



Trading our rubbish for abundant life

Matthew 19:16–22
The rich young man

Thank you for downloading our guide to talking with your church about the impacts of plastic pollution on people living in poverty.

Included in this guide you'll find template scripts: a talk lasting 25 minutes (page 3) and a shorter talk of 15 minutes (page 8). You could even shorten this further to share a message during your announcements if you don't have much time: please feel free to adapt this resource to suit your church. We've also created presentation slides that you can use during the talk, which you can download on the Tearfund website: tearfund.org/rubbishresources

The talk includes an opportunity for your congregation to take action by signing the *Rubbish Campaign* petition. Please email us at campaigns@tearfund.org at least two weeks before you are scheduled to speak so we can post you some action cards and pray for you as you prepare.

If you plan to present the video included in the longer version of the talk, remember to check in with your tech team ahead of time. You will need to make sure that all the equipment you need is available and functioning in the room or to ensure, if you stream your service, that the video can be played directly from the slides or is downloaded in advance.

Preparation

This talk is built around the lessons that are found in Matthew 19:16–22, which describes a dialogue between Jesus and a rich young man. Our focus isn't on the wealth of the man but rather the lessons that we can extract for our discipleship journey and practising justice. We'd encourage you to read and reflect on this passage beforehand.

We've broken the talk into three parts, which could be a helpful guide for adapting this talk or writing your own. You could use this order or change it around:

1. Our context

Taking the time to look at the injustice that is present in our world as a result of plastic pollution, and preparing to invite Jesus in

2. The text

Unpacking the core Bible passage and considering how God's word can guide us as we seek to establish justice

3. Our response

Moving from words to action. How do we apply the revelation in the text to our world and discipleship today?

Here are some tips to help your talk go smoothly:

- **For the shorter, 15-minute version of the talk, you'll need to amend the slide deck slightly. To use the talk exactly as scripted in this guide, remove Slide 5 (containing the video). The slide numbers in the shorter script correspond to the set of slides as they would be ordered with Slide 5 removed.**
- **If some of your church will be joining online, ensure that the link to the petition is shared in the chat or video description to provide the opportunity for all of the congregation to respond to the talk: tearfund.org/rubbishpetition**
- **Place the action cards on seats before service, there should be one per person. Have some pens available for people to sign the petition and a basket ready to collect the completed cards.**

Sermon/main talk 25 mins

Don't forget to prepare the action cards and pens, and tech for the video on Slide 5.

Slide 1

Our world has an urgent rubbish problem and as Christians we are called to do something about it. Our passage this morning is in Matthew 19. Here we find a dialogue between Jesus and a rich young man, where Jesus challenges the man to think about his relationship with the things that he owns. This provides a challenge for our personal discipleship and speaks to how we should respond to global injustices. Before we jump into the text, I want to talk a little bit about consumerism and how it is connected to our rubbish problem. I'll start by painting you two pictures.



Slide 2

The first picture is of 6 billion people around the world – that's three in four people – who have access to waste management systems. Here in the UK we belong to the 6 billion, and over the course of a couple of weeks you will collect your waste, place it in a bin at the kerbside, and the next day a refuse collector will come and carry it away for you. At the local waste centre the various materials in the waste are sorted and a few different things happen. Some of it is burned, which releases carbon emissions and that contributes to climate change. For the plastic waste, less than half of it is recycled in the UK and the majority of it is exported to other countries for recycling because we don't have capacity in the UK to deal with the huge volume of waste we generate. Every minute we throw out enough plastic to fill four double-decker buses! This system is broken.



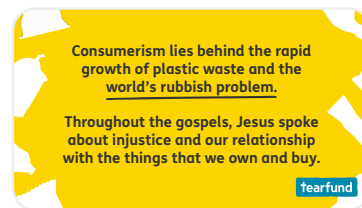
Slide 3

The remaining quarter of the world's population – that's 2 billion people – do not have a safe way to dispose of rubbish. If you belong to the 2 billion, you'll have little choice but to burn or dump your waste, often very near your home, or even in your own backyard. On the screen is an illustration of the impacts of this waste in your community. Burning the waste will release toxic fumes that you and your family will inhale. Burning also releases carbon emissions, contributing to climate change and pollution of the environment. Some of the waste will end up clogging drains, rivers and streams in your community, making flooding worse and damaging homes and infrastructure. Waste also affects livelihoods as it depletes fish stock, creates hazards for livestock, and hinders tourism. And gathered waste will attract pests that carry diseases. The diseases caused by mismanaged waste are resulting in the death of up to a million people each year: that's one person dying every 30 seconds. Crucially, those who are dying are most likely to be people living in poverty. This too is a broken system.



Slide 4

Both of these systems of waste management are broken and the rapid increase in plastic production is making the situation worse. What lies behind this problem is consumerism. Because of companies' constant desire to make more profits, we live with a pattern of throwing goods away and buying new ones, and the poorest communities are bearing the cost. Poverty is not God's plan. You are. And so seeing these injustices should prompt us to act. The prophets, the apostles and Christ himself addressed the injustices of the society they lived in as a core part of their ministries.



It's not news to you that we live in a consumer society. Consumption in itself isn't bad: we were created by God to consume. We need to eat and drink and buy clothes: consumption is part of our humanity and a means to meet our basic needs. Jesus guides us as to what our relationship with consumption should look like. In Luke 12:15 (MSG) he reminds us that 'life is not defined by what you have' and in Matthew 6:25 he reminds us that there is more to life than food and clothes. However, when we say we live in a consumer society, it means that our relationship with consumption has become unhealthy. Consumption has become central to the way that we view the world: we define our identity, status and power by what we purchase and own. We believe the advertisements which promise that the things we own will bring us joy and acceptance.

We've moved towards fast-paced lifestyles. We choose to buy products that make our daily activities more convenient and efficient, and have developed habits to do the same. Somewhere along the line we've embraced the idea that throwing things away is convenient. Single-use plastic has enabled this throwaway culture: we find it everywhere from snacks wrapped in plastic to disposable cups for church refreshments. Now, for some of us, single-use plastic has made a vital difference. For those living with disabilities and health conditions, and in medicine, single-use plastic has played, and continues to play, a key role in ensuring safety, sanitation and wellbeing. However, many of us have bought into a consumer-driven way of living that benefits companies. Writing in 1955, economist Victor Lebow forecasted how our consumer habits were changing. He said, 'Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals... We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced and discarded at an ever-increasing pace.' On the flip side, our consumer 'rituals' are hurting people and the planet.

Single-use plastic has also been presented as a solution to income inequality. For example, in many markets, companies have used plastic sachets to create smaller portions of products which are more affordable in the short term. However, as we throw away our plastic, we constantly have to buy more and companies generate more profits. We end up with mountains of waste and those who have to burn their rubbish are caught in a trap where they are forced to choose between short-term gain and long-term costs to their health, livelihoods and environment.

Thousands of Christians around the world are tired of living this way and seeing the effects that it has on people living in poverty. Tearfund is a Christian charity determined to see an end to extreme poverty and injustice, mobilising communities and churches in more than 50 countries. These Christians are seeing first hand the huge impact plastic pollution has on people living in poverty and are bringing together thousands of people to respond to this rubbish problem. We're going to watch a video now of how one church in Brazil that Tearfund works with is taking action.

Turn to Slide 5 to play the video

Slide 5



Video: A Brazilian church stopping the rubbish
vimeo.com/791870984

Slide 6 – 9

Let's have a look at what the Bible says about changing our relationship with the things that we own. Please turn with me to Matthew 19:16–22 (NIV):

¹⁶ Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” ¹⁷“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸“Which ones?” he inquired. Jesus replied, ““You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honour your father and mother, and ‘love your neighbour as yourself.” ²⁰“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” ²¹Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” ²²When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

The first thing to say is that I'm not about to suggest that we all should sell all of our possessions. Don't worry: you can breathe! Neither am I primarily concerned with the young man's level of income. Instead what this scripture illustrates, and what I want to emphasise, is that our relationship with the things that we own and buy is relevant to our capacity to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

The struggle for the young man is about surrender. Jesus is getting to his heart. The Bible doesn't necessarily pinpoint what it is about the man's wealth that makes him not want to give it away, but we can make some guesses. Maybe he'd grown up in scarcity and vowed that he and his family would never lack anything again. For some of us too, our possessions provide us with a sense of sufficiency and security. Perhaps his great wealth granted him acceptance and power in his community. We too live in a world where we are told that our value is determined by what we own. If we allow our possessions to define who we are, our identity is unstable: we constantly need more to feel secure in ourselves. Or we could consider that the young man enjoyed a comfortable life and the convenience that he could afford through his wealth. Whatever the reason the man didn't want to part with his wealth, Jesus presented an invitation, 'Come follow me.' This was an invitation to freedom and abundant life.

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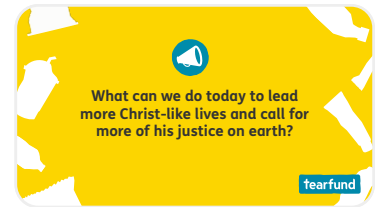
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²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

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Slide 10

We don't know whether the young man actually sold his possessions after he went away that day. But today, when we can see the impact that our current patterns of consumption are having, we have the opportunity to consider whether we are willing to exchange our current lives for a more abundant life. With God, it's never an empty exchange. When he asks us to follow him, he promises that whoever loses his life in pursuit of him will find it. So what do we find in the exchange?



We exchange finding our identity, security and fulfilment in the things that we buy for finding our identity and joy in the knowledge that God created us with inherent dignity, value and acceptance. When we do this, we no longer strive for lives of continuous purchasing and move towards lives of contentment and simplicity. We see our consumption as part of a cycle that seeks to reuse and repair goods to keep them in use for as long as possible. We see companies using long-lasting materials for their goods so that we don't have to throw them away after only one use. And when companies deliver durable goods, the mountains of waste in communities living in poverty start to shrink, and so should the rates of illness and death.

The video we watched earlier shows that doing things differently is possible. The work of communities in Brazil demonstrates what a more abundant life can look like. Can we trust God enough to exchange our current ways of consuming for new ways that allow us to welcome more of God's justice on earth?

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do just that. Just like the rich young man, our actions are an important part of our response to follow Christ and are a practical way to express our worship. Just as Moses and the prophets called on rulers to end injustice in their nations, we have an opportunity to come together to lift our voices and call for transformation. During 2023 and 2024, nearly 200 governments are meeting to develop the first-ever 'plastics treaty', an international agreement on plastic pollution. It's a moment where our world is coming together and saying, 'You know what, we tried single-use plastics and it isn't working for billions of people. What can we do differently? How can we re-imagine our future?' Now, Christians in more than ten countries and six continents are joining together as part of Tearfund's *Rubbish Campaign* to contribute a vision for a more abundant life.

Slide 11

Tearfund is calling for an agreement that includes four key things:

- 1. Reduction: legally binding targets to reduce plastic production and scale up reuse solutions**
- 2. Recycling: universal access to waste collection and recycling, for the 2 billion people who still have no safe way to dispose of their rubbish**
- 3. Respect: support for waste pickers, the people who collect and sort the majority of plastic that gets recycled globally, but whose work is rarely valued and who struggle to earn a decent living**
- 4. Response: ensuring the agreement holds businesses and governments accountable to take real action**



With these asks, we stand for justice with billions around the world.

We are facing mountains of plastic pollution, dumped or burnt around the world. Jesus told his followers that even the smallest amount of faith can move mountains. So I'd like to provide three ways that you can respond to today's message and join Christians across the world standing for justice. The first way is using your voice and signing a Tearfund petition. Tearfund has had great success with petitions in the past. Thousands of people signed our last petition calling on Unilever, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Nestlé to 'stop the rubbish', and all four companies have since made significant new commitments. Now we have a new petition, calling on the UK Government to make sure those four asks we heard about are included in the plastics treaty. You have an opportunity now to sign this petition. You should have had a card on your seat, with a section that you can complete. I'll give you a few minutes to do that now.

If you are streaming your service online, don't forget to share the link to the petition and encourage viewers to sign, tearfund.org/rubbishpetition. Pause for 1–2 minutes

Thanks so much.

Within your action card you'll find a second way to respond and that is to find ways to reduce your own plastic consumption. I mentioned earlier that here in the UK we don't have the capacity to deal with all of the plastic waste that we produce. Companies respond to consumer trends and demands: we're really powerful. On the card, there's a challenge for you. Why not try one of these ideas to reduce your single-use plastic and waste for a month? You can do this at home, with your friends or small group, or even decide to do it as a whole church by aiming to reduce the plastic used within your building.

Whichever you choose, we'd love you to share your photos and stories with Tearfund. You can do this on social media using the hashtag **#RubbishChallenge** or email the campaigns team at **campaigns@tearfund.org** These details are on your card and you can also find them online. When you're ready, select the Rubbish Challenge you will try by ticking the relevant box, and then you can tear off the panel and hand it to me at the front after the service.

If you would also like your congregation to share their stories with the church, don't forget to include the relevant contact details

Finally, you can respond through prayer. Prayer really does work wonders. On the back panel of your action card, you'll find details of how you sign up to receive regular prayer alerts from Tearfund throughout the campaign. And right now you can respond by joining me in prayer as we close:

Father, thank you for the opportunity we've had today to see our world through your eyes. We pray that as you invite us to exchange our current ways of living, as Jesus did with the young man, our identities will be firmly rooted in you and our hearts will be open to consider the ways that we can bring your justice through responsible consumption. We pray for the Tearfund team as they attend the plastics treaty negotiations and for Christians who are campaigning across the world. Give them strength to endure as they walk this two-year journey to achieve the best outcomes on the agreement, and anoint the words that they speak for power and influence over the hearts of decision-makers. We pray that decision-makers will see the urgency of the issue, that they will be turned towards compassion, and that they will be willing to commit and be held accountable for transforming our society. We pray for waste pickers, that their voices will be heard and valued within and beyond the agreement process, and that they will get the justice they deserve. And we pray for innovators and investors. Thank you for their ability to bring your hope to earth through their willingness to take action. As they seek to expand solutions, bless them with even more ideas and funding to bring them to fruition. Amen.

Short talk 15 mins

Don't forget to prepare the action cards and pens.

Slide 1

Our world has an urgent rubbish problem and as Christians we are called to do something about it. Our passage this morning is in Matthew 19. Here we find a dialogue between Jesus and a rich young man, where Jesus challenges the man to think about his relationship with the things that he owns. This provides a challenge for our personal discipleship and speaks to how we should respond to global injustices. Before we jump into the text I want to talk a little bit about consumerism and how it is connected to our rubbish problem. I'll start by painting you two pictures.



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The first picture is of 6 billion people around the world – that's three in four people – who have access to waste management systems. Here in the UK we belong to the 6 billion, and over the course of a couple of weeks you will collect your waste, place it in a bin at the kerbside, and the next day a refuse collector will come and carry it away for you. At the local waste centre the various materials in the waste are sorted and a few different things happen. Some of it is burned, which releases carbon emissions and that contributes to climate change. For the plastic waste, less than half of it is recycled in the UK and the majority of it is exported to other countries for recycling because we don't have capacity in the UK to deal with the huge volume of waste we generate. Every minute we throw out enough plastic to fill four double-decker buses! This system is broken.



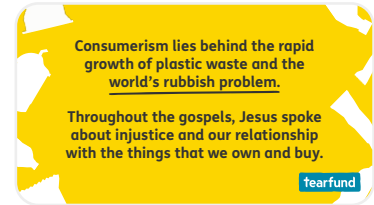
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The remaining quarter of the world's population – that's 2 billion people – do not have a safe way to dispose of rubbish. If you belong to the 2 billion, you'll have little choice but to burn or dump your waste, often very near your home, or even in your own backyard. On the screen is an illustration of the impacts of this waste in your community. Burning the waste will release toxic fumes that you and your family will inhale. Burning also releases carbon emissions, contributing to climate change and pollution of the environment. Some of the waste will end up clogging drains, rivers and streams in your community, making flooding worse and damaging homes and infrastructure. Waste also affects livelihoods as it depletes fish stock, creates hazards for livestock, and hinders tourism. And gathered waste will attract pests that carry diseases. The diseases caused by mismanaged waste are resulting in the death of up to a million people each year: that's one person dying every 30 seconds. Crucially, those who are dying are most likely to be people living in poverty. This too is a broken system.



Slide 4

Both of these systems of waste management are broken and the rapid increase in plastic production is making the situation worse. What lies behind this problem is consumerism. Because of companies' constant desire to make more profits, we live with a pattern of throwing goods away and buying new ones, and the poorest communities are bearing the cost. Poverty is not God's plan. You are. And so seeing these injustices should prompt us to act. Let's take a closer look at this issue.



It's not news to you that we live in a consumer society. Consumption in itself isn't bad, we were created by God to consume. We need to eat and drink and buy clothes: consumption is part of our humanity and a means to meet our basic needs. Jesus guides us as to what our relationship with consumption should look like. In the gospels, he reminds us on several occasions that there is more to life than what we eat, drink and own.

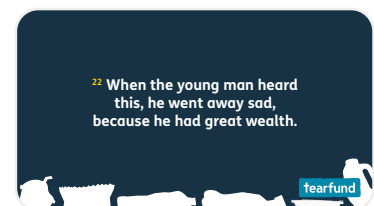
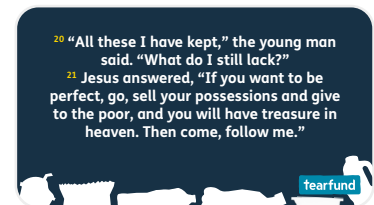
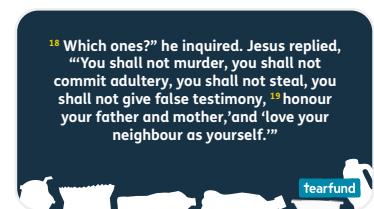
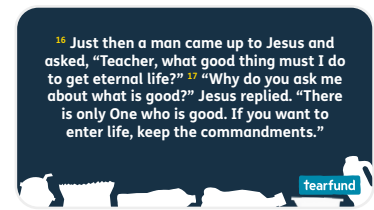
However, in our consumer society, we define ourselves by what we purchase and own. We believe the advertisements which promise that the things we own will bring us joy and acceptance. We've moved towards fast-paced lifestyles. We choose to buy products that make our daily activities more convenient and efficient, and have developed habits to do the same. Somewhere along the line we've embraced the idea that throwing things away is convenient. Single-use plastic has enabled this throwaway culture: we find it everywhere from snacks wrapped in plastic to disposable cups for church refreshments. Now, for some of us, single-use plastic has made a vital difference. For those living with disabilities and health conditions, and in medicine, single-use plastic has played, and continues to play, a key role in ensuring safety, sanitation and wellbeing. However, many of us have bought into a consumer-driven way of living that benefits companies.

Slide 5 – 8

Let's have a look at what the Bible says about changing our relationship with the things that we own. Please turn with me to Matthew 19:16–22 (NIV):

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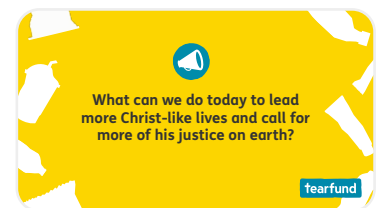
The first thing to say is that I'm not about to suggest that we all should sell all of our possessions. Don't worry: you can breathe! Neither am I primarily concerned with the young man's level of income. Instead what this scripture illustrates, and what I want to emphasise, is that our relationship with the things that we own and buy is relevant to our capacity to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.



The struggle for the young man is about surrender. Jesus is getting to his heart. The Bible doesn't necessarily pinpoint what it is about the man's wealth that makes him not want to give it away, but we can make some guesses. Maybe he'd grown up in scarcity and vowed that he and his family would never lack anything again. For some of us too, our possessions provide us with a sense of sufficiency and security. Perhaps his great wealth granted him acceptance and power in his community. We too live in a world where we are told that our value is determined by what we own. If we allow our possessions to define who we are, our identity is unstable: we constantly need more to feel secure in ourselves. Or we could consider that the young man enjoyed a comfortable life and the convenience that he could afford through his wealth. Whatever the reason the man didn't want to part with his wealth, Jesus presented an invitation, 'Come follow me.' This was an invitation to freedom and abundant life.

Slide 9

We don't know whether the young man actually sold his possessions after he went away that day. But today, when we can see the impact that our current patterns of consumption are having, we have the opportunity to consider whether we are willing to exchange our current lives for a more abundant life. With God, it's never an empty exchange. When he asks us to follow him, he promises that whoever loses his life in pursuit of him will find it. So what do we find in the exchange?



We exchange finding our identity, security and fulfilment in the things that we buy for finding our identity and joy in the knowledge that God created us with inherent dignity, value and acceptance. When we do this, we no longer strive for lives of continuous purchasing and move towards lives of contentment and simplicity. We see our consumption as part of a cycle that seeks to reuse and repair goods to keep them in use for as long as possible. We see companies using long-lasting materials for their goods so that we don't have to throw them away after only one use. And when companies deliver durable goods, the mountains of waste in communities living in poverty start to shrink, and so should the rates of illness and death.

Around the world, people living among waste are innovating and finding ways to reduce the pollution and build a more abundant life. Doing things differently is possible. Can we trust God enough to exchange our current ways of consuming for new ways that allow us to welcome more of God's justice in our earth?

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do just that. Just like the rich young man, our actions are an important part of our response to follow Christ and are a practical way to express our worship. We have an opportunity to come together to lift our voices and call for transformation. During 2023 and 2024, nearly 200 governments are meeting to develop the first-ever 'plastics treaty', an international agreement on plastic pollution. It's a moment where our world is coming together and saying, 'You know what, we tried single-use plastics and it isn't working for billions of people. What can we do differently? How can we re-imagine our future?' Now, Christians in more than ten countries and six continents are joining together as part of Tearfund's *Rubbish Campaign* to contribute a vision for a more abundant life.

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Tearfund is calling for an agreement that includes four key things:

1. **Reduction: legally binding targets to reduce plastic production and scale up reuse solutions**
2. **Recycling: universal access to waste collection and recycling, for the 2 billion people who still have no safe way to dispose of their rubbish**
3. **Respect: support for waste pickers, the people who collect and sort the majority of plastic that gets recycled globally, but whose work is rarely valued and who struggle to earn a decent living**
4. **Response: ensuring the agreement holds businesses and governments accountable to take real action**



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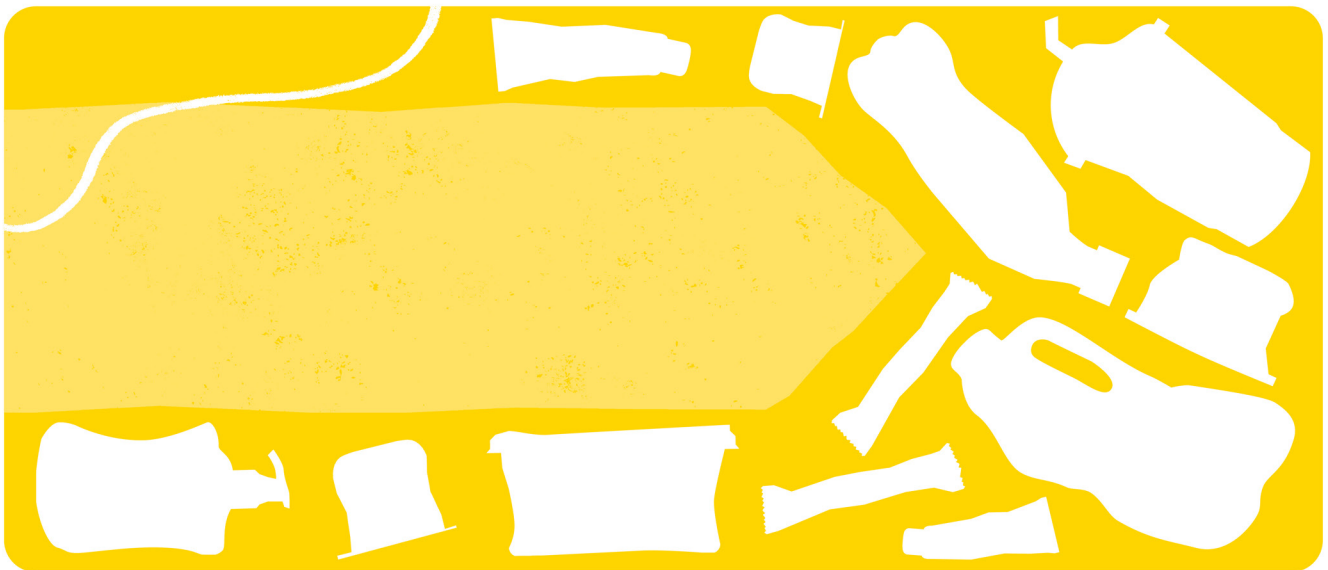
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Tearfund is part of the Renew Our World and #BreakFreeFromPlastic coalitions



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