

SESSION THREE:

FASHION

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR T-SHIRT CAME FROM?



THERE ARE MANY SURPRISES AND STORIES HIDDEN WITHIN THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY THAT WE DON'T KNOW ABOUT; SUCH AS THE IMPACT OUR CLOTHES HAVE ON THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE THEM, AND ON THE EARTH THROUGH THE INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES USED.

The good news is that there are plenty of actions we can take to make more ethical choices when we buy clothing. We encourage your group to consider taking action together – this could involve everyone working individually around one shared action, or working together as a group using a combination of actions.

You can use this session with a large group or in a smaller, more informal, social setting. There are sections that are relevant to both, and any activities or discussions include two options depending on your context – pick and choose what works for you. Look out for these symbols:



BEST SUITED TO SMALLER GATHERINGS, INCLUDING FRIENDS ENJOYING A MEAL TOGETHER OR A SMALLER GROUP OF STUDENTS.



BEST SUITED TO A LARGER GROUP SUCH AS A YOUTH GROUP, CHRISTIAN UNION, OR SCHOOLS WORK.

Think about your favourite outfit that you have worn. Maybe it's a shirt that goes with everything; or a formal outfit you wore to your school prom; or maybe it's an outfit you wore all the time as a kid. Maybe your wardrobes are bursting at the seams and you would have to pick 10 favourite outfits.

Fashion and the clothes we wear can be a really fun way to display our own style and personality. But our clothes make a statement, even if we don't realise it. Did you know that the fashion industry is the second biggest polluter, behind the oil industry? Did you know that many of the people who make our clothes are treated unfairly? Did you know that it takes 2700 litres of water to make a single T-shirt?

How often do you think about where your clothes come from? Probably not very often, especially if you're half asleep in the morning when you put them on.

Sometimes we forget that our clothes don't just appear in our favourite high street shops. Each item of clothing makes a long journey to reach those hangers. Each piece of clothing has gone through the hands of many people and has gone through many industrial processes before it ends up in our wardrobes.

Now multiply those people and processes by the number of items you have in your wardrobe. Our wardrobes and drawers are bursting at the seams, and every piece of clothing has its own story of where it has come from.

The clothes we choose to buy have had an impact on the people who were involved in making them, and have had an impact on the planet, as the material goes through intensive industrial processes. So, how can we make sure that our clothes make a statement that reflects our love for Jesus and our love for people who are living in poverty across the world?

VIDEO: THE TRUE COST

Check out this trailer for a film called The True Cost. It's about exactly that: the true cost of the clothes that we buy. You can find the full film online or on Netflix. (Note that some younger viewers may find this video upsetting, so we would advise you to preview it to ensure it is suitable for your group).



 https://youtu.be/OaGp5_Sfbss



ACTIVITY: TIME TRAVEL T-SHIRT

Don't panic, clothes aren't bad. How we dress is often part of how we express ourselves to the world – and that's okay. But like all good things, it can be distorted into something unhealthy: for us, the planet and others.



TAKE TWO PIECES OF PAPER, TITLE ONE 'PEOPLE' AND THE OTHER 'PLANET'. AS YOU GO THROUGH THE QUESTIONS BELOW, WRITE THE IMPACTS UNDER THE APPROPRIATE HEADINGS. RATHER THAN BRING A T-SHIRT WITH YOU, CONSIDER AN ITEM OF CLOTHING THAT SOMEONE IN THE GROUP IS WEARING.



TAKE THREE REALLY BIG PIECES OF PAPER AND STICK THEM UP AROUND THE ROOM. LABEL THEM 'PAST', 'PRESENT' AND 'FUTURE'. SPLIT YOUR GROUP INTO THREE SMALLER GROUPS, GIVE EACH GROUP A T-SHIRT AND ASK THEM TO CONSIDER ONE OF THE CATEGORIES BEFORE SHARING THEIR THOUGHTS WITH THE WIDER GROUP. USE THESE POINTS TO DEMONSTRATE THE 'BIG PICTURE' OF THE IMPACT OF THE T-SHIRT ON PEOPLE AND THE PLANET.

Take a simple cotton t-shirt; it has a past, present and future. Try to answer some of these questions (and create your own) about the impact that the t-shirt might have at each stage of manufacturing, use and disposal.

PAST

- Where has this t-shirt come from?
- Where did I buy this t-shirt from?
- How did it get between the factory and the shop?
- What is the t-shirt made from?
- Where did that material come from?
- Did the material grow naturally?
- How was the material processed?

Did you know that the amount of water we normally drink over three years is how much is needed to make one t-shirt?

FUTURE

- When I have outgrown it, what will I do with it?
- When I'm bored with wearing this t-shirt, what will I do with it?
- Where does the t-shirt go when we put it in the bin?
- What happens to the t-shirt after it arrives at the waste management facility?

Did you know that it takes years for our clothes to decompose? Cotton can take one year, wool can take up to 5 years and nylon can take up to 40 years.

PRESENT

- What impact does your t-shirt have now that you own it?
- Consider how you maintain your t-shirt.
- How long will you wear it for?

Did you know that around 75% of our clothing's lifestyle impact comes from washing and drying (less if we don't use tumble driers).



Nazeeb and his family are from Bihar, a state in the north of India. They were living in poverty. At the age of 14, Nazeeb had to drop out of school and find work because his family didn't have enough to eat. He was offered 6,000 rupees a month (that's about £60 a month), but had to travel 1,200 miles from Bihar to Punjab, where the work was. His mother was told there would be food and lodgings and he would be able to send money home every month.

But that job turned out to be a lie. Instead, a different job was waiting for Nazeeb. He was forced to work 21 hours a day, six days a week in a clothes factory, that's roughly 504 hours a month, or three days at school back to back. He was paid about 12p per hour and, in that time, each hour, he had to sew 3,000 zips into items of clothing. The conditions in the factory were terrible but Nazeeb and 11 other workers just like him were locked in all week. They had to work, eat and sleep all in the same room.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to sleep for just three hours a night on the factory floor night after night? Remember, Nazeeb was only 14 years old and more than a thousand miles away from his family. After some time, Nazeeb became ill with typhoid, but he wasn't allowed to go to the hospital. Instead of letting him take some time off to rest and get better they took his job away from him and locked him out of the factory, without paying him for any of the work he had ever done for them.



The fashion industry is a multi-million pound industry. Part of the reason for this is that we love to shop. Rather than just buying what we need, we buy and buy until our wardrobes are full and our drawers won't close. In this passage from Luke, Jesus tells a parable about a man who experienced a similar issue when it came to his stuff.

- Luke 12:13-23

Questions:

1. What does this passage tell you about Jesus' attitude towards consumption?
2. How can you see your shopping habits reflected in the parable?
3. The passage talks about being 'rich towards God'. How could we be 'rich towards God' when we shop?

Conclusion:

The more and more we over-consume, the greater the impact we are having on the people like Nazeeb involved in the fashion industry and on the planet that is being damaged by the industrial processes involved. The Bible tells us not to over-consume. We don't need to build a bigger barn, or invest in a bigger wardrobe, because it's not good for us to keep buying more and more. Instead let's be challenged to change the way we shop to reflect Jesus's teachings about how much we consume, how we love our neighbours and how we care for the planet.



The Bible is very clear on how we should care for people who are living in poverty. The instruction to practically support people who are in need, and the consequences when we ignore that need, are clearly spelled out. As Christians, that means we are striving to go out of our way to love and care for those who are living in poverty. That could mean simply sharing the money that we have, but, going deeper than that, it also means that our everyday, normal actions should reflect that mission too.

- Matthew 25:31-46

Questions:

1. How does the passage describe the characters of the sheep and then the goats?
2. Which is more important to God - to be like a sheep or like a goat?
3. Who is it that God wants us to care for?

Conclusion:

This passage is so clear that we should be caring for those who are in need. This is our worship to God. But yet, so often in our world, instead of us reaching out to clothe those in need, it is people who are living in poverty who are clothing us.

Imagine meeting Nazeeb in your favourite high street shop. Imagine he hands you the T-shirt that you went in to buy, fresh from the factory. As garment factories and the fashion industry continue to exploit people and hinder those already living in poverty, we have a responsibility to change the way we shop, to help us love those people instead.

We have an incredible leader and role model in Jesus. He is teaching us to love those who are marginalised and who are living in poverty. We have the opportunity to do this every time we go shopping.



INPUT/TALK: HOW DID TEARFUND HELP NAZEEB?

Thankfully Nazeeb got home safely. He was able to borrow some money and take the train home to his family. Tearfund's partner in Bihar, EHA, is helping to train Nazeeb's family in poultry farming. Tearfund also provided his family with a loan to start raising chickens. This means they can trade chickens to generate an income, giving them enough money to feed the family.

Nazeeb now doesn't have to travel a thousand miles away to an unknown job that could be very dangerous. EHA has also helped Nazeeb's mum to set up a self-help group, where members of the community gather together to support each other, and save money to help one another to start businesses. The self-help group is working to raise awareness of the dangers of travelling far away for work and of traffickers who come to trick families with fake job offers. They are spreading the word among the community to try and keep other children like Nazeeb safe.

VIDEO: WHO CHOOSES WHAT WE WEAR?

Who chooses what we wear? We do – or at least we think we do. There's a whole industry out there, from designers to companies to advertisers who are telling what the best clothes are to buy, and that you need more and more clothes to keep up with your friends and look the part.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5WWy_0VLS4

After watching the clip, think about these questions:

- How does that make you feel?
- Do you think you're immune from being pulled into the system?
- Did you really need the last piece of clothing that you bought? Why did you buy it?



ACTIVITY: A REMINDER

Write a prayer about the fashion industry to act as a reminder when you go shopping. It will help you to consider if you really need to buy an item and whether there's a different shop you could buy it from. It will also remind you to pray for the fashion industry. Pray for the people who make the clothes; for the people who make the rules about how damaging the process can be to the planet; for our culture to change its habits; and for the church to be able to show the world a different way of shopping.



WRITE A PRAYER ON A LUGGAGE TAG OR GIFT TAG (TO SYMBOLISE A CLOTHES TAG), TAKE A PICTURE WITH YOUR PHONE AND SET IT AS YOUR LOCK SCREEN AS A REMINDER TO PRAY WHENEVER YOU ARE OUT AND ABOUT.



GIVE EVERYONE A 30CM STRIP OF FABRIC OR RIBBON AND A PEN WHICH WILL WRITE ON THE FABRIC. WRITE A PRAYER ABOUT THE FASHION INDUSTRY AND TIE IT AROUND YOUR WRIST (OR ANYWHERE ELSE YOU WILL SEE IT REGULARLY WHEN YOU ARE OUT AND ABOUT).

TAKE ACTION

Remember when you discovered your persona using the quiz in the previous session? Knowing your unique skills can help you respond effectively to issues impacting people living in poverty. Let's join together, make a stand against poverty and help our global neighbours.

On the next few pages you'll find suggested activities for your persona. If you were a combination of two or more personas, choose which one appeals to you most.



ACTIVITY: TAKE ACTION – THE MOBILISER

Create an opportunity to tell your friends about what you have heard. A lot of the truths behind the fashion industry are hidden, and we have no idea what we are buying into when we go shopping. Host a movie night with a twist. Invite your friends around to watch The True Cost film together.

Get started:

1. Find a date and choose a venue, don't forget to invite all your friends.
2. Download The True Cost film; it's available on Netflix or elsewhere online.
3. When everyone has arrived and has a drink and a snack in hand, explain that you have heard that the fashion industry is having huge impacts on the people involved and on the planet. This film will help explain more.
4. Play the film.
5. Leave some time after the film has finished to listen to what your friends thought and discuss things you could do together in response.



ACTIVITY: TAKE ACTION – THE MAKER

Host a clothes swap event. Create an event for your friends to come and swap their clothes. This is a great way to get some new outfits without having to buy new clothes!

You could use the opportunity to raise some money for Tearfund's work with children at risk, like Nazeeb.

You could include a mending station as part of your event, and encourage friends to bring clothes that need mending. Mending clothes rather than buying new clothes is a great way to prolong the life of your wardrobe.

If you're feeling particularly creative, you could include an upcycling station, for friends to bring clothes that are too old to wear anymore but, with parts, materials or fabrics that could be upcycled to create a new item or accessory.

Get started:

1. Choose a date and a venue. Make sure everyone knows in advance so they have a chance to have a look through their wardrobes and you have time to collect clothes and wash/iron them.
2. Can you borrow clothes rails and coat hangers from friends or neighbours? Try looking on websites like Gumtree or Freecycle to see if you can find any for free.
3. If you're planning on adding extras to your clothes swaps such as the mending station and the upcycling station then you will need sewing accessories for these.
4. Sort through all the clothes, hang them up and display them nicely for people to browse when they arrive. Set up all the extras you are planning and don't forget to include drinks and snacks. Clothes swapping is thirsty work.
5. Have a set of 'rules' for the evening ready, it could be that everyone pays £1 per item which could help cover the costs of running the event and any leftovers be donated to charity. It could be a free for all, but instead with a limit of three items per person. You can decide what will work best for your group, but make sure everyone knows what the rules are.
6. If you have any leftover clothes at the end, you could start planning another clothes swap... or these could be donated to charity if no one else wants to rummage through.



ACTIVITY: TAKE ACTION – THE ACTIVIST

Take a vote. What is the most popular high street clothes brand among your friends? Now, try to find out how that brand makes its clothes. What are their ethical standards? How do they treat their factory workers? How do their manufacturing processes affect the environment?

Ask 100 people to ask these questions with you. All on the same day, tweet the brand, or tag them on Instagram, to ask them your questions. Your challenge is to get as many responses and answers from the brand as possible. This will help to expose their practices, making the process more transparent. It also opens up communication for you to challenge them to improve their standards.

Once you have done this, you could arrange a meeting with the manager of the local store to ask them for more information about how their clothes are made. Bring your friends to join you for extra support.

Get started:

1. Take a vote among your friends about which brand to contact, then choose a day to contact the brand together.
2. Make sure you know the social media handles for the brand you want to contact and choose a question to ask.
3. When the day comes, go go go. You could remind your friends in a group message so that no one forgets.
4. Follow up any responses you get, ask them further questions or challenge their practices.
5. If possible, set up a meeting with the manager of your nearest store, ask some friends to join you. Don't forget to go prepared. Work out what you want to ask, explain why you care and describe what you'd like them to do.
6. Share their responses with your group of fellow activists. Could you try this again with another brand?



ACTIVITY: TAKE ACTION – THE ADVOCATE

The life of a garment factory worker can be tedious, dangerous, boring and unfulfilling. Remember Nazeeb's story; he had to sew 3,000 zips every hour. Find out what it's like and do a sponsored sew. Challenge yourself to sew buttons onto an old sheet for an entire morning. Get up early and sew from 7am - 12pm. No TV, no chat, no snacks and no phones.

Ask your friends, family and church to sponsor you, to raise money for Tearfund's work with children at risk, like Nazeeb. You could also use the experience to share the truth behind the garment industry with your church. Ask for a 5-minute slot in the Sunday service to share Nazeeb's story. Tell your church family that you are trying to find out more about what it's like to be a garment worker by sewing buttons for five hours non-stop. Offer them the chance to donate to you as you fundraise for Tearfund.

Get started:

1. Tell everyone your plan, explain why you are doing it and ask for sponsorship. You can print a sheet from the Tearfund website or set up a JustGiving page. Ask your church leader if you can have a slot in the service.
2. Be prepared. Gather your materials: an old sheet, needles, thread and a huge tin of old buttons. Be careful with the needles, they can be sharp.
3. Document your experience. Can you take photos, jot down your thoughts as you go through the process or even vlog as you sew?
4. After the challenge, collect your sponsorship money and send it to Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE or go to the Tearfund website for other ways to send in your money.

KEEP IN TOUCH



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[weare.tearfund.org](https://www.weare.tearfund.org)