



# Race, Ethnicity and Poverty

– why racial justice matters

**A Bible study on the connections  
between race, ethnicity and poverty,  
and why it matters to Tearfund**

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# Introduction

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**‘God saw all that he had made,  
and it was very good.’**

Genesis 1:31

**In the beginning, God created a world deemed to be ‘very good’. Diversity was woven into the very essence of this world. We see this in the creation story among all living things.**

Yet diversity has not remained the gift that God intended it to be. Instead, it has become a means for discrimination and prejudice. Such injustice is rooted in the broken relationships that resulted from the Fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). Broken relationships led to the creation of broken societal systems, which were created by some and then inherited by others. These systems (often found in laws and policies on areas such as welfare, immigration, education and policing) perpetuate discrimination and injustice, and are a major cause of poverty.

Broken relationships leading to poverty can also be seen in relation to race. *The Durban Report*, from the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, emphasised that: ‘Poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion and economic disparities are closely associated with racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and contribute to the persistence of racist attitudes and practices which in turn generate more poverty.’<sup>1</sup> Racism is contributing to people living in poverty. As followers of Jesus who are called to love justice; we should challenge racism as part of this mandate. We all have a role to play in helping to address poverty.

Similarly, discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity is also contributing to poverty. *The World Social Report 2020* estimated that: ‘At the rate of progress observed from the 1990s to the 2010s, it will take more than four decades to close the stunting gap between ethnic groups.’<sup>2</sup> The report goes on to state that, although globally there is widespread condemnation of prejudice and discrimination, ‘they remain pervasive obstacles to equal opportunity – and to the achievement of the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals].’<sup>3</sup>

There is a clear connection between race and ethnicity, and poverty.

Globally, individuals and groups are being systematically discriminated against on racial and ethnic grounds. Tearfund’s vision is to see people freed from poverty, living transformed lives and reaching their God-given potential. But as long as people are experiencing systemic racial and ethnic discrimination, poverty will continue. Christians are in a unique position in that we have been given an example to follow in response to this.

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1 UN, 2001, World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, United Nations, p.7 <https://www.un.org/WCAR/durban.pdf>

2 UNDESA, 2020, World Social Report 2020, United Nations, p.4 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/02/World-Social-Report2020-FullReport.pdf>

3 Ibid.



## Bible Study

**Throughout the Bible, there are examples of Jesus challenging oppressive systems.**

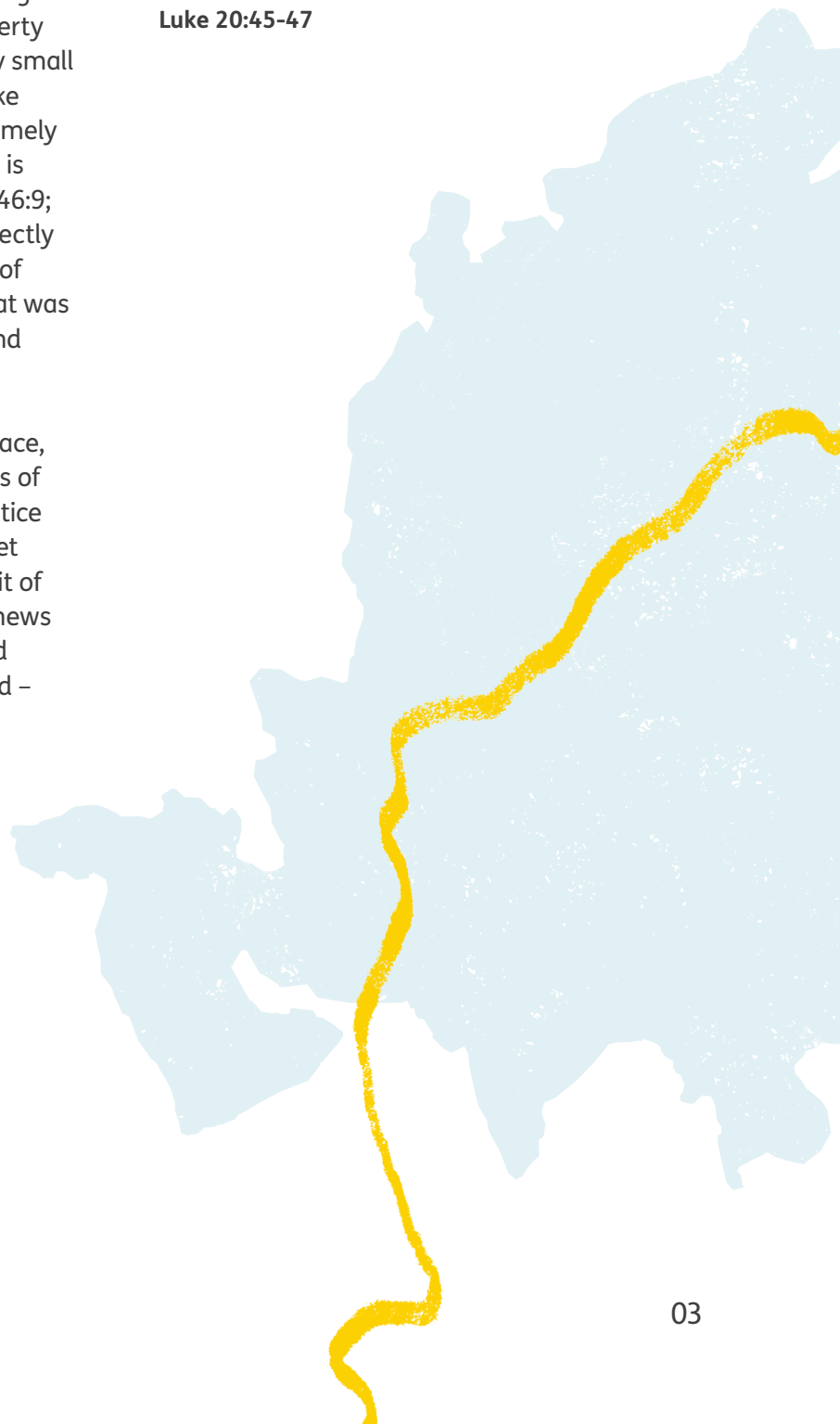
In Luke's Gospel, Jesus speaks out against the unjust system that enabled the teachers of the law to take places of honour and respect in society while at the same time 'devouring widows' houses' (Luke 20:45-47).

An example of this is provided in the following verses, when Jesus sees a lady living in poverty putting all that she has to live on – two very small copper coins – into the temple treasury (Luke 21:1-4). In biblical times, widows were extremely vulnerable, and God's compassion for them is clear within scripture (for example, Psalm 146:9; Isaiah 1:17; James 1:27). The story is not directly about race or ethnicity, but it's an example of Jesus denouncing an oppressive system that was exploiting a social group living in poverty and marginalised within society.

As you reflect on the connection between race, ethnicity and poverty, call to mind examples of how Jesus spoke out against systemic injustice and compassion for marginalised people. Let the weight of this sit with you in your pursuit of justice. The promises of God and the good news of the gospel are for everyone. Jesus shared this message with everyone he encountered – especially people in the margins of society.

**'While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the market-places and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.'**

Luke 20:45-47





## Questions for reflection

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1. How has this study helped you to reflect on the links between race, ethnicity and poverty?
2. Now that you have reflected on these links, in what ways has your thinking about racial injustice changed?
3. How did Jesus challenge systemic injustice and disrupt the status quo? Can you think of other examples from his life where he did this?
4. How would you describe the status quo in your community? Which groups are marginalised within your community?
5. What practical steps can you take to challenge unjust systems and pursue justice?



## Prayer

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Dear God,

As we reflect on how racism and ethnic discrimination keep people in poverty, help us to see what we can do as individuals, families and the church to bring justice.

We pray for people everywhere who are experiencing discrimination and ask that you will comfort them.

Give us the boldness to follow Jesus' example, showing compassion towards those marginalised within our societies and speaking out against unjust systems.

Amen.



## Other resources

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Here's where you can find more Tearfund resources about racial injustice and how to challenge unjust systems:

[www.tearfund.org/about-us/our-mission/diversity-and-inclusion](http://www.tearfund.org/about-us/our-mission/diversity-and-inclusion)

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