

# Power, Influence and Enterprise Solutions to Poverty

*Jerry Marshall draws lessons from A.A.Milne's 100 Acre Wood that relate to the theme of power and influence, and a conference with Faith in Business on enterprise-based solutions to poverty.*

A.A.Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh books paint a vibrant picture of struggles and missteps in power and influence. Take Rabbit for example: "As soon as he woke up he felt important, as if everything depended on him. It was just the day for Organising Something, or for Writing a Notice Signed Rabbit..."<sup>1</sup>

The problem with Rabbit's longing for bureaucratic and imperious power is his low ranking in the community hierarchy. The real characters of influence are those close to the 'Dear Leader' figure in the background: Christopher Robin. Top of the list are Robin's best friend Pooh bear and his sidekick Piglet.

At the bottom of the hierarchy is Eeyore. This sad stuffed donkey is clearly struggling with chronic depression. His housing is inadequate, relegated as he is to a poorly drained corner of the 100 Acre Wood. And he

may well be malnourished by a diet limited to thistles. Eeyore is single, often alone and his gloomy outlook appears to make it difficult for him to form deep relationships.

In one of the stories, Pooh and Piglet discovered that no one has remembered Eeyore's birthday<sup>2</sup>. What happens next illustrates how power and compassion are a potent mix that can lead to well-meaning but irresponsible leadership.

Pooh and Piglet respond in a loving way, but like so many, they instinctively follow a "needs-based" approach. They tackle the symptoms – a lack of presents – rather than consider the underlying issues, which are relational.

As is often the case with charity and aid, the choice of gift, a pot of honey and a balloon, reflect the givers' values rather than what would actually

be appreciated by the beneficiary<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, there are logistical challenges not untypical of aid delivery: greed leads to the loss of all the honey; and careless handling of the balloon causes catastrophic damage.

Even if the honey had arrived intact, careful consideration would have helped Pooh recognise the danger of creating dependency on fodder that Eeyore is ill-equipped to retrieve for himself, as well as taking away the dignity of fending for himself. It is a classic example of what Sam Wells characterised as "*working for*" Eeyore rather than "*working with*" or "*being with*" him<sup>4</sup>. Spending time with Eeyore might have enabled them to remember his birthday in the first place; and involving him fully in decisions would likely have led to better outcomes.

The idea of "*being for*" might also have prompted them to campaign for relocation or better drainage.



Credit: Wikipedia

E.H. Shepard's illustrated map of the forest shows "Eeyore's gloomy place... rather boggy and sad". In a later story, Pooh and Piglet do indeed build Eeyore a new house at Pooh Corner; but again, a lack of consultation and the inadvertent use of his old house as building material causes considerable stress and leaves Eeyore homeless on a cold and snowy night. I cannot help wondering whether relocation near single-mum Kanga (with a DBS check<sup>5</sup>) might be to mutual advantage.

If Pooh and Piglet had avoided the dangers of a needs-based approach and instead taken an Asset Based Community Development route<sup>6</sup>, they might have had a far greater impact through taking advantage of the considerable social capital in the Forest. Responsible use of power and influence in Christian leadership surely centres on working with God and the body of Christ to bring together resources and social capital to build something of Kingdom value.

For those of us connected with Faith in Business who appreciate the

potential of "redemptive" or "impact" business, there are also enterprise solutions that could address Eeyore's situation, while providing dignity and avoiding dependence.

For a start, basic business start-up training<sup>7</sup> might have enabled Eeyore to develop an enterprise (donkey rides or removing Heffalumps from pits?) that could meet his relational needs, provide an income to improve his housing and diet, and build his self-esteem. Second, a partnership with Christopher Robin, in consultation with the community, might lead to better housing for all and either the rewilding of Eeyore's Gloomy Place or tree planting funded by carbon credits.

There is a place for charity of course, but enterprise not charity is the reason why global poverty has fallen from over 50% in my childhood in the 1960s to under 10% today<sup>8</sup>. Of course, there are challenges arising from this and more to be done. That's why many of us want to lead redemptive or impact businesses, in partnership with entrepreneurs in

the Global South, and to train and empower others to find enterprise solutions to poverty.

It's not easy. Power and influence (arising from relative wealth), mixed with compassion, are a potentially dangerous combination. Our best efforts to empower partners can be scuppered by our penchant to just "fix things" with what to us is often a very small outlay, combined with a deference from our beneficiaries that probably has colonial roots. But working with others, as part of a supportive community, both changes lives and is incredibly fulfilling.

For those who want to know more, Faith in Business is working with Transformational Enterprise Network (TEN)<sup>9</sup> and others to lead a day conference in London. The aim is to showcase, inspire and resource Christians who want to use their skills and resources to find business solutions to poverty. Dr Peter Heslam is the keynote speaker. **From Handouts to Handshakes** is in London on 27 March 2026<sup>10</sup>. 

### Pearls of wisdom from Winnie-the-Pooh

I'm indebted to John Truscott, who introduced me to the spiritual truths in Winnie-the-Pooh. Most of the training sessions at Administry, the organisation he founded, included Pooh readings. I'm also indebted to *The Pooh Perplex*<sup>11</sup>, withering parodies of various schools of literary criticism.

When training church leaders in entrepreneurial leadership, there are two quotes that seem to me to be the bedrock of mission:

*You can't stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes.*

*It is more fun to talk with someone who doesn't use long, difficult words but rather short, easy words like "What about lunch?"*

1. AA Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* (London, Methuen, 1928) ch.5.

2. AA Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (London, Methuen, 1926) ch.6.

3. See for example: Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)* (New York, HarperCollins, 2012).

4. Sam Wells, *Being with* (2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2Zci7KBXms>.

5. DBS stands for the Disclosure and Barring Service, an executive non-departmental UK public body that checks a person's criminal record to help determine their suitability for a job and prevent unsuitable individuals from working with vulnerable groups.

6. For more information, see: Ann Morisy, *Journeying Out: A New Approach to Christian Mission* (Harrisburg PA, Morehouse, 2004); and Al Barrett, *Asset Based Community Development: A Theological Reflection* (London, Church Urban Fund, 2013).

7. For example: <https://www.tencommunity.net/resources/mind-your-own-business->

8. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/estimates-global-poverty-wwii-fall-berlin-wall>.

9. <https://www.tencommunity.net/>.

10. See <https://www.tencommunity.net/events/from-handouts-to-handshakes-2026>.

11. Frederick C. Crews, *The Pooh Perplex* (London, Arthur Barker, 1964).



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