short, and proud to do so.

I don't tug the forelock but look my neighbour in the eye.

I don't accept or seek charity.

My name is Daniel Blake, I am a man, not a dog.

As such I demand my rights. I demand you treat me with respect.

I, Daniel Blake, am a citizen, nothing more, nothing less. Thank you."

1. In this letter, Daniel rejects the terms used of him by the system. How do you think he would like us to define him?
2. What strengths does Daniel demonstrate in writing this letter?

3. Loach chose Newcastle as a setting for the film for its 'strong, rich, well defined character, an area built on struggle, and a keen sense of dignity' (BBC news 21st October). How important do you think Newcastle is to this film, and to what extent is it a film about our region?
4. It has been said that 'I Daniel Blake' is 'not hero versus villain, but everyman versus the system' (Frances Murphy, Thinking Faith). Do you agree, and what is the take-home message of this film for you?

To do:

Daniel defines himself in his letter. It is his legacy. What will your legacy be?

Write your own letter (or make an audio/visual recording) outlining what you think your legacy is - how you wish to be remembered.

Put your statement away for a day or two.

Revisit what you have created as if you were a stranger. Do you like/ recognise this person? Are they aware they are loved by God and 'fearfully and wonderfully made'?

If not, what help might be sought so that this person can feel part of the family of God?

Bible Reading

Psalm 139:13-18

‘For it was you who formed me in my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made’.

What does this passage tell us about the value of each person?
Is there a link between saying ‘I am a citizen’ and ‘I am a child of God’?
How can we live that out as disciples in our Christian lives?

Prayer

When the broken come to wholeness,
When the wounded come to healing,
When the frightened come to trusting,
The stone has been rolled away.

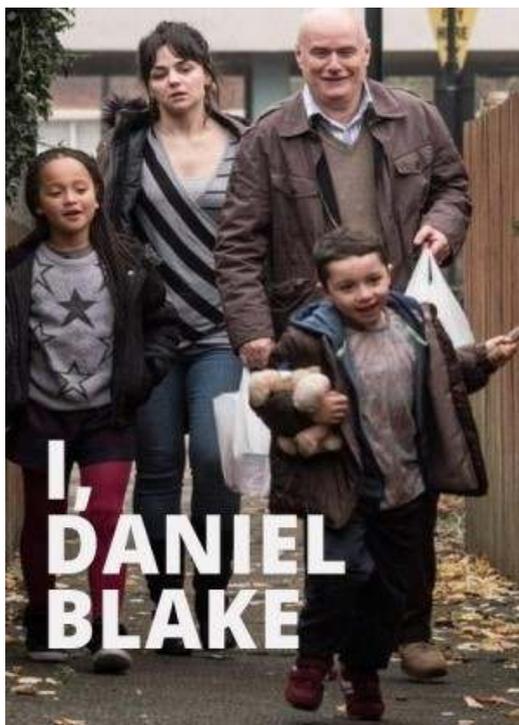
When the lonely find friendship,
When the hurt find new loving,
When the worried find peace,
The stone has been rolled away.

When we share instead of taking,
When we stroke instead of striking,
When we join around the table,
The stone has been rolled away.

The stone has been rolled away!
In you, Christ Jesus,
Love breaks through hatred,
Hope breaks through despair,
Life breaks through death.
Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Francis Brienen, United Kingdom

Printed by
Diocese of Newcastle, Church House, St John's Terrace, North Shields, NE29 6HS
January 2017
www.newcastle.anglican.org



Material written and compiled by Catherine Pickford, Karenza Passmore, and Hilary Elder, with advice from Steve Forster. Booklet created by Josie Pinnegar.

All Bible quotes have been taken from the NRSV anglicised edition.

Pictures reproduced with permission from eOne Entertainment.

Prayers, taken from 'Prayers Encircling the World' SPCK 1998. Alan Paton's prayer used with permission from SPCK.

Every effort has been made to seek permission to use copyright material in this booklet. We apologise for those cases where permission might not have been received and, if notified, will formally seek permission at the earliest opportunity.