


# Waste



**“For the sake  
of our planet,  
we must focus on  
our waste crisis.”**

David Attenborough

# Waste is...

contaminating our oceans, clogging our drains and causing flooding. It's transmitting diseases, causing respiratory infections, and harming animals.

## TO BEAT POVERTY AND INJUSTICE, WE NEED TO TACKLE WASTE

*Tearfund*

Our world has a rubbish problem. Two billion people are living among piles of waste because their rubbish isn't collected. That's one in four people on the planet who are drinking polluted water, breathing toxic air and battling sickness. Billions of single-use plastic products are sold in countries where waste isn't collected. Tearfund is calling on four consumer giants, Coca-Cola, Nestlé, PepsiCo and Unilever, to...

**Report:**  
by 2020,  
issue the  
number of  
single-use  
plastics sold

**Reduce:**  
by 2025,  
halve the  
number  
of such  
products

**Recycle:**  
by 2022,  
one single-use  
plastic to be  
collected for  
each one sold

**Restore:**  
work with  
waste pickers  
to provide  
employment  
with dignity

Add your name to this call!

Visit [www.tearfund.org/about\\_you/action/rubbish\\_campaign\\_2019/](http://www.tearfund.org/about_you/action/rubbish_campaign_2019/)

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's TV series, 'War on Plastic', began with his visit to a recycling plant in Malaysia. Among mountains of abandoned materials, useless to the recyclers, Hugh found many familiar plastics from the UK.

His visible shock and shame then deepened when he visited a little girl seriously sick from the toxic fumes of unwanted plastics being burnt nearby. For decades, poorer countries have been paid to accept the plastic waste of richer countries. This was significantly reduced by a UN pact in May 2019 but the legacy of past exports remains.





Watch Annie Leonard's short film about the lifecycle of the goods we buy. An internet sensation, it's been viewed over 6 million times and is called *The Story of Stuff*:

## THE STORY OF STUFF



<https://youtu.be/1-RnnEFWUM4>

What were your responses as you watched the film? Anger? Frustration? Determination? What else?



### Sustainable 'stuff'

Ellen MacArthur, the long-distance solo yachtswoman, sees in her careful, waste-free management of provisions during a voyage, a picture of the way in which we must manage the finite resources of planet Earth.



*"My boat was my entire world. What I took with me was all I had. Food, fuel, clothes, toothpaste. At sea, I managed it down to the last drop of diesel, the last packet of food. No experience could have given me a better understanding of the word 'finite'. What we sailors have out there is all we have. There is no more."*

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation promotes a radical new approach to 'stuff'. It advocates a 'circular economy' in which waste becomes a thing of the past, the recyclability of all items having been factored into their very design. She says "We need to move away from today's linear take-make-waste model and fundamentally rethink the way we design, use and reuse".

Background image: elic/Shutterstock.com

### Plastic-wrapped 'stuff'

The theologian and environmentalist Ruth Valerio has inspired many to go plastic-free during recent Lents and anyone who has tried will know it's tricky. Often we can buy loose fruit and veg which can go straight in the basket. And some supermarkets now encourage us to take our own containers to their fish and meat counters. But what about nuts or lentils? Yoghurt? Cleaning products? Tricky, yes... but still a brilliant thing to do – and not just during Lent!

- Join [www.dofn.org/e89](http://www.dofn.org/e89) for moral support!
- Be inspired by an Australian journalist at [www.dofn.org/yw2](http://www.dofn.org/yw2)
- Campaign for a deposit return scheme for all bottles at [www.dofn.org/cpre](http://www.dofn.org/cpre)
- Take your empty pots and bottles to Ernie's Zero Waste Shop in Norwich (137-139 Magdalen St) and fill them with dried goods (those lentils and nuts!), wash-up liquid, shower gel and much else.



## 'Gather up the fragments' John 6.12b

The hunger of others mattered to Jesus. With generous provision, he had fed the thousands of people who had flocked to him in the desert. He had taken a tiny offering of bread and fish and transformed it. It had become enough – *more* than enough... The food was plentiful enough to satisfy the vast crowd – and then some.

At which point, we see that the left-overs *also* mattered to Jesus. *Nothing*, he told his disciples, was to be wasted: "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost". Nothing!

The surplus food is not left for the birds. On the contrary, time and energy is to be given to its careful collection. It is a powerful lesson. The way we deal with waste also matters. In fact, it is a vital aspect of our own discipleship.

### Nothing is wasted

*Reflections on what we call rubbish*

O God,  
with whom nothing is lost, nothing is wasted,  
we thank you for the miracle of compost –  
our daily leavings, what we throw away,  
able, with time and care,  
to fertilize the earth.

Take what we regard as useless in our lives,  
failure, pain or poverty,  
and transform them through your power  
to become a rich source of growth.

*Mark 4.30-32*

Janet Morley: All Desires Known SPCK 1988

Cup your hands together,  
and you will see the shape  
this blessing wants to take.  
Basket, bowl, vessel:  
it cannot help but  
hold itself open  
to welcome  
what comes.

This blessing  
knows the secret  
of the fragments  
that find their way  
into its keeping,  
the wholeness  
that may hide  
in what has been  
left behind,

the persistence of plenty  
where there seemed  
only lack.

Look into the hollows  
of your hands  
and ask  
what wants to be  
gathered there,  
what abundance waits  
among the scraps  
that come to you,  
what feast  
will offer itself  
from the fragments  
that remain.

"Gather up the fragments"  
Jan Richardson

Do 'cup your hands together' as you read the prayer-poem (above right).  
What 'fragments' from your own life or life-style might you gather there?  
In what ways might they become instead 'an abundance'?



# The stories of two waste-pickers

There are millions of waste-pickers world-wide who 'gather up the fragments'. Their daily work is to salvage reusable or recyclable materials, to sort them and to sell them. Their days are spent on vast rubbish dumps or rifling through bins.

## Zharmeena's story

Zharmeena is eight. On a cold winter morning, as the sun rises above the squalor and stench of the dumps of Islamabad, she is one of many frail-looking children already picking through the rubbish. It is a risky and competitive business.



Like many of Pakistan's 1.5 million homeless children, Zharmeena is an Afghan refugee. She wears ill-fitting boots and has a few thin pieces of fabric wrapped around her. "I come to collect garbage for the scrap dealer who gives me money," she explains. "Every day for two years or more." She earns less than 70p a day.

Free education for street children is offered across Islamabad but those from Afghanistan don't have the required birth certificates. "I've never been to school," Zharmeena says.

Quite apart from the disease-ridden conditions in which she sifts endlessly through noxious piles of waste, she is vulnerable to violence, trafficking and abuse.

## Luyanda's story

Money problems interrupted Luyanda's degree and he eventually got into the recycling business, earning enough to support his mother and daughter. He calls himself 'a proud reclaimer'. Waking daily at 3.30am, he travels to a leafy suburb of Johannesburg and, by 6am, is sorting the contents of household bins out for collection.



He belongs to the African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) which is pressing the community to separate recyclables from other waste and also to rethink its attitude to waste pickers: "Many people see us as dirty scavengers whereas actually, we are experts, skilfully differentiating between a wide range of materials, conducting a great service to both community and environment.

"And do not think that we are all uneducated. Listen to our stories: many of us have other skills which we bring to our recycling work. We are reclaiming South Africa's future."

You might like to list the ways in which these two stories differ. And the important issues which the differences highlight?



# Birth to Death of a Plastic

Crude Oil

$\frac{1}{4}$  bottle of oil is used to produce each bottle.



Plastic

The oil is transformed into plastic pellets.



PET Pellets

Pellets are heated and expanded to shape the bottles.

Heat

1 bottle takes 3x the water to produce it.



Packing

Filling / Capping

Sterilizing

The amount of resources it takes just to transport these bottles adds up to about 1 liter of gasoline per bottle.



Transporting

Fueling

Stocking

According to the EPA, roughly 10-27% of plastic bottles are recycled in the U.S.

The remaining 73-90% of plastic bottles can take 500 years to decompose in a landfill, lasting about 5 times our own lifetime!



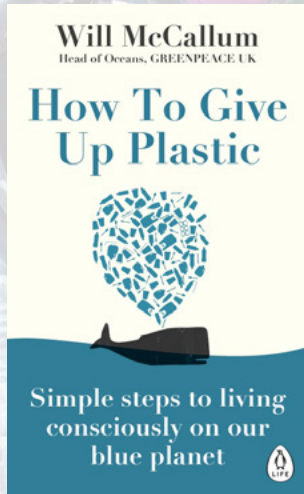
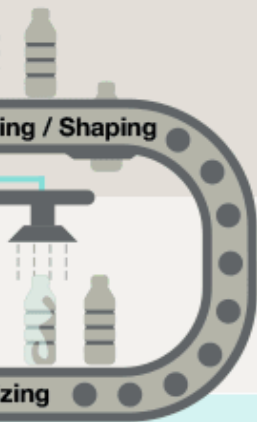
Purchasing

For the small percentage of plastic that is recycled, they will be sorted, melted back into pellets and used to make things like clothing and carpeting.

Most end up in landfills and continue to collect in our oceans in the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch" which destroys marine life.



# c Bottle



We've all had the experience of plastic encroaching on a beloved landscape. In Will McCallum's case, that landscape is Antarctica. Even there, far from human habitation, he has found fragments of plastic.

Will is Greenpeace UK's Head of Oceans. Early on in his book (left) he charts the successful reduction of single-use plastic bags world-wide and the banning of microbeads (below) in toiletries.



His focus now is the plastic bottle. Just those produced by Coca-Cola each year, laid nose to tail, would wrap around the circumference of the earth 700 times. No wonder that so many of them end up in our oceans. There, they take 450 years to break down.

Many of us have already grasped that we simply cannot continue plastic production at this rate. No waste or recycling system can cope. *We have* to move away from single-use plastic bottles. It's great that drinks fountains and refillable bottles are being used more widely. And for many of us, tap water is safe and free!

What else might you do? Buy Will's book and discover his top tips for reducing single-use plastic.



"For years we thought that the oceans were so vast and their inhabitants so numerous that nothing we could do would have any effect upon them. But now we know that was wrong... The oceans are under threat now as never before in human history. Our fragile blue planet has reached crisis point... We have a responsibility. Every one of us"



Sir David Attenborough



Despite growing numbers of beach cleans and a push on recycling, around 8 million tons of plastic still ends up in the oceans each year. And there, it can be lethal. Tens of millions of people across the world watched David Attenborough's Blue Planet II, gasping in shock when an albatross fed its chicks small pieces of plastic, mistaking them for food.

A man threw some plastic into the sea  
 The particles broke down naturally  
 Fish came by and ate them up  
 They struggled in pain as it ripped their gut  
 A fishing boat blew its horn  
 And picked up the net he had drawn  
 A man ate the fish for his tea  
 The one who threw plastic into the sea

*The Bottle Fish*  
 by Antonio Mo, age 12

"It is a curious situation that the sea, from which life first arose, should now be threatened by the activities of one form of that life.

But the sea, though changed in a sinister way, will continue to exist: the threat is rather to life itself."



Rachel Carson, Marine Biologist 1907-1964



"The sea is his for h



"We cannot allow our seas a  
 by endless fields of floating  
 everything depended on G  
 as if everything depended o





he made it." Psalm 95.5



"There is the sea, spread far and wide,  
and there move creatures beyond  
number, both small and great.  
There go the ships, and there is that Leviathan  
which you have made to play in the deep."

Psalm 104. 25-6



"We owe it to our children to be  
better stewards of the oceans.  
The alternative? A world  
without whales. It's too terrible  
to imagine."

Pierce Brosnan



**"Plastic in all its forms is choking our planet."**  
Jerry Brown, Former Governor of California

"And God said, 'Let  
the waters bring  
forth swarms of living  
creatures...' So God  
created the great sea  
monsters and every living  
creature that moves, of  
every kind, with which  
the waters swarm...  
And God saw that it was  
good." Genesis 1.20-21

and oceans to be littered  
with plastic. We must pray as if  
by God's providence, and work  
to clean up after us."  
Pope Francis

**500 million**  
tonnes of plastic are  
produced annually worldwide

In 2020 we will generate  
**900% more**  
plastic than in 1980

**By 2050**  
the oceans could contain  
more plastics than fish



Background image: katatonia82/Shutterstock.com

## Fast fashion

When it comes to waste, the fashion industry is a major culprit. One dustbin lorry of clothes is burned or sent to landfill every second – enough to fill Sydney Harbour every year. Sadly unsurprising then, that a landfill in India will soon rise higher than the Taj Mahal.

Fewer people these days buy a garment expecting to wear it repeatedly over a long time. Entire business models are built on the premise of “fast fashion,” providing clothes cheaply and quickly to consumers through shorter fashion cycles. But this linear model of buying, wearing and quickly discarding clothes negatively impacts people and the planet’s resources. And the annual value of clothes discarded prematurely is more than \$400 billion.



## Ocean plastics transformed!

Gant is one of many clothing retailers trying to make fashion less fast and more sustainable. It employs fishermen in the Mediterranean to gather plastic from shorelines. This is then converted into a 100% recycled polyester thread which is blended with ethically produced cotton threads to make items such as the white shirt modelled above. Even the buttons are made from recycled plastic!



### Laundry against landfill

Watch this brilliant little advert urging us to ‘wash wisely, wear longer and waste less’ - <https://youtu.be/XBsXs-LCNRs>



“There is no beauty in the finest cloth if it makes hunger and unhappiness.”

Mahatma Gandhi



“Demand quality not just in the products you buy, but in the life of the person who made it.”

Orsola de Castro, *Fashion Revolution*



## Prophetik

Livia Firth is the Co-founder and Creative Director of **Eco-Age**, a consultancy enabling businesses to grow through sustainability. She is also the founder of the Green Carpet Challenge, launched in 2010 when, accompanying her husband Colin Firth, she walked the red carpet in a sustainable gown from the fashion label *Prophetik*. It was made of hand-dyed indigo 'peace' silk created with minimal environmental impact.

Using the occasion to campaign about environmental and social justice issues, Livia did much that night to turn the red carpet green, many world famous designers and celebrities now following her in spotlighting sustainable fashion at awards ceremonies.

Most of us will never walk a red or a green carpet! But we all make choices about what to wear. "Ban fast fashion, forever!" says Livia Firth. "It's made fashion disposable and by doing that it's destroying the environment and enslaving millions of people in its supply chains. If something is really cheap it's because it has been produced by someone that is not getting paid properly." And, as we have seen, it's always the poor of our world who suffer most from the disposal of excessive waste.

The prophet Amos (4.1) rails against those "who oppress the poor and needy", who say with the same casual presumption as we might request another item of clothing online, "Bring me a drink!"

The voice of *Prophetik* and other ethical brands echoes that of Amos. There are plenty of contemporary prophets out there if only we have ears to hear.



Livia Firth challenges each of us to "Become an active citizen through your wardrobe!" In what specific ways could you rise to her challenge? And encourage others to join you?



## The Jeans Journey

According to the Ellen McArthur Foundation (EMF), 25 billion gallons of water is required for one year's worth of global textile production (including cotton farming).

It might be easier to grasp the scale of resources used in clothing manufacture if we focus on one garment. Take jeans – worn all around the world. Making one pair currently uses 10,000 litres of water and produces as much greenhouse gas as driving a car for more than 80 miles.

In 2019, EMF shared new guidelines to tackle the waste and pollution associated with the current production of jeans and launched the *Jeans Redesign*. Many leading brands have already signed up, willing to 'make fashion circular'.



*"The way we produce jeans is causing huge problems with waste and pollution, but it doesn't have to be this way. By working together we can create jeans that last longer, that can be remade into new jeans at the end of their use, and are made in ways which are better for the environment and the people that make them. This is just the start. Over time we will continue to drive momentum towards a thriving fashion industry, based on the principles of a circular economy."*

François Souchet, Lead, Make Fashion Circular

By buying from second-hand or eco-friendly shops you can massively reduce the environmental impact of your clothes. And when you no longer need them, they do not need go to landfill. As well as textile recycling banks, numerous charity shops welcome pre-loved clothing. Oxfam, for instance, saves over 7000 tons of clothing from landfill annually, thanks to its Wastesaver processing plant.

You could also donate to Clothes Aid [www.clothesaid.co.uk](http://www.clothesaid.co.uk) whose strapline is "Collecting for British charities is in our jeans"!

JEANS



Watch this video  
[vimeo.com/158010241](https://vimeo.com/158010241)

for a brief overview of  
the journey from US cotton  
field to our wardrobes.



Does anything surprise you?

**clothesaid**  
Collecting for British charities  
is in our jeans



## Consider the lilies

“Consider the lilies... they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you?” Luke 12.27-8



PchelaMajka/Shutterstock



Less than 1% of clothing is recycled into new garments but things are beginning to change. Here, Kate Hudson models a dress from her own eco-friendly fashion line. It is woven from soft crepe that's spun from 100% recycled polyester.

Whether or not the floral fabric evokes the beauty of those 'lilies' to which Jesus referred (above), its reliance on materials which would otherwise go to landfill echoes something of the trust in God's provision which he was encouraging in his disciples – in us.

# Lament for a languishing world

Earth is polluted by its very own people who have broken its laws,  
disrupted its order and violated the sacred and eternal covenant.

Isaiah 24.5 (The Message)

God our creator,  
in the midst of a littered land  
filled deep with the waste  
of our lives  
we groan with creation:  
*Have mercy on us.*

God our creator,  
in the midst of poisoned rivers  
contaminated by chemicals  
we groan with creation:  
*Have mercy on us.*

God our creator,  
in the midst of suffering seas  
polluted by plastic  
we groan with creation:  
*Have mercy on us.*

God our creator,  
in the midst of toxic air –  
suffocating fumes  
from incinerated waste –  
we groan with creation:  
*Have mercy on us.*

God our creator,  
we have chosen the ways  
that lead to death  
and creation groans with us:  
*Have mercy on us.*

SMG

O God, you are the source of all our bounty:  
when we are hasty about waste,  
and thoughtless about throwaways;  
when we are careless about consumption  
and choose convenience over compassion;  
may your Spirit startle us  
and bring us to our senses.  
Amen

SMG

Living God,  
where there is waste, let us bring recycling;  
where there is recycling, let us bring reuse;  
where there is reuse, let us bring sustainability;  
where there is sustainability, let us bring justice;  
where there is justice, let us bring love.

John Polhill in *Eggs and Ashes*  
(Wild Goose Publications)





## Local inspiration!

"The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it."

*Robert Swan*

### **Stibbard's Terracycle Point**

(supported by Colegate) is in the church porch. It collects used toothpaste tubes and toothbrushes and the plastic pump of soap dispensers. All these things, none of which are welcome in standard recycling bins, would otherwise pollute soil or sea.

**Mulbarton's Swap Shop** invites people to bring three unwanted items and take away up to three others pre-loved by neighbours. Anything from rugs to mugs, books to boots, jigsaws to jewellery! Any surplus is offered to charity shops. A great way to save money, build community and reduce landfill.

### **Textile Design courses**

at Norwich University of the Arts encourage sustainable fashion. Conscious of the 60 billion square metres of fabric wasted each year during cutting and manufacturing processes, students explore zero waste design and pattern cutting as well as creative textile upcycling.

### **Norfolk County Council's Reuse Shops**

are sited at 14 recycling centres. Want golf clubs, toys, bikes, furniture? Try here first, save money and stop perfectly good items going to landfill. 821 tons of unwanted treasures found new homes in 2018-9. Find a shop near you at

[www.norfolk.gov.uk/reushop](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/reushop)

### **Cefas**

supports ocean health through world-class marine monitoring. The Commonwealth Litter Programme, for instance, is led by Cefas. The programme will support five developing countries taking action on plastics entering the sea. And the HQ for this groundbreaking work? Lowestoft, in our Diocese!

**Mini Scrapbox**, based in Reepham and run by Aylsham and District Team Ministry, collects waste materials from local businesses and transforms them into desirables for schools, playgroups, artists, crafters and other community groups: [www.aylshamchurchbenefice.churchdesk.com/scrapbox](http://www.aylshamchurchbenefice.churchdesk.com/scrapbox)

What other local ventures would you add to this list?



# 'What then should we do?' (Luke 3.10)

Here are three suggestions: choose your depth and dive in!

Get creative with a few old pieces of clothing and rework them into something newly vibrant.

Write a polite but passionate letter to your supermarket's CEO, urging a speedy reduction in the use of plastic packaging.

Join or start a local beach clean group  
[norfolkcoastaonb.org.uk/partnership/](https://norfolkcoastaonb.org.uk/partnership/) [beach-clean-events/691](https://beach-clean-events/691)

Image: Bokica/Shutterstock.com

## Useful websites:

- [cpre.org.uk/what-we-care-about/zero-waste](https://cpre.org.uk/what-we-care-about/zero-waste)
- [weforum.org/agenda/2020/02/waste-global](https://weforum.org/agenda/2020/02/waste-global)
- [globalcitizen.org/en/content/topics/waste-management](https://globalcitizen.org/en/content/topics/waste-management)
- [breakfreefromplastic.org](https://breakfreefromplastic.org)
- [ethicalunicorn.com/?s=plastic](https://ethicalunicorn.com/?s=plastic)
- [tonle.com/pages/zero-waste](https://tonle.com/pages/zero-waste)
- [fashionrevolution.org](https://fashionrevolution.org)
- [ruthvalerio.net/environment/people-power-key-plastic-less-future](https://ruthvalerio.net/environment/people-power-key-plastic-less-future)
- [greenpeace.org](https://greenpeace.org)
- [arochoa.org.uk](https://arochoa.org.uk)
- [ellenmacarthurfoundation.org](https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org)
- [plasticoceans.uk](https://plasticoceans.uk)
- [friendsoftheearth.uk/natural-resources/all-you-need-know-about-waste-and-recycling](https://friendsoftheearth.uk/natural-resources/all-you-need-know-about-waste-and-recycling)
- [cefas.co.uk](https://cefas.co.uk)

## About the series...

This is the third in a series of six booklets exploring the relationship between Christian faith and some of the most pressing issues of our time. The hope is that individuals and groups of all sorts will find them challenging and inspiring.

Written by Susanna Gunner

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 THE CHURCH  
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Diocese of Norwich