



TheWell

# The Justice Charter

## Bible studies



tearfund



## Introduction

**We're so excited that your church has made the decision to sign The Justice Charter. This set of Bible studies is a tool to engage your congregation with your Charter projects. It will facilitate discussions on the biblical basis for each of the Charter commitments and how your church can take action together. Through it you will discover that social justice is at the heart of biblical justice. You could host these discussions during your Sunday services, or midweek in your small groups.**

Completing this study series will require at least two sessions. You should read study one (God's heart for justice) followed by the studies relevant to your chosen area(s). It is important to progress in this order as study one contains foundational concepts that support the other studies. Several areas of justice intersect – for example, racial and climate justice, or climate and gender justice – so don't feel limited to studying only the area(s) you have committed to.

Each study contains some devotional content and up to five questions to guide the discussion. The devotional content will take approximately ten

minutes to read. Then, the time you spend on each question is your choice, based on the time you have available. The questions have been designed to challenge us and unearth perspectives we may not have previously considered, so do allow for debate and dissenting opinions to be expressed. Moving into new topics means discussion leaders may receive answers that seem unusual or aren't what we have rehearsed. Instead of shying away from discussing the answer due to uncertainty, leaders should encourage the group to consider whether the answer presented can line up with other scriptures. You could suggest the group engages with deeper study at home and brings their study findings back to the group for further discussion in the near future.

Some of the studies finish with a box titled **Go deeper**. This provides extra resources that you may want to incorporate into your session if you have an extended period of time or you find them particularly relevant to your context.

**If you would like any additional resources to support your discussions, contact us at [thewell@tearfund.org](mailto:thewell@tearfund.org)**

## Bible study 1

# God's heart for justice



### Charter commitment

1. We commit to living a life of justice, seeking to do justice in the world through the ways we live and act, and by challenging systems of injustice to reduce inequality around us.

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### Scriptures

**Genesis 3:1-7 • Isaiah 61:1-9 • Luke 4:14-21**

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### Discussion material

At The Well, we believe that injustice results from broken relationships – our relationships with 1) God; 2) ourselves; 3) each other; and 4) the wider creation. These relationships were broken at the point when Adam and Eve sinned against God in the garden of Eden. Since then, God has pursued us to re-establish relationship with him. This doesn't just include the relationship between him and us, but all four relationships. This means that the work of justice is one aspect of the wider work of reconciliation. God sent Jesus to die to redeem our whole world back to himself, and the end goal of this redemptive work is the new creation. Until the new creation is established, God will be continually working to restore and make whole. How amazing is this! This truth is full to the brim and running over with his love.

Each of the broken relationships contribute to the injustices that we see in our world. A broken relationship with God means that we fail to hear his voice and to make decisions that honour him. A broken relationship with ourselves distorts the way we see our identity as sons and daughters of the King. We forget that as a part of his family, along with every other person on the planet, we are to seek each other's wellbeing, and use the positions that God has placed us in to seek justice – just like Esther petitioning the king to abort the planned genocide of her people. A broken relationship with each other is seen in how we close our eyes to the way our actions contribute to the suffering of others around the globe, or how we are able to profit from their disadvantageous circumstances. And a broken relationship with the wider creation has resulted in humans abusing nature rather than nurturing it. This abuse is leading to intensified natural disasters that are causing the loss of livelihoods, land, family connections and lives. It is leading to the breakdown of the natural world in all the beauty and order that God created it to have, which we see in the loss of coral reefs and forests, and the pollution of seas. This brokenness has become embedded in our institutions and systems as well as our individual behaviours.

## Discussion questions

1.

**Which broken relationship would you most like God to restore in your own life?**

Because brokenness has become embedded in our institutions, we have to engage with seats of power to restore justice in our world. Isaiah was a prophet who spoke to the rulers of Jerusalem and the neighbouring nations. He challenged the systems of injustice that they perpetuated in their rule and how, through this, they led the nation to abandon God. Like other prophets, he most likely declared his message at the city gates. The gates were the centre of social and civic life in Isaiah's day – it's where trade took place, where people went to meet each other, and where they went to hear news regarding the city. His message was that the people of Jerusalem must no longer ignore the rights of the vulnerable, accept bribes, steal and oppress individuals through violence.

While Isaiah challenged rulers, his message was one of hope. Isaiah called for the destruction of the old Jerusalem in order to make way for the new. What's key to note is that he demanded this change to come in the physical and in the present – he didn't long for death or the end times as a means to relieve injustice. He could see beyond the present mess and shared God's vision for an alternative way of living. Chapter 61 forms part of that vision. Isaiah caught sight of God's plan for doing away with the injustice that plagued his society. Justice looked like: liberty for the captives – that's upholding human rights for those falsely imprisoned; gladness instead of mourning – that's emotional healing; rebuilding of cities that were destroyed – that's reparation and restoration; enjoying the wealth of nations – that's compensation for economic loss.

**Luke 4:14-21** describes the moment that Jesus declares his mandate to fulfil Isaiah's prophecy, as God's justice enacted in the flesh. This is the focus scripture for The Justice Charter. The Charter presents a vision of justice relevant to our present day. With each generation new challenges and injustices arise – for example, the injustices inherent in climate change and the limited participation of women in society are at the forefront of conversations today. Like the prophets, we are not only responsible for calling out injustice but also for presenting God's vision and message of hope. We don't necessarily need to be people who receive a dream or hear an audible voice. God has given us his vision for our society in his word. And like the prophets standing at the city gates, the Charter empowers us to call for justice, making our voices heard in all spheres of society, including in our personal relationships and global community, as well as in the marketplace and to national and international governments. Together, our voices are loud and powerful.

2.

**Which social issues are dear to your heart? Given no constraints, what would you do about it?**

3.

**What is one way, big or small, to engage with the issue you care about this month? Is there something you can do with other Christians who also care about this issue?**

# Bible study 2

## Economic justice



### Charter commitments

2. We commit to supporting entrepreneurship and the positive role of business to bring dignity, livelihoods and foster a flourishing society.
3. We commit to being responsible consumers, asking the questions of how the people and places involved in our food, clothes and purchases are treated, choosing to buy ethically and calling on corporations to provide fair wages and just working conditions.
4. We commit to calling on governments and corporations to cancel the debts of economically marginalised countries and pursue trade practices that are built on fairness and equity.

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### Scriptures

Leviticus 25:8-38 • Philippians 2:1-5 • James 5:4

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### Discussion material

In 2022, nearly one in ten people globally were living in poverty. These individuals don't only describe their poverty in monetary terms, there are other dimensions, but income is one way that we can think about how an individual or family can meet their basic needs. Thinking back to study one, we can understand monetary poverty as a result of broken relationships. The choices of some to take advantage of others has created global systems of economic inequality. Throughout the Bible we see God's concern for a society's economic system. Let's take a look at how God, through Moses, established laws about trade and loans for Israelite society, before looking at two elements of our present-day economic system that are fuelling injustice.

In **Leviticus 25**, God established the Jubilee principle for Israelite society. This meant that every 50 years all property is restored to its owner and debt is forgiven. Where do we see God's justice at work through this economic system? Throughout the chapter, we repeatedly see God instructing that the Israelites should not take advantage of each other. God tells them to offer a fair price for the value of property being sold (verses 14-17) and that people who are taking a loan while living in poverty should not be taken advantage of through being charged interest or paying for food at a profit (verses 35-38). This is so that the poor 'can continue to live among you' (verse 35, NIV). God's economic

☑ Here it is Lucas Patrick Simon (32), a solar entrepreneur who raised capital through the 'pamoja' self-help group to open a shop, which he can now open after dark thanks to a solar-powered light  
Photo: Tom Price - Ecce Opus/Tearfund

system is inclusive. We see that the Jubilee is scheduled to fall every 50 years. This means that economic disadvantage should not continue across several generations; each person in their lifetime should have the opportunity to see the grace of God through the forgiveness of debt. It is an act of justice through redistribution of property and wealth. He is also challenging the motivations of those who own property, placing himself at the centre of their hearts and activities. God established this principle so that his people are reminded that he alone is God and he alone owns the land (verse 23). It is not their own possession and likewise we should remember that wealth is not ours to hoard.

## Discussion questions

1.

**What are the differences between God's answer to economic inequality and the world's answer? What about the Jubilee system grabs your interest?**

One aspect of our unjust economic systems is that many of the companies that supply the food, clothes and goods we purchase operate supply chains that keep people in poverty. Labourers often don't receive fair pay for their work or goods, work in unsafe conditions, and work in the informal sector, which means they have little to no job security or social security. Companies make it part of their business strategy to establish a labour force in countries where governments have low standards for minimum wage and health and safety, allowing for low production costs and large profits. We too benefit from this system as we are able to buy goods and services at a low cost. This is a great injustice.

It's easy to dismiss this reality when we are purchasing goods to meet our own needs, but God hears the cries of those who are being exploited (**James 5:4**). Jesus declared that he came so that those of us living on earth could have life to the full (**John 10:10**). Yet for so many, these conditions don't look like 'life to the full', so how can we look beyond our own interests, as Paul encourages readers to do in **Philippians 2**? Where we choose to spend our money affects people we've never met. As the Afro-Caribbean community, we know the great value of our purchasing power: we've organised boycotts like the Bristol Bus Boycott which resulted in discriminatory labour laws being transformed, and we've organised campaigns to encourage active investment in Afro-Caribbean entrepreneurs. These examples show the great kingdom impact we can achieve when we organise ourselves. Self-help groups are another way that many people back home organise themselves. Similar to what we might call *susu*, *ajo* or *pardner*, the group pools resources and provides loans for its members to set up or scale a small business. This revenue allows a business owner to create green jobs, allowing more individuals to build an independent livelihood.

2.

**Paul in Philippians encourages us to have the same mindset as Christ in our relationships. What in our mindset currently allows us to be comfortable with spending with companies that cause harm, and what elements of Christ's character do we need to take on?**



3.

### **Have you ever supported movements for boycotts or purchasing from specific buyers? Why or why not?**

A second unjust characteristic of our economic system is that most of the world's economies are interwoven with each other in a way which unfairly benefits high-income countries. Low-income countries rely on loans from international banks to be able to build infrastructure and embark on development projects. These loans often come with interest rates and conditions which don't always provide the best outcomes for these countries. This is an injustice because the low-income situation that these countries find themselves in has in part resulted from their colonial history. A former president of the Maldives has described the injustices in the process of improving infrastructure as a small island nation:

*'We took a loan to build a road, to build a house, to build a school, to build a harbour, or some such infrastructure. When we took the debt, we took it with the received wisdom that the weather has no link to carbon emissions but now IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] is clearly saying that the bad weather is because of carbon emissions. This bad weather has washed away the road, has taken away the house, has taken away the school, has destroyed the harbour that we built with the loan. The assets that we created are becoming stranded. Our analysis shows that for every ten dollars climate-vulnerable developing countries spend on interest payments of the debts we took, we have to pay another dollar because of climate impacts. This is injustice piled on injustice and adds to the moral and economic case for urgent debt relief. If there is no Maldives we can hardly pay the debt back.'*

While the Jubilee principle isn't built into the regular rhythm of government budget plans these days, the eradication of debt is something that we can still advocate for. In 2000, the Jubilee 2000 campaign, inspired by the Jubilee principle in Leviticus, successfully achieved the wiping of \$100 billion of debt for the world's poorest 42 countries. What seemed impossible became possible, thanks to the voices of over 21 million people who joined the campaign.

4.

### **What have been our beliefs and assumptions about people and economies experiencing debt and poverty? How does the Jubilee principle challenge our perspectives? Should justice look different when there has been corruption involved?**

From the above two examples we see that the way we use our money and use our voices can challenge unjust economic systems. We can search for businesses that offer a living wage and fair trade prices using websites that research the practices of companies to guide our decisions. We can research the banks and institutions that hold our savings, investments and pensions to ensure they are being invested in ethical funds, and choose to move them to an ethical provider if this isn't the case. We can select our coffee shops more carefully, choosing to buy from those that are supplied with single origin beans purchased at a fair price.

We can also choose to support entrepreneurship by donating to the set-up of Awakened self-help groups, an initiative led by The Well. Tearfund works with local churches and other Christian organisations across Africa and the Caribbean, to empower people to become economically independent through these groups. You can find out more about how to support the groups at [tearfund.org/awakened](https://tearfund.org/awakened)

As we close, let us take away that the presence of poverty and mistreatment of people in our world is not inevitable or normal. Rates of poverty had been falling successfully before the COVID-19 pandemic, which created a crisis for many. Our God gives us a better vision for our economic systems. Let's choose his way, loving our global neighbours as ourselves.

5.

**What are some areas where we can think about spending more ethically over the next month, in our personal lives and the church budget? Sometimes spending with ethical businesses costs us more (most likely because people along the supply chain are being paid a fair wage!). How can we balance responsible spending with responsible budgeting?**



Self Help Group weekly meeting women offering weekly savings and issuing a loan to a member. Nazret, Ethiopia, Kale Heywet church  
Photo: Cally Spittle/Tearfund



# Bible study 3

## Racial justice



### Charter commitments

5. We commit to eliminating racial disparities through launching or engaging with programmes in areas such as education, economic marginalisation, healthcare, employment, political representation and others.
6. We commit to fostering reconciliation where there are racial and ethnic divisions within our church and society.
7. We commit to calling on governments to eradicate policies that perpetuate racism through public and private institutions, and prevent the introduction of new policies to the same effect.

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### Scriptures

**Revelation 7:9-10 • Acts 2:1-12, 38-39 • Acts 6:1-7 • 2 Corinthians 5:16-18**

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### Discussion material

Racial justice is a God-issue, not just a social issue. God loves diversity and intended us to be part of one body in all of our diversity. Often, we speak of the liberation potential of the gospel – that is, the recognition that all people bear the image of God in equal measure and are deserving of a life lived with dignity. However, that is only part of the story. When we look at the gospel through the lens of the four broken relationships (as we discussed in study one of this series), we see that God desires reconciliation. Scripture paints beautiful pictures of this unity. **Revelation 7:9-10** describes people of all nations and tribes worshipping together before the throne of our almighty God.

This diversity is also described in **Acts 2**. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke in several languages and people from many nations came to the knowledge of Christ. The scripture goes on to say that God wishes to pour out his Spirit on all people. As we evangelise, who are we evangelising to and which church do they join? Are they welcome to join our churches and do they have a comfortable experience when they do? When God poured out his Spirit, the disciples witnessed to all. They broke bread together, and yes, there were moments where discrimination occurred, but this was quickly corrected. In fact, what we read in **Acts 6:1-7** shows that making a structural change to institute diverse leadership is one way to achieve justice. They were all Jews yet there was still

inequality among them. Justice in this scenario was ensuring the fair distribution of resources to all people regardless of their heritage.

Jesus has shared the ministry of reconciliation with us. Reconciliation is not about ignoring what makes us different – while the arbitrary and manipulative way in which racial and ethnic categories have been used has caused harm, we don't need to ignore or suppress these aspects of our identity. Acknowledging these identities isn't the 'worldly point of view' that Paul speaks of in **2 Corinthians 5**. When we look at the early church in Acts, there was much cultural and ethnic diversity, and they didn't shy away from it. Instead, we can interpret 'worldly' as that which is not reconciled, because unity is of the Spirit of God.

### Discussion questions

1.

**What are the characteristics that enable reconciliation, and how can we cultivate these? Is there anything stopping us from having the diversity of the early church in our churches today?**

2.

**Often, discussions around racial injustice focus on tense relationships between white people and people of colour, but how does God's heart for reconciliation challenge us in the area of our relationships with people of colour who identify with a different race to ourselves, or with a different ethnicity, even if we are often grouped together by race or nationality?**

We acknowledge that reconciliation isn't always easy. It's often not possible to do when one party has not yet repented of their actions, or when the other refuses to forgive and open their heart to connection. As well as the spiritual approach to race relations, we should also consider that one of the physical consequences of being subject to racism is trauma, whether personal or collective. Trauma, if not dealt with, often creates a protective barrier that we put up to avoid being damaged again. This protective barrier is useful but there are also points in time when it no longer becomes useful. As Christians speaking into society with a prophetic voice on what reconciliation should look like, it is important that we speak from a healed place. Can we allow God to heal some of these areas so that we can enter into relationships as he desires? Can we trust God that on the other side of pain is a beautiful family, rich in diversity, just as he intended?

3.

**Reconciliation requires repentance. Social movements are actively transforming our world but there is still work to do. What do we as Christians do in the space between our current world and the new creation?**

The Justice Charter offers three different ways to work towards racial justice. Like in Acts, often it takes the marginalised to be represented in leadership to ensure the fair distribution of resources that they are lacking. As we hold and declare a prophetic vision of God's justice in the area of racial inequality, let us lead in launching or engaging with programmes that enable resource transfer; let us go first in holding space for people to meet and heal relationships; and let us stand together in communicating our vision and solutions to governments.

4.

**What do you think is our responsibility as African and Caribbean Christians to help the church foster racial justice?**

5.

**What would you like to see our church do in response to this discussion, within our church, national and global communities?**



📷 Dorcas (46) spends time talking to Grace (19) who had given birth to Gift the day before  
Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

# Bible study 4

## Climate justice



### Charter commitments

8. We commit to preaching and teaching on the biblical basis for God's love for the whole of creation, and our duty to respond to the climate crisis.
9. We commit to investigating and reducing our plastic use and carbon footprint in any church buildings we own or use, and encouraging our members to do the same at home.
10. We commit to calling on governments to take action and follow through on their promises to tackle the climate crisis, and move to a greener economy that brings justice and helps reduce inequality.

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### Scriptures

**Genesis 1:26 • Genesis 2:15 • Luke 19:37-40 • Psalm 148**

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### Discussion material

The earth is warming. Scientists have warned us that a temperature rise of 1.5°C (34.7°F) will have catastrophic and irreversible effects. We currently have registered a rise of 1.3°C (34.3°F) and if nothing changes we're on track for a rise of 2.4°C (36.3°F), which will render large portions of the globe uninhabitable.

Around the world, the Afro-Caribbean community and other people of colour are most impacted by climate change. Hurricanes, flooding and droughts are destroying homes, land, education opportunities and ultimately taking lives, most frequently in the countries in Africa and the Caribbean that we call home. This impact is multiplied when individuals or communities experience disadvantage in other ways, for example if they are living in poverty, with disabilities or are women. Although people living in formerly colonised countries face the worst effects of climate change, they have also contributed the least emissions to the crisis due to the history of intentional underdevelopment of these countries. For example, it takes 212 Burundians to emit the same amount of carbon as one person in the UK. This is an injustice, not just because of the unequal impacts but because billions of people are reaping a problem that they largely haven't sown into. We lament that this injustice is a legacy of colonialism, but the causes are not limited to the past. Today, 'people in the UK' includes you and me. Given we serve a God who rules with

justice (Psalm 89:14), as part of our discipleship journey we have a responsibility to lend our hands, hearts and minds to the mission.

## Discussion questions

1.

**Were you aware that climate change affected people in the ways talked about in the discussion material, including the disproportionate effect on people of colour? What about the extent of global warming? How does this shape your perspective of the meaning and urgency of the climate crisis?**

Much of African and Caribbean heritage is connected to agricultural communities and wisdom. We have rich histories of caring for, preserving and living with nature. However, here in the UK we haven't maintained that relationship. Even within the church, we've recounted phrases such as 'I won't let a rock cry out for me' with a tone of competition with nature, each of us fighting not to be the person whose worship is so weak that a rock can do better. In this is an underlying statement that human worship is higher or more valuable than that of nature. We are referring to Jesus' words in **Luke 19:37-40**, but we have misconstrued them. Here, Jesus' response to the Pharisees wishing to prevent the disciples from worshipping is an indication that all of nature worships God and will continue worshipping even if we are silent. Nature's worship is pleasing to God, it forms part of the chorus of creation whereby humans and nature worship God together (**Psalm 148**). When we understand that nature is created to worship God and that it is dear to his heart, it prompts us to take another look at our broken relationship with nature and to adjust the way we teach about *his* creation.

2.

**Can you remember any stories related to the natural environment that your family told you as a child?**

3.

**What are one or two words that you would use to describe nature or your relationship with nature? How can Psalm 148 inform your perspective?**

In the garden of Eden, God gives humans a set of responsibilities and parameters. In **Genesis 1:26**, God gave men and women 'dominion over the fish of the sea... [and] every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth'. This is a great empowerment but one that is often misinterpreted. The word 'dominion' in our present culture is associated with ideas of dictatorship, violence and absence of responsibility. Yet, the original text was created within a culture where kings were accountable to God for the way that they ruled. They were subject to a higher authority, and so we too, in our responsibility, are accountable to God for our care of his creation. Our interpretation of this verse should also be in light of the other responsibilities God outlines during creation. In **Genesis 2:15**, we see that Adam was placed in the garden in order to care for it. The Amplified Bible uses the phrase 'cultivate and keep it'. Taking these two verses together, we can see that the great authority given was for the purpose of serving God in the preservation of his creation. However, looking at our world today, collectively we haven't done this well.



4.

**How does the meaning of ‘dominion’ shape our view of ourselves in relationship with God? Now, drawing on our responses to question 3, how would you describe the relationship between us, nature and God?**

What does this mean for the climate crisis? We are no longer in the garden of Eden but there are many ways we can incorporate our mandate to care for creation into our daily lives. The Justice Charter suggests ways to work together to reduce our carbon emissions. The production and recycling of plastic emits huge amounts of carbon. Recycling is always better than sending plastic to landfill, but even better is reducing how much plastic we use in the first place. For example, using a reusable cup for our next takeaway coffee, providing glass and ceramic cups for refreshments at church, or buying a set of durable containers to share that extra party rice. Within our buildings, we can change to LED bulbs, improve insulation or turn down the heating a little. This helps to care for the planet and reduce the amount we spend on bills. Moreover, let’s re-establish the relationship with nature that is so embedded in our heritage. Grow something on your windowsill, join a family member on their next trip to the allotment or spend some time near water, whether that’s sitting near the pond in your local park, walking along the canal or taking a low-carbon trip to swim in the sea. Enjoy the details of what you hear, see, smell and feel in nature.

We can also work together to call on governments to bring in the policy changes needed to respond to the crisis. The Well and other Tearfund teams run campaigns providing ways to lift your voice and call for justice. Alongside this, pick an issue that you’re passionate about – whether that is climate finance, women and girls, agriculture, migration – and read about how climate change is affecting this area of society.

5.

**How are you incorporating care for the planet in your lifestyle? Is there something more you’d like to try? What could we do at our church?**

### **Go deeper**

For more suggestions on how to act on climate change, download the [Climate Emergency Toolkit](#), which provides tips on how to get the conversation started at your church, resources to lower your church’s carbon footprint and strategies to engage your local community on climate issues.

If you’re interested to know more about the connection between race and climate change, watch The Well’s event, *Climate Change is Racist*, on our YouTube channel [@TheWellOrg](#)

# Bible study 5

## Gender justice



### Charter commitments

11. We commit to promoting a liberating biblical understanding of the inherent worth and dignity of both men and women, and to practising the full equality and participation of women and men in all aspects of the church and society.

12. We commit to challenging and condemning all forms of gender-based violence in the church and society, and to providing and advocating for the adequate provision of counselling and pastoral care, healthcare, and criminal justice for survivors of gender-based violence.

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### Scriptures

Genesis 1:27 • Genesis 3:16 • Judges 4 • John 20:11-18

**Trigger warning:** The discussion material involves mention of physical, sexual, financial and spiritual abuse, and the personal consequences that can result, including death. It provides statistics regarding the incidence rates of violence in several countries, and gives a brief overview of three contexts in which women are vulnerable. None of the discussion questions directly cover these topics.

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### Discussion material

Across the world, we see a movement of women and men seeking equality for women. The church belongs at the forefront of this movement, but the misinterpretation of scripture has resulted in theologies that advocate for the oppression rather than liberation of women. Similar to the reality that much of the theology developed by white theologians fails to speak to the experience of Afro-descendent peoples, the failure to include women in the development of our theology means that we have failed to fully understand God's heart for women (and Black women!) and to teach about his justice and liberation for them today. In this study, let's challenge ourselves to examine scripture through the lens of the four broken relationships we looked at in study one and consider what this can add to our theological understanding of gender relations.

To understand the relationship between men and women as God intended it, we can look to the relationship before the Fall. Adam loved Eve as his own flesh and bones. He saw the image of God in her and held her in such high esteem (**Genesis 1:27; 2:23**). However, at the moment that sin entered the world, the relationship between God and humanity, and between humans, was shattered. **Genesis 3:16** describes this tragic moment. The curse that ‘your husband... shall rule over you’ was precisely that – a curse. It is a relationship that deviates from what God intended. Unequal power relations is a reflection of our fallen condition and as such is not a way of living that should sit comfortably with us or that we should advocate for within our churches, workplaces, homes or communities’.

## Discussion questions

1.

**John 20 provides just one example of Jesus’ loving relationship with women. What does his behaviour and choice to share the news of his resurrection first through a woman teach us about what a reconciled relationship between men and women can look like?**

What are some situations today in which we see men ‘ruling over’ women that we can seek to bring God’s love into? We see it in the abuse – physical, sexual, financial and spiritual – prevalent in our churches and homes. In the UK, two women are killed every week by a current or former male partner, and one in four churchgoers have experienced abuse in their current relationship. In Caribbean and African countries, 46 per cent and 30 per cent of women respectively have experienced violence. Abuse is also present wherever we see war, climate emergencies, refugee crises. Tragically, sexual violence is used as a weapon of war. During droughts, which are becoming more intense and frequent due to the changing climate, water sources which support livelihoods can dry up, requiring women to search for alternative locations and leaving them vulnerable to abuse by men who own these locations. When families choose to flee their homes in the midst of violent conflict, women are often left vulnerable as they migrate on long journeys.

An effect of these abuses is loss. There is loss of: physical and psychological health; the ability to sustain livelihoods, resulting in economic disadvantage, identity and freedom; and relationships with family and friends. Justice is the restoration of what has been lost. Some ways that restoration to wholeness can be achieved are through counselling, loving pastoral and community relationships, access to healthcare, and criminal justice. There are several services and charities that provide justice through these means, and we can partner with them to act for justice by urging governments to provide adequate funding, volunteering with them, and donating to Tearfund to support their projects on gender-based violence.

Another place we see men ruling over women is in the positions of power that they hold and refuse to relinquish, in our churches, workplaces and civic spaces. In these positions, they control access to resources and have silenced the voices of women. Justice is in the redistribution of this power. In **Judges 4**, we see that God appointed a woman as a judge for Israel. At that time, Israel had been in bondage and cried out for deliverance. We see that God had deposited in Deborah a spirit of wisdom. She heard the disputes of the Israelites and received the strategy for Israel’s liberation. Not only this but she also had strong faith and courage to pursue the strategy God gave her. Not everyone had this;



Barak needed his faith to be strengthened, and he and Deborah went to battle side by side. Notice too that Jael received the credit due to her. God gives each one of us – male and female – gifts for building his kingdom, within and beyond our Sunday services, and he expects us to use and multiply them. Deborah’s story shows us that through these giftings God has provided all that we need to establish justice in our present day, but we must provide the leadership positions for women to be able to nurture and share these gifts to their full potential.

2.

**We’ve talked about the idea of surrendering power. That’s tough. What can we draw from our experience of, and dissatisfaction with, racial injustice and oppression to think about what it means to surrender power and offer repentance to reconcile the relationship between men and women? Can we use our experience of surrendering to God to draw any more thoughts?**

3.

**What do you think is the effect of the absence of women in church leadership?**

In responding to the gender movement, it is important that we engage intelligently and acknowledge that women are taking action because they want to correct the injustices that they have been subject to. There needs to be accountability for where our majority male leadership has failed to establish justice for women. God pronounces, ‘Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, Who write misfortune, *Which* they have prescribed To rob the needy of justice, And to take what is right from the poor of My people’ (Isaiah 10:1-2). When we are humble enough to listen to the injustices voiced by women and lean into difficult truths with compassion, we are able to speak about where today’s church has failed to set godly standards for society. We repent and transform our ways of doing things. Let’s join God in this work of liberation and reconciliation.

Alongside the earlier suggestions to approach the government and work with charity organisations, why not create a book club, plan a sermon series or dedicate time in your small groups to become familiar with the experiences of women and consider how the Bible contains a liberatory narrative for women.

4.

**What would you like to see our church do in response to this discussion, within our church, national and global communities?**

### **Go deeper**

Read and be inspired by two deeply moving stories, including a testimony from Prabu Deepan who works for Tearfund in Asia and has [transformed his idea of masculinity through a study of Jesus’ life](#), and another about [a church in Honduras which is equipping its leaders to tackle violence](#).

# Bible study 6

## Religious justice



### Charter commitments

13. We commit to standing in prayer with our Christian sisters and brothers who are experiencing persecution, and with all those oppressed because of their religious beliefs. We commit to championing the freedom, peace and reconciliation that Christ modelled.

14. We commit to calling on governments to eradicate policies that allow for the mistreatment and marginalisation of individuals and communities because of their religious beliefs, and to prevent the introduction of new policies to the same effect.

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### Scriptures

2 Corinthians 11:23-28 • Luke 10:25-37 • 2 Timothy 3:12

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### Discussion material

Each day across the world, people are being persecuted for their faith. Like in many other regions, religious conflict is prevalent back home. Violence by armed groups is restricting the freedom that individuals and communities have to practise their religion. However, governments do not always act to protect their citizens or demand accountability for criminal acts against them: sometimes state authority is too weak to be effective but sometimes governments neglect to act. Together, the actions of violent groups and governments amount to infringements on religious freedom, and this is a breach of human rights.

Let's look at a couple of examples. [In Nigeria, an escalating violent conflict between farmer and herder communities has fallen along religious lines.](#) The targeted attacks of pastors, churches and Christian villages involve killing, maiming, looting and burning property, and other violent acts. Over 6,000 Christians were killed between 2015 and 2019 and over 300,000 evicted from their land. Yet, several institutions observe that the Nigerian government has failed to prosecute perpetrators and failed to respond to the early warnings that they received of planned attacks. [In 2014 in the Central African Republic \(CAR\), 30,000 Muslims were driven from their homes by militia groups.](#) Those who quietly returned or remained experienced repression of their religious identity and, under the threat of death, were forced to convert to Christianity. They cannot pray together publicly and there is systemic discrimination which prevents Muslims from gaining access

to education and identity documents, and in turn restricts other aspects of economic, social and political life.

The motivation of these conflicts, and similar ones in sub-Saharan Africa, is more complicated than two religions at odds with each other: they are driven by resource scarcity resulting from climate change, historical ethnic conflict leftover from colonialism, and political and economic instability and other factors. However, groups often choose to use religion to build social narratives that create social division, and so here we find another broken relationship. This fracture has led to the loss of life and freedom and this is injustice. Justice is found in the reconciliation of this relationship between people and communities of different religions.

### Discussion questions

1.

**How did reading the passage in 2 Corinthians 11, and hearing about the situations in Nigeria and the CAR, make you feel?**

Paul writes about his experience of being persecuted for what he believed. In **2 Corinthians 11**, he speaks with a purposefully sarcastic, boastful tone, but we can't ignore the atrocious experiences that he went through – being flogged and lashed, migrating from place to place without anywhere to call a safe home, and much more. While Paul gives encouragement to those who are experiencing similar circumstances, our hope can go beyond endurance. The psychological scars and physical disabilities that those who are persecuted acquire drive us to work for a world where violence and oppression are not an acceptable part of daily life. This drive is founded on the desire for reconciled relationships in God's kingdom.

In other words, our compassion should result in action. We do not have a high priest who is unable to relate to us (**Hebrews 4:15-16**). Our God weeps over the pain that each individual experiences, regardless of the religious identity of the oppressor and oppressed. He created each one of them. Just like Christ was moved to perform miracles by the compassion he felt for the sick, and how the good Samaritan did not restrict his compassion to those who were similar to himself in outward appearance, let us be moved to action, whether that be on our knees or in the policy space.

2.

**In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul tells Timothy to expect persecution as part of living for Christ. Is this still relevant to today's context where freedom of religion is a human right? Should we see suffering as a badge of honour or does accepting persecution as a part of life amount to complacency on our part?**

In the UK, we have the incredible privilege to meet freely in churches to worship and to preach on the streets. Our government sees faith groups as policy stakeholders. They invite us into conversations to hear our opinions and we are able to leave those rooms alive. This is an opportunity to advocate for those who do not have this freedom. Our government's foreign affairs office has a finger on the human rights situations in countries across the world, especially those on the African continent in which it has UK interests. There are advocacy groups who challenge the UK government through

meetings, petitions and letters, asking it to put pressure on foreign governments through the relationships they hold, such as trade relationships. You can join in on the action and add your voice to their activities. You could also meet with your local MP and ask them to use their influence in the House of Commons through asking parliamentary questions about an ongoing matter. Or just send them an email to express your concern for a situation that is on your heart and ask what the government is doing about it, and see what response comes back.

3. **Have you previously considered that faith groups are policy stakeholders in the UK? Would you be willing to engage with an advocacy group or contact your MP? Why or why not?**

4. **What stories do you have of positive relationships with those of other faiths? Are there benefits to having friends, neighbours and colleagues of other faiths? How can we better champion freedom, peace and reconciliation in our diverse relationships?**



📷 Christopher (38) in his studio with students. A former gang member, Christopher is now a peace advocate and fashion designer in his community, known as 'man of peace'  
Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

**The Justice Charter** is born from collaboration between leaders from The Well, Tearfund, Churches Together in England and Wales, One People Commission of the Evangelical Alliance, and Dr Dulcie Dixon McKenzie, brought together to support and celebrate Black Majority Churches and Christians of African and Caribbean heritage in their pursuit of justice.

**The Well** is a dedicated space, where individuals and institutions, local churches and whole denominations from the Black Christian community can unite, come together and collaboratively respond in a unique, distinct way to the call to support international development through prayer, action and giving.

Through events, initiatives, resources, publications and campaigns, The Well will be a networked alliance of Black Majority Churches inviting every member of their congregations to join in the journey of whole-life transformation. The Well will provide thought-leadership in international development, sharing knowledge and supporting key networks with examples of best practice.

To read the full text of The Justice Charter, visit [tearfund.org/charter](https://tearfund.org/charter)

To find out more about The Well and sign up to our newsletter, visit [tearfund.org/thewell](https://tearfund.org/thewell)

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