

Rubbish Campaign

prayer guide

This resource will help you pray about the plastic crisis in faith-filled and creative ways.

You can use this guide whether you want to pray at church in a service or in a group setting, whether you're hosting a prayer room or praying at home on your own.

You could just take some of the prayer points and use them in a Sunday service or in your own prayer time. Or you could use lots of the ideas to set up prayer stations for your church. **Feel free to adapt and amend and use your imagination!** We hope the ideas and stories here will help you draw near to God and cry out for those affected by the plastic crisis.

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A rubbish situation

Our world has an urgent rubbish problem, but Christians around the world are uniting to take action.

2 billion people – one in four of us – have no safe way to dispose of rubbish, meaning many are forced to live and work among piles of waste. This is making people sick, releasing toxic fumes, flooding communities and causing up to a million deaths each year. That's equivalent to one person dying every 30 seconds.

And the rapid growth of single-use plastics has made this worse. We're facing mountains of plastic pollution. But Jesus told his followers that even the smallest amount of faith can move mountains.

During 2023 and 2024, more than 150 governments are meeting to develop the first-ever international agreement on plastic pollution. But it's not a done deal. We need you to add your voice in prayer and through writing letters and signing our petitions. You'll be joining thousands of others from across the world who are coming together to demand an end to plastic pollution and its impacts on people living in poverty.

For more information on Tearfund's *Rubbish Campaign* and to sign the petition, visit tearfund.org/rubbish



📍 Above: Mountains of waste in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Photo: Daniel Msirikale/Tearfund

📍 Below: Plastic pollution in River Tejiptó, Coqueiral community, Recife, Brazil. Photo: Ruth Towell/Tearfund

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How to use this resource

This guide contains prayers and activities to help you and others in your church community to lament, to pray and to take action. **We suggest you read through it and then take whichever activities and prayers work best for your context, adapting them as necessary.** If you have any questions or need resources such as petition postcards, please contact us on campaigns@tearfund.org And do tell us if you use the resources as we'd love to have some idea of how many people are praying alongside us.

Setting up prayer stations

Print off the instruction sheets for each prayer station and set up each space so that there is room for people to spend time with God in comfort. The stations do not need to be done in any particular order: people can be free to wander around and dip into what appeals to them.

Kit list

At all the prayer stations it would be useful to provide **pens** and plenty of **paper**, as well as the instruction sheets that follow. In addition, we recommend you offer the following:

Page	Prayer station name	Equipment
4	The earth is the Lord's	Bibles in different translations
5	Creation waits	Bibles in different translations
6	Facts and stats	stopwatch or 30-second sand timer, some plastic rubbish (clean bottles etc)
9	Waste pickers: the hidden heroes	a print-out of this article tearfund.org/wastepicker
11	Getting personal	a bin, paper for people to write their pledges on, something to act as an altar where they can leave their offering (eg a candle or a cross, whatever works in your context)
12	World leaders	Post-it notes, <i>Rubbish Campaign</i> postcards. (Email campaigns@tearfund.org ahead of your event so we can send you postcards.)
18	Praying together	strips of paper to make a paper chain. Visit tearfund.org/weekofprayer to see the global prayer film which includes the prayer used at this station.
19	Prayerful hearts	tape, scissors, paperclips, stapler and staples, safety pins, permanent pens, and clean, empty crisp packets. (Ask people in advance to save crisp packets for this!)



The earth is the Lord's

'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.'

Psalm 24:1–2

Spend some time in wonder at how big these statements are. What and who is included in 'everything'? Picture in your mind a few of the people and places you've encountered that are included in this Bible passage.

As you pray, you might like to:

- open your Bible and read the rest of Psalm 24
- read it again in a different translation
- rewrite the passage in your own words
- read the passage as a blessing over a particular country or leader whom God has placed on your heart
- memorise it



Creation waits

‘For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.’

Romans 8:19–21

When you are eagerly expecting something, what does that feel like? Is there anticipation, giddiness, joy? Is there fear or trepidation?

What would it be like to see creation liberated and experiencing freedom and glory?

Creation waits for the children of God to be revealed. How can we play our part, as the children of God? Write on a Post-it note or sheet of paper provided your ideas of how we as children of God can help liberate creation.

As you pray, you might like to:

- read Romans 8:19–21 again in a different translation
- rewrite the passage in your own words
- Meditate on the word ‘liberate’
- read the passage as a blessing over a particular country or leader whom God has placed on your heart



Facts and stats



Choose one of these 30-second stats. Set the timer to 30 seconds, and meditate on what is coming to pass as those seconds tick away.

Other plastic stats:

- Plastic production doubled between 2000 and 2019.
- Half of all plastic produced is only used once.
- 2 billion people – one in four of us – have no safe way to dispose of rubbish.
- The plastic industry is the fastest-growing source of industrial greenhouse gas emissions in the world.
- Today, globally, we throw away about 300 million tonnes of plastic waste every year. That's enough to cover almost 50,000 football pitches a day!



Sources

<https://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/policy-reports/no-time-to-waste>
https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2020/07/breakingtheplasticwave_report.pdf
<https://stories.undp.org/what-do-plastics-have-to-do-with-climate-change>
https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/environment/global-plastics-outlook_de747aef-en
<https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-waste-management-outlook>

📷 Plastic waste in Recife, Brazil. Photo: Ruth Towell/Tearfund

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Facts and stats – let us lament

Pick up a piece of plastic rubbish and talk to God about how you feel about it. A lament is a prayer expressing sorrow, pain or confusion. The Bible contains many laments (see, for example: Psalms 3, 10 and 94; the book of Lamentations; Matthew 23:37–39; Matthew 27:46). So feel free to lament the state of our world, and all we have done to it. If it helps, take some time to write down your prayers and reflections.



🗑️ Turning plastic waste into an economic opportunity through a recycling project in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Photo: Flot Mundala/Tearfund

*<https://www.tearfund.org/stories/2020/08/good-grief-relearning-lamentation>

Let us lament*:

Our God,
The God who suffered,
The God who wept, and who weeps.

How long before you answer our cries?

The world is not as it should be.
Injustice is everywhere.
It feels like there is nothing we can do.

How long before you ease our sorrow?

How long before you heal this pain?

The world groans beneath the weight of greed.
Governments fail to serve the vulnerable.
Not enough is being done to protect creation.

How long before you respond to this anger?

You are good and just, and you take the side of
the oppressed.
So do not delay, Lord – hurry to help those in need.

Amen.

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Waste pickers: the hidden heroes

Waste pickers are informal workers who collect, sort and sell materials for recycling or reuse. It is estimated that more than 20 million people around the world earn an income in this way.

Through collecting materials such as plastic, glass, paper and electronic waste from households, streets and dumpsites, waste pickers' contribution to recycling is immense. In fact, about 60 per cent of all plastic recycled globally is collected by waste pickers. They are the backbone of the world's recycling systems.

Pray:

- Pray that waste pickers' voices will be represented and heard at the current UN talks to develop an agreement to end plastic pollution.
- Pray too that the treaty secures a fair future for those who collect and recycle plastic waste around the world.



📍 Above: Jonsoni PIta, a waste picker, collects recyclables along the riverbank in Kigogo, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Photo: Daniel Msirikale/Tearfund

📍 Below: Plastics are recycled into marketable products such as paving slabs at a Tearfund-supported project run by the Church of Christ in Congo, Kinshasa. Photo: Flot Mundala/Tearfund

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‘He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump. He sets them among princes, placing them in seats of honour. For all the earth is the Lord’s, and he has set the world in order.’

1 Samuel 2:8 (NLT)

Pray:

- Pray along with Hannah, Samuel’s mother, for God’s order in the world, where the poor and needy are placed in seats of honour.



What do you think the world ‘set in order’ would look like?





Getting personal

‘So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering... Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out...’

Romans 12:1–2 (MSG)



**Consider what and how you consume.
How have you conformed to your culture?
What needs to be transformed?**

As you pray, you might like to:

- Pray that God will help you to live differently from the highly consumerist patterns of the world. Ask God to show you how to live in a way that has less impact on his creation and on our global neighbours living in communities most affected by rubbish.
- As a response, write down any positive actions you would like to make, or continue, to help reduce your waste. Write out your pledges to reduce plastic eg ‘I pledge to use a reusable water bottle’. Lay these pledges on the altar as an offering to God now.
- If there are areas of your lifestyle or shopping behaviours that you would like to ‘bin’ (eg using disposable coffee cups), write them out and put those things in the bin here. Ask God to help you do things differently, but also to give you grace for when you get it wrong.



World leaders

‘I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority...’

1 Timothy 2:1–2

We’re now facing mountains of plastic pollution, dumped or burnt around the world. But Jesus told his followers that even the smallest amount of faith can move mountains. And now there is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do just that. During 2023 and 2024, more than 150 governments are meeting to develop the first-ever international agreement on plastic pollution. But it’s not a done deal.

Let’s pray for all those in authority who are negotiating this agreement. Then, please take action and add your voice to thousands of others to ensure leaders don’t throw away this opportunity.



📷 Above: A waste picker collects plastic bottles at a dump near the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
Photo: Daniel Msirikale/Tearfund

📷 Below: Global plastics treaty negotiations are taking place in 2023 and 2024. Photo: Adam Aucock/Tearfund

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Step 1 - Pray for the treaty

Take a Post-it note and write a prayer for the leaders of a country which could play a crucial role in these negotiations:

The High Ambition Coalition consists of more than 50 countries who are committed to achieving an ambitious, international, legally binding treaty that ensures urgent and effective interventions across the full lifecycle of plastics (from production to disposal). The group includes the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan and the European Union.

Pray that they will remain committed to their ambitions in the face of opposition and that they will adopt a strong social justice element into their position.

Countries from the African region are speaking out as a group on the need for better waste management. They want to prevent people from having to dump or burn their uncollected plastic waste and protect them from the devastating health impacts of unmanaged waste.

Pray that their voices will be heard and the measures they are proposing will find their way into the final treaty.

Countries with vested interests in keeping plastic production at unsustainably high levels are seeking ways to delay and obstruct negotiations, and are resisting calls for legally binding targets on reducing plastic production.

Pray that God will open their eyes to the impacts of plastic pollution and give them a global vision and a heart for people suffering around the world.

Petrochemical and fossil fuel companies are present at the negotiations, sometimes even as part of official country delegations. These companies have huge resources and strong vested interests, and pose a real threat to the success of the treaty.

Pray that God will soften the hearts of these individuals and cause them to see beyond profits and share prices.

Leading the negotiations are the Chair – Gustavo Adolfo Meza-Cuadra Velásquez – and the Executive Secretary – Jyoti Mathur-Filipp.

Pray that they will provide strong and consistent leadership throughout the negotiation process.

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Step 2 - Speak up

We're standing with Christians from more than 15 countries and six continents, and calling for bold action to end the plastics crisis. We need an effective, binding plan that holds big polluters to account, reduces plastic production, supports the vital work of waste pickers, and ends the impacts of plastic pollution on people living in poverty.

Sign the petition now to ask our Government to play their part. This rubbish situation can change if we act together.



Sign the petition by using a postcard or digitally via the QR code here on your phone.



- 📍 Above: London launch of the *Rubbish Campaign* outside the Houses of Parliament. Photo: Adam Aucock/Tearfund
- 📍 Below: Young people on Bolivian TV, talking about the *Rubbish Campaign* following a march in Cochabamba. Photo: Miriam Moreno/Tearfund





Give thanks

‘Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.’

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

There is much to be thankful for, even in our plastic crisis. Plastic is a useful resource when used appropriately, for example in many medical applications. And there are many people leading the way in tackling the misuse of plastic. Christians across the world, for example, are uniting to demand and take action.

Together, we’re calling for an effective, binding plan that holds big polluters to account, reduces plastic production, supports the vital work of waste pickers, and ends the impacts of plastic pollution on people living in poverty.

- **Thank God for Bangladesh and for young people who are taking action on plastics.**

Bangladesh was the first country in the world to ban plastic bags, back in 2002, although the law has not been strictly enforced. Young people there are aware of the ongoing UN talks aiming to develop a plastics treaty: people like Mim, 19, who is president of a Youth Green Club set up by Tearfund’s partner LAMB. She feels strongly that business and industry need to be encouraged to produce sustainable alternatives to plastics – and she wants to see tighter laws on plastics.



📷 Youth Green Club. Photo: Magnet Jamil/LAMB/Tearfund

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- Thank God for the thousands of people worldwide who took part in **Plastic Free Free July**, reducing their own reliance on single-use plastic and encouraging others to understand the damage plastics are doing to creation and our global neighbours.



- Christians are finding creative ways to reduce reliance on plastics. **Mel Hemmings started a refill shop in Woking as a response to her faith in Jesus** who, she jokes, is the original zero-waster! Give thanks and pray for Mel and others like her as they bravely go against the flow, compelled by faith. You can watch a short film of Mel's story by visiting tearfund.org/changemakerfilms



📷 Mel Hemmings at the London launch of the Rubbish campaign. Photo: Adam Aucock/Tearfund

- Thank God for the new global plastics treaty negotiations which are taking place during 2023 and 2024. This is such an important opportunity to tackle our plastic crisis as a global community. Jono Bailey from Christian Surfers Australia has joined Tearfund Australia's *Rubbish Campaign* calling on governments to agree an ambitious treaty. He explains: 'The rising levels of plastic pollution that bring destruction to the oceans and their inhabitants deeply sadden us, and we recognise that it grieves our Creator as well.' Give thanks for these voices and pray that the treaty negotiations will bring real change.



📷 Campaigners and waste pickers dressed as lifeguards at negotiations in Paris to issue a safety notice to governments about the flooding risks presented by plastic pollution. Photo: Adam Aucock/Tearfund

- **Coqueiral Baptist Church in Brazil** have seen firsthand the devastating impact of mismanaged waste, including increased flooding in their own community. They have been on a journey to reduce their use of single-use plastics as part of their ‘ministry of reconciliation’ (2 Corinthians 5:18–19). They have been working to clean up the local river and they have trained members of their community to respond to the flooding that is exacerbated by plastics clogging the river. Give thanks for this church!



📷 The Clean River, Health City project involves the community in Coqueiral, Recife, Brazil, in tackling plastic pollution. Photo: Ruth Towell/Tearfund

- **Thank God for the many people worldwide who are using their ingenuity to turn waste plastics into useful items.** In Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tearfund is supporting a project it helped establish with the Church of Christ in Congo. The Turning Plastic Into Green Jobs project does exactly what its name suggests: they collect, clean and re-use discarded bottles – turning them into useful objects such as paving slabs. The project also provides local jobs and skills training.



📷 Creating paving slabs from recycled plastic in a Tearfund-supported project in Kinshasa, DRC. Photo: Flot Mundala/Tearfund

What would you like to give thanks for today?





Praying together



Join with others around the world to pray this prayer by Jessica Bwali from Zambia. If you're using this in a congregation, the refrain could be said by everyone, while the other lines could be read by individuals.

Creator God

Thank you for the many good gifts you have given us – so much beauty and abundance in creation all around us.

The earth is yours, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

And yet we hear creation groaning and we have heavy hearts because we know so much of creation's pain is due to our actions. Forgive us for polluting the environment through our selfish deeds, without considering the impacts on people and creation.

The earth is yours, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

Help us fulfil Jesus' call to love our neighbours and take action to look out for one another.

 Photo: Edna Photography

We remember the people on the frontline of plastic pollution. We pray to you, Lord, that you protect them from the diseases and flooding that come with plastic pollution and that they may find comfort in you.

The earth is yours, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

We pray that world leaders would act on plastic pollution, coming together to agree on an ambitious and binding plastics treaty. Give wisdom and soft hearts to those involved in the negotiations.

We pray for each of the 20 million waste pickers around the world who do vital work. They collect plastics for recycling, and yet are often overlooked and underpaid. Let their voices be listened to at the UN treaty negotiations and their human rights and livelihoods protected.

Oh, God, help us not to throw this opportunity away.

The earth is yours, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

Dear God, we pray for the global church, for all the communities and people affected by plastic pollution, that you may keep them close to you. Help us to restore and care for this beautiful earth you blessed us with. Amen!



Add your name to a strip of paper and join it to the paper chain to show you've prayed our shared prayer. Feel free to decorate your strip of paper too!

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Prayerful hearts

Make a crisp packet heart as a reminder of your love for creation and all our global neighbours, and of your commitment to keep praying.

Step 1

Take a clean, empty crisp packet and on a flat surface fold it horizontally twice to make a rectangle that is about a third the size of the original. We found it helpful to use paper clips to hold it in place before stapling.



Step 2

Fold this in half to find the midpoint as you are now going to fold the right side of the rectangle upward, aligning the bottom edge of the right side with the midpoint.

Repeat on the other side.



Step 3

Turn the heart over and fold the righthand corner over towards you.

Repeat on the other side.

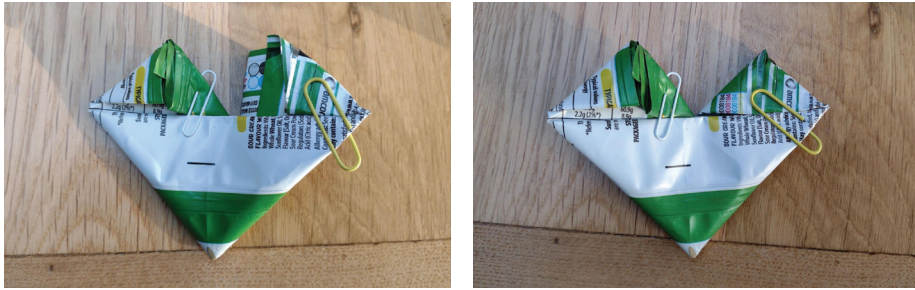


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Step 4

Now fold the inner corners down to complete the heart shape.



Step 5

Use 3 staples to hold everything in place, and trim the sides with scissors to give a more rounded heart shape if you prefer.



Step 6

Add your slogan. You'll need a waterproof permanent marker pen, and you might want to try writing on another crisp packet before committing your design to your badge.



Step 7

Finally, add a safety pin on the back using a piece of tape if you want to turn your heart into a badge. Wear it with pride.





Write a haiku

Alan, a Tearfund supporter who is also a Plymouth City Council Climate Ambassador, is encouraging people there to write poems on the climate or biodiversity emergencies.

He suggests using haikus, the simple 5/7/5-syllable and three-line format that traditionally focuses on nature, to give people of all ages the opportunity to express something about the climate or biodiversity emergencies. The haikus will be displayed on the council website, in the library and on social media.

Why not write a haiku to communicate something you have learned about plastics today?

Alan's plastic haiku:

Children's sandcastle
Sprinkled with micro-plastic
Cut your plastic use



Here's our starter:

Earth's hidden heroes
Collecting and recycling
I'm praying for them

Thank you

Thank you so much for using these resources to encourage people to pray. We are praying for you as you lead, and asking God to meet you all. You could consider keeping some of the prayer stations as a display for a while, to encourage ongoing prayer and action.

For up-to-date prayer points, please visit tearfund.org/prayforrubbish and please keep praying for the *Rubbish Campaign* as it continues. For more information on the campaign, visit tearfund.org/rubbish

If you have any questions about the campaign or this resource, please email us on campaigns@tearfund.org
We'd love to hear from you.

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The logo for Tearfund, featuring the word "tearfund" in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background. The background of the entire page is yellow with a faint world map and a white wavy line.