

One-off event

# Living simply together

A rubbish church resource

## Welcome to the Rubbish Campaign church resource!

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 one person dying every 30 seconds. The rapid growth of single-use plastics has made this crisis worse. It's fuelling our throwaway culture, threatening people's health and making the climate emergency worse.

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. So, we are asking you to join us in prayer and action, to demand an end to plastic pollution and this rubbish problem.

By praying, speaking up, changing our lifestyles and hosting events in our schools and churches, we can love our global neighbours and put pressure on governments to listen to the people who are suffering right now.

This resource is intended to help you take your church on a journey: connecting the dots between consumerism, plastic pollution and its impact on people living in poverty. We believe every person, created by God, has value and should have the opportunity to live a full life, free of all this rubbish.

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# Introduction

This is a leader's guide to help your church consider its response to waste and consumerism. This version is for a one-off event, if you would prefer to explore this over a series of three sessions, click below:

[View Three-part series guide](#)

This resource is intended to be flexible, so that you can adapt it to your particular church context and congregation needs. After some detail on the practicalities, the resource is divided into three main topics:

## 1. Theology of consumerism

## 2. Impact of plastic pollution

## 3. Living simply together

We envision this series, or event, taking place over a meal with your community. There is more detail about this in the 'Sharing a meal' section, and you can choose whichever option works best for your context. Whether you share meals together for three weeks, or just once, we hope it will help deepen relationships and connection, while allowing participants to think about reducing waste in their everyday lives.

We pray that this resource will be a blessing to you and your community as you consider your response to injustice and consumerism, and commit to living more justly, together.

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# Logistics

Here is an overview for how a rubbish session could work:

- Arrival and welcome.
- Guests share their meal, or tea and coffee.
- The session host shares content, including topic scripts and any accompanying videos.
- After each topic has been presented, a leader will facilitate small group discussions.
- The host will close the evening in prayer.

We have designed this resource to be flexible, to allow you to develop something that will be as effective as possible for your community. Whether you choose to run a series, or a one-off event, the steps below should help you think through the practicalities:

- 1 The first decision will be whether to host a three-part series, or a one-off event. If hosting a series, decide whether you will share a meal together for all three sessions, or just one.
- 2 Agree a date(s) and venue with your church. If helpful, arrange a time to chat with your church leader to make sure that they are on board and understand what you are trying to do. It's best to avoid clashes with other church events if you can.
- 3 Gather a team of people who can help you! Consider asking your home group, or others, to help you facilitate and organise.
- 4 Share out the jobs. You could break the work into four main roles: food coordinator, session host, table leaders and PowerPoint operator. You'll also need people to help set up and pack away.
- 5 Invite people! The best way to promote an event is to invite people face to face. So ask your church leader if you can give an announcement in the weeks running up to the start date, talk to people before and after church, and use other channels such as church bulletins, email and social media. You could also invite other local churches to join you.
- 6 You could consider hosting the event on eventbrite and encouraging people to sign up so that you have an idea of numbers in advance. This will be particularly helpful when it comes to planning a meal!
- 7 Let us know about your event by emailing [campaigns@tearfund.org](mailto:campaigns@tearfund.org) so we can be praying for you and publicise it on our relevant social media channels if your event is open to the public. We'll also send you enough *Rubbish Campaign* cards for your event and answer any questions you may have.

# Sharing a meal

We believe that amazing things can happen around the table, and so we have designed this resource to take place over a meal.

Time and again throughout scripture, we see Jesus taking time out to share a meal with people, often those whom society had forgotten about or cast aside. Jesus valued mealtimes as vital to community-building and discipleship, whether this was with enemies, uninvited guests, his closest friends, or thousands sharing fish sandwiches.

As you grapple together with issues of consumerism and waste, doing so over a meal can help you see each other's perspectives and develop a sense of friendship, intimacy and community.

## Practicalities

Whether you choose to share three meals during a series, or just one, we have outlined two possible options for how you can facilitate a low-waste meal. Whichever you choose, this is a brilliant way to get your guests thinking about consumerism and waste before they even arrive.

### Option 1: Bring-and-share

- Ask guests to bring a dish to share. If everyone brings enough to feed themselves, you should have enough when everything is shared out.
- You may want to agree who brings savoury/sweet, so you have a good balance, and you may also need to consider food hygiene rules if people are bringing hot food.
- The challenge is to try to bring something that is free of single-use plastic, or at least uses less packaging than normal. People might find this difficult if they've not thought about it before, but that's part of the fun! Encourage them to try, but make sure it doesn't feel too strict or off-putting. This should be a fun addition to the event, not a burden!
- Even if people try to reduce plastic in their meals, it is very likely that people will still have to use products packaged in plastic! You could ask guests to bring all the plastic waste generated by preparing their meal: this could be an impactful way to visualise some of the issues being discussed. You could also arrange for this waste to be recycled after the event, either through council services or soft plastic-recycling schemes available at some big retailers.

### Option 2: Prepare a meal for guests

- If you don't think a bring-and-share meal would work for your group, why not take on the challenge with your organising team and prepare a meal that doesn't use any single-use plastic (or uses less than normal!)?
- If choosing this option, be sure to check for any dietary requirements among guests.
- Making pizzas from scratch, a one-pot stew, a daal, or soup and bread can all work well. Get creative and see what you can do!

**‘Our life at the table, no matter how mundane, is sacramental – a means through which we encounter the mystery of God.’**

**Tim Chester**, Author and Senior Faculty Member of Crosslands Training



## Preparation

**Here are some tips to help people prepare their food:**

- If you have a zero-waste shop in your town, you could buy pasta, rice, lentils, dried fruit, chocolate buttons, etc.
- Visit local markets and greengrocers for loose fruit and veg, or buy loose vegetables from your supermarket.
- Ask the deli counter if they can put cheese and other items into a tub or jar you've brought rather than wrapping them up. Lots of supermarkets do this now!
- Visit a bakery or ask in the supermarket for a loaf without plastic packaging.
- Baking or making at home often reduces the amount of plastic needed, so reserve some time the day before to get creative in the kitchen and prepare your dish.
- Encourage people to use what they have! Using up ingredients at the back of the cupboard or what needs using up in the fridge can help reduce waste and cut costs.
- Encourage your guests to bring a tub for leftovers to avoid any food waste at the end of the night!

# 1

## Theology of consumerism: how do we serve God, and not mammon?

### Host Script

Perhaps you've never thought about what plastic has to do with consumerism. You wouldn't be alone in that! However, when you look back in recent history, you can see how intertwined these issues really are.

The production of throwaway plastics started booming after the second world war as people began to discover cheap and convenient solutions to everyday problems, from shipping to food storage. Since the 1950s, an estimated 8.3 billion metric tonnes of plastic has been produced. That's one tonne for each person born within the same timeframe.

However, there has been a terrible flipside to the convenience of plastic: environmental degradation caused both by the production and disposal of plastic, as well as colossal human costs. In communities throughout low- and middle-income countries, the impacts of plastic pollution are being felt first and hardest by the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

The exponential growth of plastic production has also shaped our culture and norms, facilitating a shift towards a consumer-driven society, where resources become devalued and disposable and so can be used up faster and faster. This in turn, ramps up plastic production and ultimately amplifies the environmental and human problems it creates.

As people of God, it is so important that we question what our disposable, throwaway consumer culture is doing to our hearts. Consumer culture creates an insatiable desire to find satisfaction in stuff, and to base our identity on what we have and what we can acquire. This ultimately disconnects us from our neighbours, from God's creation, and from God's vision for who we are as people.

Often, our modern problems have ancient solutions. And, as it turns out, Jesus had a lot to say about our relationship with stuff.

All through the gospels, Jesus challenges his people on their relationship with wealth and material possessions, and calls them to live differently – to pursue hospitality, justice and radical generosity.

- **'Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'** Luke 12:15
- **"Sell your possessions and give to the poor... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'** Luke 12:33–34
- **"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"** Matthew 6:25

Perhaps Jesus' strongest admonishment of our relationship with material possessions comes in the Sermon on the Mount:

**'No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.'** Matthew 6:24

The word 'money' used in the text is translated from the Aramaic word, **mammon**.

Biblical scholars widely agree that through the use of this word, Jesus was not simply referring to a generic concept of wealth, but rather a demonic power. By naming mammon as being in direct opposition to the kingdom of God, Jesus makes clear that Mammon is a rival or alternative lord.

Throughout his teachings, Jesus talks about money more than anything else, other than the

kingdom of God. Money, for Jesus, was not a neutral tool or straightforward transaction, but something that could master a person every bit as completely as the one true God.

Mammon, and its ability to master the human heart, therefore constitutes an **alternative kingdom** that functions to counteract the kingdom of God, which we know ushers in justice, life and human flourishing.

**‘God wishes to put all things into the service of people and ultimately to bring forth the flourishing of creation through the flourishing of people. Mammon wants to put all people into the service of things and ultimately to bring about the exploitation of all of creation.’**

**Andy Crouch**, Partner for Theology and Culture at Praxis

No wonder Jesus makes it clear that we cannot serve both masters.



### Video 1: Ruth Valerio

[Click here to view<sup>1</sup>](#)

We are now going to watch together a video by Ruth Valerio, Tearfund’s Advocacy and Influencing Director, which explores the theology of consumerism, and the biblical basis for a different way of living.



### Group Discussion 1

*Take some time to discuss the questions below in groups, encouraging people to think about them both from their perspective as individuals, but also as a church collective.*

#### Discussion questions in groups:

- Do you think the Bible has anything to say about consumerism and how we can live well in our world as people of God?
- What would it mean for us to live simply as Christians?
- What are some of the barriers to us living this way? How can we overcome these?
- In the film, Ruth says consumerism is about the search for happiness and fulfilment – but it misdirects our desires towards the wrong things. What would it look like for us to live life to the full? What should we desire instead of stuff?
- Ruth says living simply can be a way of positively resisting consumerism. What are you already doing in your own life to live more simply? Share ideas and tips with your table to inspire and encourage each other.
- In response to ‘detachment’, Ruth challenges us to speak up and to reconnect – to put things back in their story as a way of loving our neighbours. How would this help?

*Take time to feed back on the key themes from each group before a tea/coffee refill break.*

<sup>1</sup> [vimeo.com/791871505](https://vimeo.com/791871505)

## 2 Impact of plastic pollution on people living in poverty

### Host Script

Often, when we think about plastic pollution, the first images that spring into our mind are scenes of plastic-lined beaches, plastic-entangled turtles, or birds weighed down with plastic waste.

While the impacts of plastic on wildlife are a terrible consequence of our throw-away culture, we should not forget the human story in this crisis. Plastic pollution and mismanaged waste are polluting drinking water, poisoning the air and flooding communities. All this rubbish is making people sick and causing up to a million deaths each year: that's the equivalent of one person dying every 30 seconds.<sup>2</sup>

Plastic pollution is causing a social emergency, as well as an environmental one. Between 2000 and 2019, plastic-waste generation more than doubled. Today, half of all plastic is designed to be used just once before being discarded. And yet some 2 billion people in low- and middle-income countries don't have access to solid-waste collection. They have little option but to burn or dump it. The results are wide-ranging and extremely harmful. Plastic pollution is directly impacting the achievement of over half of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. It is also contributing directly to the climate emergency through plastics production and emissions from the burning of plastic waste. Not to mention that almost all plastics are made of fossil fuels!

As Christians, we believe that every person is made in the image of God, the *imago Dei*. Any diminishment of the *imago Dei* in our world should stir our hearts and convict us to act justly, as the prophet Micah instructs us (Micah 6:8).

**'To "do justice" means to render to each what each is due. Justice involves harmony, flourishing, and fairness, and it is based on the image of God in every person—the *imago Dei*—that grants all people inalienable dignity and infinite worth.'**<sup>3</sup>

**Eugene Cho**, Pastor and CEO of the Christian advocacy group Bread for the World

We are 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.



**Video 1: Campaign film**

[Click here to view<sup>4</sup>](#)

<sup>2</sup> Tearfund (2019) *No time to waste: Tackling the plastic pollution crisis before it's too late*, p iii.

[learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/policy-reports/no-time-to-waste](https://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/policy-reports/no-time-to-waste)

<sup>3</sup> Tearfund (2022) *Plastic pollution and poverty: A briefing to inform negotiations on a UN treaty on plastics*, p1

[learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/policy-reports/plastic-pollution-and-poverty](https://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/policy-reports/plastic-pollution-and-poverty)

<sup>4</sup> [vimeo.com/791870301](https://vimeo.com/791870301)





## Group Discussion 2

### Discussion questions in groups:

- Were you aware of the impact of plastic pollution on people living in poverty?
- Now that you've heard more about it, how does it make you feel?
- Do you find it easy or difficult to locate yourself within this story? Have you ever paused to think where your rubbish or recycling goes after you've finished with it? Where do you think "away" is when we throw things away? And what impact might that have?
- What actions, if any, have you taken in your own life in response to the injustice of plastic pollution?
- What actions might you be inspired to take following our discussion?
- What do you think the role of the church should be in resisting consumerism and tackling plastic pollution?

*Take some time to hear feedback from each group.*



## Campaign cards

*Take time to sign campaign cards here.*

# 3

## Living simply together

### Host Script

We have been on a journey together over these last few weeks, as we've grappled with the issue of consumerism and plastic waste, which is harming people living in poverty. As we come to our final session, we want to take the next step to put what we have learnt into action.

We are going to dream together about what this could look like for our community. On our tables we are going to come up with a list of things we could do to reduce our waste and live more simply together.

Before we do this, it is important to reflect on why taking action as a church community matters.

The church is the bride of Christ, and God's chosen vessel for transformation on the earth, and so it needs to take seriously what it means to live out the values of Jesus, even in the smallest detail of church life. The people within the church community are also individually called to be ambassadors of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:20). This means living lives which publicly embody the values of the kingdom of God – and when people do this corporately, it can have a powerful impact.

What's more, when the church makes changes as a corporate body, this can inspire transformation in the personal lives of individuals within the community, who may not have taken action without first seeing it modelled in their church.

But the church is also much more than a physical building. It is also a family of people, each with their own networks and connections, reaching out into the community. There are churches all over the world who are living this out. They have seen powerful transformation in their own community, as well as ripple effects that go far beyond it.

Gateway Church in Leeds partnered with an organisation called Missional Generation<sup>5</sup> on a project called EcoGen. Eco Gen is a refilling station planned and led by young people and located in a local church. After a 5 week teaching series on the climate crisis and biblical teaching on creation care, young people from Gateway researched, planned and implemented their own refill store. The store ran during tea and coffee time on a Sunday morning, and initially sold dried pasta and cleaning products in bulk for the congregation to buy. **“It was great to see the youth be active members of the church, they are the leaders of the future and we always need to be looking for ways to invest in them. People were very encouraging and we managed to sell out of pasta in our first week!”** - Hannah Clark, Youth Worker for Gateway



### Video 1: Zero Waste Brazil

[Click here to view<sup>6</sup>](#)

We're not going to watch a short video from a church in Recife, Brazil, who have now become a zero waste church.



### Group Discussion 1

Each group will spend time compiling a list of ideas for reducing waste as a community, led by the table's facilitator. Printouts of ideas will be on the tables, and each group will brainstorm around what would work best for their community, and the steps required to implement any changes.

<sup>5</sup> [missionalgen.co.uk](http://missionalgen.co.uk)

<sup>6</sup> <https://vimeo.com/79187098>

## Reducing waste

Waste-reduction areas for a church to consider in their action plans:

Gardening/green space/composting

Food/drink hospitality

Church life

(youth work, church cleaning, fashion and clothing)

### General tips for reducing plastic waste

- Do a rubbish audit: What gets thrown away each week? What can be recycled? What might be composted? Are there single-use items that could be replaced with reusables?
- Start recycling and look for more ways to reuse items.
- Start a composting service and start composting on the grounds. Composting services (if available) can take items you won't be able to compost on the grounds, like meat, dairy and compostable plates, cups etc. Any other food waste, paper, coffee grounds etc can be composted on the grounds in a garden compost system.
- Replace disposable plates, cups, coffee cups and cutlery with reusable items that can go in a dishwasher if you have one. Alternatively, get a group of volunteers together to wash up after the service.
- Consider the cleaning products you're using. Could you switch out plastic bottles for refillable glass bottles, and switch chemical cleaners out for natural alternatives?
- Strongly discourage plastic water bottles and use pitchers/glasses and reusable cups.
- Could you host a regular clothes swap to reduce fashion waste? Tearfund has produced a [DIY guide](#)<sup>5</sup> to hosting a clothes swap as a fundraiser.
- Invite people to opt out of paper newsletters for electronic versions.
- Take stock of Junior Church supplies. Can things be reused? Consider whether new items needed can be sourced secondhand. When restocking, consider using craft materials that can be composted – coloured pencils rather than markers, compostable craft items. If you do need new items, consider using [ReusefulUK](#)<sup>6</sup>, where you can save craft resources from heading to landfill!
- When you require clothing items for staff, children's events etc, consider where you purchase these from and try to source from an ethical provider. Consider choosing a generic design that would work for multiple events and last for years rather than a one-off design for a particular year of activity.
- Use real sugar and milk in dispensers rather than single-use packages.
- Use real spoons instead of plastic ones.
- Use a reusable cup instead of disposable plastic ones.
- Use reusable containers to store food rather than plastic bags.
- Could your church start a simple refill station, buying items in bulk and allowing people to refill items on a Sunday morning or during the week?

7 <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1rcqT2IObuOUwniG9dyrvdsItFCujihBE?usp=sharing>

8 [moneysavingexpert.com/team-blog/2022/11/reusefuluk-scrap-shops](https://moneysavingexpert.com/team-blog/2022/11/reusefuluk-scrap-shops)



## Feedback

Lead a feedback session, where each group presents their plan. Once each plan has been presented, identify the areas of similarity and difference, and try to get the wider group to agree on one overall list of ideas together. (A whiteboard might be helpful here!)

Once a list of ideas has been agreed, ask the group to make a plan for next steps. It might be helpful to have all the ideas typed up in a document, and for the leader of the session to have a discussion with the church leader or relevant person to see how these changes could be implemented.

It might be that the church agrees to adopt all of these ideas and makes the necessary arrangements quickly. Or it might be a slower process and that's OK. Encourage the group to remain in contact to help move things forward and perhaps share a regular update about the changes. Your church may have an eco group who would love to support you on achieving these things. If there isn't one already, maybe people here today could take this forward?

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## Closing prayer

*Host closes the session in prayer.*

## Next steps

Thank you for using this *Rubbish Church* resource. We pray it has been a blessing to your church community as you commit to living more justly, together.

Please make sure you send us your completed campaign cards so we can ensure every voice is counted as we seek to influence the UN treaty on plastics. The address is included on the cards.

Please do get in touch with us on [campaigns@tearfund.org](mailto:campaigns@tearfund.org) to let us know how your rubbish event goes and what your plans are moving forward!

If you would like to take any further action in your churches, there are other campaign resources which may be helpful. Our church talk is designed for a Sunday sermon, and our children's resource can be used for kids' groups, for Junior Church, or in primary schools.

If you would like to keep connected, you can sign up to our Activist emails which go out every month. This is a great way to connect with a community of people across the UK who are helping their churches take action together. To sign up, just email [campaigns@tearfund.org](mailto:campaigns@tearfund.org)



## Further resources

### Books by Ruth Valerio:

*Just Living: Faith and community in an age of consumerism*

*L is for Lifestyle: Christian living that doesn't cost the earth*

*Saying Yes to Life*

### Books by Eve Poole:

*Buying God: Church, Consumerism & Theology*

### The Story of Stuff Project

Story of Stuff is a US based organisation that encourages the civic participation of their global community in environmental and social issues

[storyofstuff.org](http://storyofstuff.org)

### Refill store directory

An online directory of refill stores across the UK

[ecothriftyliving.com/2019/10/over-100-zero-waste-shops-in-the-uk](http://ecothriftyliving.com/2019/10/over-100-zero-waste-shops-in-the-uk)

### Tearfund report on abundant community theology

[learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/research-report/abundant-community-theology-working-towards-environmental-and-economic-sustainability](http://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/research-report/abundant-community-theology-working-towards-environmental-and-economic-sustainability)

### Live Justly

A free ten-part Bible series with global contributors. Session 6 is focused on consumerism

[learn.tearfund.org/resources/tools-and-guides/live-justly-global-edition](http://learn.tearfund.org/resources/tools-and-guides/live-justly-global-edition)

### Eco Gen

More information about EcoGen, the refilling station project by Missional Generation

[vimeo.com/559946926](http://vimeo.com/559946926)

Tearfund is part of of the Renew Our World and #BreakFreeFromPlastics coalitions



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