

Bible study resource

# Restorative revolution

Exploring 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges and reflecting  
on the church's role in God's work of restoration



tearfund

# Introduction

This set of six short Bible studies is based on Tearfund's paper [\*Restorative revolution: A movement of the church to transform wealth, power and communities for a flourishing world\*](#). The first study provides an introduction to themes of 'restorative revolution' and the church's opportunity to respond. Each subsequent study is based on a different chapter of the paper and has been written by a Young Theologian from a different continent. These studies are designed to help your church engage with key challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reflect on its collective power to shape a fairer world, and respond to the invitation to join in with God's work of restoration.

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# Restorative revolution: Why now?

## Written by Clark Buys

Clark Buys is a Theology Development Officer at Tearfund. Clark has a Masters in Theology, and is a trained Spiritual Director. Born and bred in South Africa, Clark now lives on the south coast of England.

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

**Esther 4:14**

## Reflection

In the heart of the Persian Empire, a young Jewish woman named Esther found herself in an unexpected position of influence as the queen. Her story unfolds at a critical juncture when her people faced the threat of extermination. Amid this peril, Esther’s cousin Mordecai challenged her to take action, reminding her that her royal position was not a stroke of luck but a providential appointment for a divine purpose.

Esther's response demonstrated remarkable courage and hope. Despite the potential consequences, she chose to speak up, risking her life to plead for the salvation of her people.

Esther faced a clear danger. Tearfund’s *Restorative revolution* paper brings into sharp focus the myriad threats we face today: elite power that excludes and dehumanises, hoarded wealth and extreme poverty, and the extraction, exploitation and degradation of the wider creation.

Against this backdrop, we might be tempted to believe that the problems are too big, too complex, and the solutions too far out of reach from our everyday lives.

But perhaps we can draw courage and hope from Esther’s story. It seems that she was tempted to ‘remain silent’, to live out her privileged life and ignore the imminent dangers for her people. Fortunately, we see Mordecai offering a helpful challenge – encouraging Esther to use what she had at her disposal and be an agent of justice and compassion.

The story of Esther challenges us to recognise that our roles, however humble or grand, are part of a larger divine narrative. Consider the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: ‘Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.’

Esther's individual act of courage had a profound impact on the destiny of many other people. Her story invites us to consider our roles in shaping a fairer future. It prompts reflection on the pivotal moments in our lives where our actions can contribute to the redemption and restoration of broken systems. Her bravery challenges us to take courageous action, with brothers and sisters around the world, working for a more just and beautiful world.

**‘Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.’**

**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**



### Reflection questions

1. In what concrete ways do you see ‘elite power that excludes and dehumanises, hoarded wealth and extreme poverty, and the extraction, exploitation and degradation of the wider creation’? How does it make you feel?
2. In Esther’s story, we see the role that Mordecai played in encouraging and challenging Esther. How do you think we need to work together – across denominations, countries, theological differences – in order to participate in a much-needed restorative revolution?
3. Esther had a providential appointment to stand up to the threats facing the Jewish people. Can you discern other ‘divine appointments’ for you and others in your church community? How has God uniquely equipped you ‘for such a time as this’ to play a role in promoting justice, flourishing and equality?

## Prayer

*Gracious God, in moments of challenge and uncertainty, grant us the courage and discernment to recognise the unique opportunities you place before us. May we, like Esther, embrace our roles with hope and action, trusting that our efforts, no matter how small, contribute to your redemptive purposes. Help us to connect and collaborate with our brothers and sisters around the world, joining a growing revolution within your ongoing redemption story. Guide us in breaking free from narratives that hinder justice and empower us to be agents of change in our spheres of influence.*

*Amen.*



# Where are we?

**Written by Brenda Wangu**

Brenda is a mathematics and Christian religion teacher in Kenya. She is pursuing a Master of Divinity in Biblical Studies at African International University.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord.

“For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

**Jeremiah 29:4–11 (ESV)**

## Reflection

For the children of Israel who were in exile at this point, this letter from Jeremiah would not have made sense. They felt alone, rejected, empty, desperate and all sorts of other emotions. They kept on waiting for when they would be rescued from exile. The word of the Lord through Jeremiah came as a wake-up call. It was a message different from what they expected and from what they were hearing from the false prophets. Yet, God affirms through the letter that he is still at work in the nation of Israel – perhaps just in unexpected ways. As the Israelites waited on the Lord, there was an expectation on them too. They were to keep busy while in captivity and pursue the good of the land. They were to endure because God had a purpose for them in exile.

**‘God places us in the world as his fellow workers – agents of transfiguration. We work with God so that injustice is transfigured into justice, so there will be more compassion and caring, that there will be more laughter and joy, that there will be more togetherness in God’s world.’**

**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**

In the current state of things in the world, ours may not be captivity in a foreign land but ruling powers that oppress the poor and take advantage of the vulnerable. When we look around, it might seem that there is no hope, and a feeling of disappointment when church authorities fail to stand for God's truth and love.

## Hope amidst adversity

Today, there are two choices: one, that we fold our hands, watch all that is happening, give up and keep waiting for God's deliverance. However, like the Israelites in exile, there is an alternative option: we can choose to be present and active in current affairs. We are not to let go of what the Lord has given us: we must respond to the issues facing us. We must work, putting our hands and minds to action, and trusting God to bless the season and the work.

For believers today, we must stand for God's truth and take responsibility for things as they happen around us. We must choose not to participate in corruption, oppressing the poor or unjust practices that are happening in the world, but participate in the building up of our nations and especially the kingdom of God. We are called to work, take care and be stewards of all that has been entrusted to us. We must play our part as believers in pointing creation to God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Only then will God's plan continue to be made manifest in the church and the current world.



### Reflection questions

1. Our current situation may not be captivity or being in a foreign land, but it may relate to the Israelites' situation. What are some things that are happening today that compare to what was happening to the Israelites at that time?
2. Despite the message of hope about the plans God has for the world, trusting God and his plan is easier said than done. How can we hold on to faith and the assignments given to us? How can we also stand for the poor and oppressed?
3. It is not easy to accept the current situations and play our roles. However, as those called by the Lord, we must respond to what he says and desires of us. How does this help you see the current situation in the world? How do you choose to respond?

## Prayer

*God in Heaven, we know your will is sovereign and nothing happens without your knowledge. We are encouraged in knowing you are still at work in the lives of your children, despite the situation in the world. We ask that you give us strength and courage to live as you desire for us to do, that we shall work and devote ourselves to the welfare of our nations even as we await things to change. Help us pray and stand with those who are desperately in need around us, and make us a point of encouragement for them.*



# Why are we here?

**Written by Carmia Margaret**

Carmia is Associate Pastor of Immanuel Christian Church, Bandung, and Faculty Member of Biblical Seminary for Rural Development Ministry, Cianjur, West Java, Indonesia.

‘To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”’

**Genesis 3:17–19 (NIV)**

‘What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.”

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”

“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

“Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.”

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”’

**Romans 3:9–18 (NIV)**

## Reflection

Arimbi, a registrar at the district court, was imprisoned on bribery charges after being caught with a large amount of cash that did not belong to her. The money was not actually stolen but a bribe she received to hide a larger corruption case. The case did come to court but ironically the person on trial was easily acquitted because he was able to pay bribes to various legal parties. Meanwhile, Arimbi was imprisoned for a long time because she could not afford a lawyer or other court bureaucracy costs. This story is told in a novel entitled *86* by a local female writer, Okky Madasari.

Arimbi's story is not unique. Many similar phenomena occur in Indonesia. All too often, the poor are disadvantaged and powerless, while the rich gain benefits and become more powerful. Fast medication and excellent health services can only be enjoyed by well paid people who can afford premium insurance. High-quality education is also more available in expensive private schools. Even discounted shopping, food, entertainment and leisure can only be enjoyed by those rich enough to get a credit card.

As a result, there is economic inequality everywhere, accompanied by higher levels of unemployment, debt and crime. All of these are landscapes of poverty that sometimes can only be understood through the language of tears. The question is: Why does this happen? What caused this systemic phenomenon?

### The multi-faceted causes of poverty

In his book *Old Testament ethics for the people of God*, Christopher Wright points out three causes of poverty revealed in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, poverty occurs as a result of disasters or natural events. This occurs in cases such as pest infestation of crops, the prolonged famine that eventually led Jacob's family to flee to Egypt (Genesis 42:1–2) or Elimelech's family to flee from Bethlehem to Moab (Ruth 1:1), as well as Job's calamity and sickness (Job 1:1–21). In Indonesia, examples include the massive tsunami in Aceh in 2004, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions mainly in Java, and several landslides. Unfortunately, many 'natural disasters' are in fact made much worse because of the reality of poverty and a lack of disaster preparedness in vulnerable communities.

Secondly, according to Wright, some cases of poverty can occur due to 'laziness'. This is particularly shown in Proverbs (12:11, 14:23, 20:13, 21:17 etc). For formerly colonised countries such as Indonesia, enslavement has left a legacy of dependency in some. It's expressed in the mindset that, as long as there is food for today, there's no need to think further about becoming more economically established or improving life for the next generation.

However, by far the most common cause of poverty in the Bible and today is the third one: oppression. Oppression occurs when individuals or groups that are more numerous or stronger, driven by selfishness and greed, seek advantage by exploiting, harming or ignoring weaker people. The Old Testament shows that oppression has many faces: exploitation of the socially and economically marginalised, royal excess, abusive power, judicial corruption or false accusation.

In addition to what Wright has said, some causes of poverty are linked to the church community. The unbiblical 'prosperity theology' narrowly equates the gospel promises with material riches, physical health and individual wealth. This kind of theology unconsciously promotes self-seeking rather than self-renouncing, increasing consumerism and bypassing the reality of structural sins and poverty. Some Christians also oversimplify the biblical idea of salvation as merely being moved into heaven: they seem to neglect their calling to seek to renew this material, earthly world.

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, Christopher (2004) *Old Testament ethics for the people of God*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 169–171. Cf Barnard, Phillip Alan (2016) 'The causes of poverty: Is a biblical understanding reflected in the experiences of today's poor?', *Missiology: An International Review* vol 44 (4), pp 448–65.



Other unhealthy cultures such as celebrity pastors, social favouritism or discrimination can also contribute to the church's failure to fully follow Jesus' call and example to bring justice and shalom to the whole creation.

Of course, we know that this was not God's plan. God designed everything to be harmoniously organised, resulting in peace and prosperity for all creatures, and ultimately glorifying his name. Humans are supposed to submit to God, co-exist peacefully with one another, and faithfully steward creation. The needs of all people can be met and the earth well cared for. There does not have to be economic inequality, injustice, poverty, famine or disaster. But all this was disrupted after sin entered. Sin broke the relationship we have with God, with ourselves, with our neighbours, and even with the land where we are living. Everyone lived with fear, shame and guilt. Everyone wanted to protect themselves and unknowingly oppressed others. Everyone thought that they would be safe if they had certain powers and enough material possessions. People's hearts drifted away from God and became greedy, hate-filled and envious. When everyone thinks this way, it is inevitable that injustice and oppression will eventually become the structural norm.

This is the sad reality we face in today's world. Do we realise this? Can we hear the cries of the world, especially those who are oppressed and living in poverty? Do we realise that we too may have been part of it? May God help us to listen to the language of tears, so that we too can begin to yearn for a better narrative as offered in scripture.



## Reflection questions

1. What type of poverty is happening in your neighbourhood? What causes and effects can you observe? What do you feel about all this?
2. What efforts have churches and Christian communities made to try to address the problem? To what extent does the Christian community exacerbate it?
3. How do these phenomena reflect the fractures in humanity's relationship with God, ourselves, our neighbour and the land?

## Prayer

*Loving and gracious God, grant us the discernment to see the suffering of the world around us and hear its cries, that we may be moved to participate in your work for its renewal. Let your kingdom be established on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Amen.*

## Reflection song

May the song from the late Mangapul Sagala, a well known Indonesian college minister, help us to listen to the language of people's tears.

### Utus Kami Bagi Bangsa Tercinta

Indonesia negeriku tercinta, kaya alam banyak penduduknya  
Namun hidup menderita, miskin, banyak masalah, karena dosa sungguh merajalela  
Oh Tuhan dengar doa kami. Ampunilah dosa bangsa kami  
Curahkanlah rahmat-Mu, nyatakan kuasa-Mu, pulihkanlah bangsa ini

Satukan, lengkapi, dan pakailah kami jadi hamba-Mu Tuhan!  
Penuhi hati kami dengan kasih-Mu, nyalakanlah Roh kami  
Satukan, teguhkan dan utuslah kami bangun bangsa tercinta  
Ini kami Tuhan, utus kami sekarang, berkati Indonesia!

### Send us to our beloved nation

Indonesia is my beloved country, rich in nature, large in people  
But life in suffering, poor, many problems, because of the damage of sin  
Oh God, hear our prayers. Forgive the sins of our nation  
Pour out your mercy, reveal your power, restore this nation

Unite, equip, and use us as your servants, Lord!  
Fill our hearts with your love, ignite our spirit  
Unite, strengthen, and send us to build our beloved nation.  
Here we are, Lord, send us now, bless Indonesia!



# Where should we go?

**Written by Arthur Nascimento**

Arthur is a civil society organiser and history teacher from Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil.

‘For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and **in him all things hold together**. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and **through him to reconcile to himself all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.’

**Colossians 1:16–20 (NIV) (emphasis added)**

## Reflection

The incarnation of Christ teaches us about identification, solidarity and presence as Bible scholar Juan Stam puts it. We learn from the Lord that a life lived in his likeness is faith embodied in reality: his life of service, joy, sharing and suffering is forged in the purpose of reconciling all things, as is highlighted in Colossians chapter 1. If we are to be like Christ, we must seek to emulate his example: empathetic and supportive involvement and a presence that listens, feels and reaches out to others.

Looking at reality is uncomfortable. We see with certainty that things are not as they should be and therefore are far from God's original intentions. The disharmonious world is the result of a disharmonious way of living caused by sin. We perceive that the last few centuries have built and contributed to a humanity that lives, produces and consumes as if there was no tomorrow.

Faced with this imbalance, the book of Colossians brings us precious teachings, and the text of chapter 1 signals that Christ in his incarnation, death and resurrection fulfils the eternal purpose of through him uniting all things with himself, reconciling and entrusting us with the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5 calls us ambassadors of reconciliation. In addition to Colossians and 2 Corinthians, the New Testament makes it clear that we are called to exercise righteousness through Jesus Christ.

‘For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.’

**Romans 11:36**

## **We then ask ourselves: where should we go?**

We must understand that we are part of God's creation, and that we are privileged to be part of the redemptive plan to harmonise and restore all things. We understand that God is the one who prepares the path and enables us to outwork mission in the world: we should not consider any path other than following the steps of Jesus Christ, steps of love, mercy, justice and salvation. We keep our eyes fixed on Christ and on the path of faith. We perceive that he is not at the end of the journey waiting for us, but he is present by our side until eternity, until we enjoy the fullness of the new creation (Revelation 22:1–5).

## **Examining our circumstances**

Stopping to work out where we should go is an exercise that requires a map. An experienced sailor uses a nautical chart, a compass or other instruments that can help him get to his destination. It is appropriate to question what our destiny is, but first, let us think about what reference point we should use to navigate our way along a path of restoration.

If we look at the uncertain future of the world, we don't see much progress. There is countless evidence for this claim, from numerous scientific reports showing that human-induced global warming is triggering unprecedented changes in the earth's climate to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index showing worsening corruption levels in most nations.

It is easy to see that we are not preparing a good place for those who will inherit the planet left by our generation. Our way of living has not been ideal and hasn't spread a message about valuing life.

So what should our reference be for thinking about where we should go? To think about this issue, I remember Ariano Suassuna, one of the most prominent literati and intellectuals in north-eastern Brazil, and philosopher Paulo Freire, who say:

**‘The optimist is a fool. The pessimist, a bore. It's good to be a hopeful realist.’**

**Ariano Suassuna**

**‘It is necessary to have hope, but to have hope from the verb to hope; because there are people who have hope of the verb to wait. And hope from the verb to wait is not hope, it is waiting. Hoping is getting up, hoping is going after it, hoping is building, hoping is not giving up! To hope is to move forward, to hope is to join with others to do otherwise.’**

**Paulo Freire**

It is necessary to weave together the two understandings of Suassuna and Freire. Then we realise that when we look at the life of humanity and the planet, which presents a chaotic scenario, we need to look at who is involved with what is fair and with transformation. Being a hopeful realist isn't just about passively accepting things as they are. Hope is much more active and transforming.

## An example to reflect on

Tearfund has invested in mobilising and training a Tearfund Youth Network in Latin America and the Caribbean to look, think and influence their local communities. They do so through two groups that form part of the network: the Social Political Transformation group and the Sustainable Environmental and Economic Development group.

These groups focus on mobilising young people who have shown great potential in assembling groups that respond to needs in the most vulnerable areas, and who would otherwise have little access to networking opportunities.

This network also understands the need to work with local churches, so the groups have mapped and gathered networks of pastors and leaders who understand the need to work with their local communities. Through these links, a bank of talents, resources and projects has been created, which is encouraging both the young people and their partner churches.

## Where should we go?

With movements like these, we will be able to go further in our mission. Our path must be the path of what is fair, so we must always remember our reference point: a Christ who chooses to be incarnated in a faith that is one of identification, solidarity and presence.



### Reflection questions

1. If Christ is our point of reference, what should we do when looking at the chaos and inequalities of the world?
2. What examples do we have in our countries of the proper exercise of justice?
3. **The Youth Network** teaches us to look to our churches to see a movement rise up. How can our churches offer young people space for integration, reflection and action to promote justice?

## Prayer

*God of reconciliation and restoration, help us to play our part of your redemptive plan to harmonise and restore all things. God of hope, fashion in us a hopeful realism that leads to action and transformation. Let us reflect Jesus as we identify with the marginalised and oppressed, and offer a peaceful presence in our communities and in our world.*

*Amen.*



# How do we get there?

**Written by Mehtab Shahbaz**

Mehtab is a priest in the Diocese of Lahore, Church of Pakistan, and serves as the youth minister, coordinator and pastor for the diocese. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from St Thomas' Theological College, Karachi.

'With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'

**Micah 6:6–8**

## Reflection

Micah chapter 6 addresses the theme of justice, humility and ethical living in the context of a covenant between God and Israel. The pivotal verse, Micah 6:8, captures the essence of the divine expectations: 'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' This passage resonates deeply with the principles of a restorative economy, which Tearfund defines as everyone having 'sufficient economic agency and power to meet our basic needs – but not at the expense of other people or the natural world. This means that no one can have too much or too little. It means the earth's life support systems – the animals, plants, and ecosystems that we all rely on – are protected, not overstretched or harmed.'

The idea of a restorative economy reflects the strong connection between ethical conduct and responsible stewardship of resources. In the context of the Pakistani Christian community, this biblical wisdom holds particular relevance as we navigate the pursuit of justice, holistic wellbeing and sustainable development in the context of poverty, discrimination and violence.

The concept of justice in Micah 6:8 is part of the wider teaching in the Old Testament that emphasises social justice, such as Isaiah 1:17 and Amos 5:24. These verses underscore the divine expectation for societies to ensure that all members have equitable access to the benefits of communal life. The Pakistani Christian reality is unfortunately the opposite, where local believers don't have access to resources because of our faith.

## Acting justly

Micah's call for justice aligns with the principles of a restorative economy, emphasising fair resource distribution and addressing systemic inequalities. In Pakistan, economic disparities are significant and deeply tied to religious identity. Things may have improved over the years, but Christians (as well as other minorities) still find it hard to improve our economic situations because we cannot access resources such as education and employment.

Biblical justice involves providing for the vulnerable, which aligns with a restorative economy's goals of poverty eradication, improved access to education and healthcare, and economic opportunities for disadvantaged groups. In fact, in the words of liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, God has a 'preferential option' for the disadvantaged. This concept is much needed in our context.

We can also leverage our voices to advocate for policies that promote justice, kindness and humility within the national framework. By advocating for minority rights, social inclusion and sustainable development, we can align our efforts with the principles of Micah 6:8. A recent example is the Minority March on 11 August 2023 in Karachi, where the persecuted Christian community was at the forefront of advocating for minority rights.

## Loving mercy

Micah's exhortation to 'love mercy' reflects the restorative economy's holistic focus on wellbeing. Mercy, in the biblical context, often refers to compassionate action and extending kindness to those in need. It is a recurring theme throughout the Bible, highlighting God's mercy toward humanity and emphasising our moral imperative to emulate this mercy in our interactions with one another (Matthew 5:7, Luke 6:36).

Pakistani Christians, having experienced God's mercy in our lives, can pursue social justice and extend compassion to other marginalised communities, as well as our oppressors. This aligns with the restorative principle of fostering holistic wellbeing which includes mental health, social support and community cohesion. Our initiatives can promote kindness and contribute to a nurturing societal environment. In this country, Christians are involved in the education and healthcare sector, which involves caring for those who hate us. Specifically, the recent incident in Jaranwala, where about a dozen churches were burnt, displayed the Christian community's unity as well as compassion for those among us who are victimised. A non-violent response also displayed mercy, forgiveness and compassion for the other.

## Walking humbly

'Walking humbly with God' signifies a disposition towards responsible stewardship and environmental conscience.

Humility in the biblical narrative involves recognising human dependence on God and acknowledging our role as stewards. The concept of stewardship, as seen in Genesis 1:28, emphasises humanity's responsibility to manage and preserve natural resources in a manner that aligns with divine intentions.

Acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly reflect core biblical values that find practical expression in pursuing equitable resource distribution. As Pakistani Christians, the concept of reliance on God is a present reality, where most of our community live on the edge. For many people in Pakistan, one delayed wage or pay cheque can make us completely desolate. At the same time, we learn to walk in humility, acknowledging our own sins before God and accepting his mercy with the realisation that this mercy extends to those who refuse to share the earth's resources with us.

Walking humbly with God also involves responsible environmental stewardship. The Pakistani Christian community can engage in waste reduction campaigns and initiatives, aligning with both ecological restoration and ethical imperatives. Steps taken by the local church include:

- planting initiatives on church properties
- installation of solar panels on churches and ministry offices
- clean water initiatives in the rural areas
- theological awareness of creation care

In many of these projects, creation care is also tied in with the Great Commission, the ministry of evangelism. It can become our witness to the majority community, who may learn to share resources and work towards sustaining what the land produces.



## Reflection questions

1. How does the concept of a restorative economy resonate with your personal values and beliefs?
2. In what ways can you contribute to promoting economic justice and equitable resource distribution in your own community?
3. How can you personally incorporate the principles of Micah 6:8 into your daily life to make a positive impact on your community and the environment?

## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, we come before you with humble hearts, seeking guidance and strength to live out the principles of Micah 6:8 in our lives and communities. Help us to act justly, to stand for what is right and fair, especially for those who are marginalised and oppressed.*





# What does a restorative economy look like?

**Written by Laura Symon**

Laura is training for ordination in the Scottish Episcopal Church. She holds a BA (Hons) in Theology and is commencing an MA in Christian Leadership.

‘For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating, for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime, for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat, for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord— and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.’

**Isaiah 65:17–24 (NRSV)**

## Reflection

These words, taken from the book of Isaiah, describe something which must have felt distantly removed from the experience of those who first heard them. Composed in exile, the prophetic writings tell the story of the reality of the people of Israel at the time, expressing the pain of separation from home and from God.

Yet, from that place of despair, Isaiah’s prophecy does something else: it expresses a defiant hope in a restoration that encompasses the whole of creation, describing a renewed ecology, economy and community. This picture shows restored health and community, an end to suffering, dignity and purpose in work, and economic justice – with the final verses speaking of God’s closeness as part of the return to hope and to joy.

It is a beautiful vision of hope in a restored community: one where the ecological and economic are intertwined with the personal and the community. In Scots Gaelic, the term *dùchthas* is used to describe that sense of the self, the community and the land belonging inextricably to one another, expressing the deep interconnectedness of home, personhood and creation.

This passage illustrates that connection, and the understanding that restoration of one does not come without the restoration of the other. In this new vision, all of creation is made new, and environmental and economic restoration are key to the picture.

## Prophetic imaginings

Scripture does not give us a step-by-step policy towards economic justice, but passages such as this provide us with a picture of what a restorative economy could look like. Tearfund defines a restorative economy like this:

**‘In a restorative economy, each of us has sufficient economic agency and power to meet our basic needs – but not at the expense of other people or the natural world. This means that no one can have too much or too little. It means the earth’s life support systems – the animals, plants and ecosystems that we all rely on – are protected, not overstretched or harmed.’**

### Restorative revolution:

A movement of the church to transform wealth, power and communities for a flourishing world

This picture may look far removed from the place we find ourselves in right now, but as God’s people, we are called to engage with what Walter Brueggemann terms ‘the prophetic imagination’:<sup>2</sup> to step outside of our numbness to the status quo of our own exile and to look towards the vision outlined by the prophets. The imagery of this vision continues in the New Testament, in the teaching given by Jesus on the kingdom of God – where the whole of creation is restored and the world as we know it turned upside down. Looking towards the picture of flourishing and fairness takes willingness to confront reality and to imagine better on our part, but Isaiah’s prophecy gives us a hint of where we are going. It is grounded in Israel’s suffering in exile, but turns towards what is coming – to delight, to joy. It paints a picture of promise and possibility for God’s people, looking beyond exile to a future hope of restoration.

In this spirit of prophetic imagining, God’s people of today can look to these images so that we can move beyond the ‘what is’ to the ‘what if’. This first requires us to fully acknowledge where the structures of ‘what is’ – our current economies, policies and priorities – limit the full flourishing of life. The prophetic writings come from lament and calls to repentance, and then turn to wonder. What would it look like if we work to change the story? What if our structures, our laws – our economies – can be transformed by being reoriented towards a restored creation?

And so, as we consider what a restorative economy looks like, let us ask the question: What if? What if we listen to the voices of the most vulnerable and work to change economies so that they can be oriented towards justice, agency for all and fairness? What if we renounce unethical labour practices and invest in sustainable jobs and livelihoods? What happens if we commit to the reform of financial structures to encourage better care of creation?

This question – ‘What if?’ – does not close conversations but opens up more questions and possibilities, as well as challenges to the ‘what is’. Asking ‘what if’ allows a vision of hope to emerge. In Scots Gaelic, ‘hope’ is *dòchas* – rhyming closely with *dùchthas*. There is *dòchas* for all of creation – *dùchthas*, the inextricably connected people, earth and context – and we can imagine a path towards it.

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann (1978) *The prophetic imagination*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.




## Reflection questions

1. This passage is just one of many throughout scripture that pictures a restored creation and community. Which psalms, stories and other biblical passages come to mind?
2. As these visions show hope and suggestions of what will be in a restored creation, they also highlight the things that Israel is facing, but which will be 'in it no more'. What things are we faced with in our own context that do not exist in a restorative economy?
3. Looking at your own context, where are the stories of hope? Where can we see the 'what if' of a restorative economy breaking through?
4. From 'what is' to 'what if' – to 'what next'? How do we move from imagination to action, to walk forward in hope? Tearfund's *Restorative revolution* paper provides suggestions in three areas:
  - 'from exclusion and elite power to inclusion and agency for all'
  - 'from hoarded wealth and extreme poverty to dignified, purposeful livelihoods'
  - 'from extraction & degradation to flourishing for the whole of creation'Viewed through the lens of the prophetic imagination, what concrete, practical changes could emerge in these areas?
5. As a church, how can we sustain prophetic imagining? What practices can we adopt to immerse ourselves in this vision of restoration?

## Prayer

*Creator God, who holds all things together;  
Son of God, who restores and brings all things to wholeness;  
Spirit of God, who inspires us onwards;  
Embolden us to look beyond what is to what if,  
and to imagine a better way.  
Grant us the courage to move forward in hope.  
Amen.*



**‘And what does the Lord require  
of you? To act justly and to love  
mercy and to walk humbly with  
your God.’**

**Micah 6:8**

**[learn.tearfund.org/restorative-revolution](https://learn.tearfund.org/restorative-revolution)**

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