



## **The Rubbish Challenge** **10 Steps to Less Waste in 10 Months**

A resource for churches,  
designed as an e-newsletter insert.

More material and videos at:

[www.conversations.net.nz/rubbish-challenge.html](http://www.conversations.net.nz/rubbish-challenge.html)

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An **ECO**  **CHURCH NZ** project of **A Rocha Aotearoa NZ**  
[www.ecochurch.org.nz](http://www.ecochurch.org.nz)

### **The 'Why?'**

We all know that we make too much rubbish. Too much goes in the red bin, off to landfill. Too much stuff is only made for one use before getting chucked. Too much recycling gets contaminated and dumped. Not enough stuff gets composted. This is not just a problem for our city councils. It is a problem for God's creation, and so it is a problem for God and God's people. We all add to landfill waste and so we all get to share in solving the problem. Could this even be a way of serving God? Could it be a face of mission in 2021?

### **The 'How?'**

How? By taking small steps.

To cut down on our rubbish, we think about what we use and where it goes. We make choices, about what to buy and how to dispose of what we don't want any more.

The Rubbish Challenge is a series of little actions, one each month. Together they add up to a big impact.

The Rubbish Challenge is a resource for churches, groups, families and individuals. Each month there'll be thought, a verse, a prayer, and a practical task to do. Plus links to more material.

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## **10 Steps over 10 Months:**

- Step 1) February: Consider
- Step 2) March: Measure
- Step 3) April: Recycling
- Step 4) May: Disposables
- Step 5) June: Food
- Step 6) July: Paper Towels
- Step 7) August: Batteries
- Step 8) September: Kids
- Step 9) October: Cleaning
- Step 10) November: Celebrate

## Step 1) February: Consider

**Bible verse:** Ephesians 1:22 *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything.*

### **‘Big Idea’: Mission is Gospel in Context**

Christ is Lord of everything and the Gospel of Christ is good news for every-where. Mission happens at the points of connection between the eternal truth of salvation and the messy specifics of human life. In our time we face huge environmental issues. Following Jesus takes us where ever he leads, even into the rubbish dumps of the world.

**Watch video** at [www.conversations.net.nz/rubbish-challenge.html](http://www.conversations.net.nz/rubbish-challenge.html)

### **Questions** - *for reflection & discussion*

Whose problem is our rubbish? Is it a problem for God?

It's great to throw things in the bin and someone else takes it away ... but where does it go? What impact does it have on the environment? Is it our responsibility?

Is this something our church/group/home would like to address this year?

### **Action Steps for February**

1. Download the 'Waste' study guide from A Rocha's 'Rich Living' series:

[www.arocha.org.nz/resources/rich-living-series](http://www.arocha.org.nz/resources/rich-living-series)

2. Read and talk about with others

3. Watch Silvia's short video at: [www.conversations.net.nz/rubbish-challenge.html](http://www.conversations.net.nz/rubbish-challenge.html)

4. Decide to do the Rubbish Challenge 10 Steps this year.

For a church this could involve taking a formal proposal to the leadership/Council.

### **Prayer**

Almighty Creator, all things come from you. You call us to be responsible stewards.

Jesus Christ, you are in all the world. You call us into mission to all the world.

Life-giving Spirit, give us strength to follow Christ, in the little things and in the big things.

Amen.

## **Step 2) March: Measure**

### **Bible verse**

There is lots of counting in the Bible; think of some and look them up. Counting helps us take notice of reality. Jesus invited people to be fully aware of what was going on: "blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear." (Matthew 13:16)

### **'Big Idea'**

To read a map you need to know where you are. Measure your rubbish to set a baseline. Then you can set goals and measure progress.

### **Question - for reflection & discussion**

Take a good hard look at the rubbish that we produce. Find out more about waste issues in your city.

Do you think you personally put too much in the bin?

What are you already trying to do to reduce land-fill waste?

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### **Action Step for March**

Measure your rubbish. Choose a period (2 or 4 weeks). Make up a chart for each type of rubbish. Notice what is in each bin – what was in the wrong bin?

### **Prayer**

Dear God, if only we could throw away everything we do not want.

If only stuff would disappear, from our homes, from our relationships, from the planet like ... *(pause to name things you would like less of)*.

Dear God. We confess to you our rubbish - the junk we buy, the rubbish things we say and do. Forgive us, God of infinite grace. Have mercy on us. Amen.

### Step 3) April: Recycling

**Bible verse:** 1 Corinthians 15:50. *What I am saying is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*

#### **‘Big Idea’**

God designed all of Creation to be perishable, but modern manufacturing has created millions of objects that are effectively imperishable. Plastic is designed to degrade so slowly to be almost immortal. True immortality is found only in God. All else is idolatry. Objects that do not decompose harm the environment. Recycling reduces this harm.

#### **Question - for reflection & discussion**

What do we do with objects whose life span is much longer than ours?

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#### **Action Steps for April**

Help your City Council recycle as much as possible:

- know what can go into the yellow recycling bins (find out from your City Council)
- don't put anything else in the recycling bins
- don't wrap recycling in plastic bags
- clean recycling first

Buy less stuff in plastic bottles – refill and re-use.

Ask for no plastic packaging when you buy products (such as polystyrene).

Get creative. What ideas do you have for re-using stuff?

#### **Prayer**

Risen Christ, all glory to you.

In you is everlasting life!

Conquer the idols in our world.

Give us wisdom, courage and creativity  
as we recycle.

## Step 4) May: Disposables

**Bible verse:** Romans 12:2

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

### **‘Big Idea’**

Cheap and convenient is not always good! If we take into account the long-term cost of plastic waste, cheap disposable items are actually very costly. They do harm to creation. Doing what we know is wrong is sin, and damages our relationship with God.

### **Question - for reflection & discussion**

How do you respond to the challenge that buying cheap throw-away things is wrong, even a sin?

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### **Action Step for May**

Review what single-use items you buy.

When do disposables seem a good option?

- for large numbers of people
- for picnics and outside events
- for hygiene reasons

Explore alternatives.

Choose to stop buying throw-away items such as cups or plastic cutlery.

### **Prayer**

Lord have mercy – we confess to you:

we like what is easy and convenient.

Christ have mercy – we ask of you:

renew our lives to live your way.

Lord have mercy – we offer to you

all we value and choose and buy

to the praise of your glorious grace.

Amen.

## Step 5) June: Food

**Bible verse:** John 6: 12 *When they had all had enough to eat, Jesus said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over so that nothing is wasted."*

### **'Big Idea'**

God created wonderful processes for all things to break down and be remade into new things, 'so that nothing is wasted'. Rot and decay get a 'bad rep' in the Bible, in fact Paul describes all of creation as "in bondage to decay" (Romans 8:21). But in our day we have a new appreciation for the importance of decomposition, as God's 'circle' way of sustaining life through returning nutrients to the soil.

### **Question - for reflection & discussion**

How do you feel about composting and decomposing food?

Can you see God at work in rot and decay?

How can you ensure that your food scraps get composted, and able to feed new life?

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### **Action Step for June**

Set up a system so that all food waste goes into organic collection or the compost.

If you have a City Council organic waste collection, this is the green bin, and every home, church or office should be using this as much as possible.

You need a food scraps container on (or under) your kitchen bench (e.g. a metal pot with lid). It needs to be:

- easy to use and easy to clean
- with no plastic bag liner
- clearly labelled

Who will empty it and clean it?

If you can, set up a composting system or worm farm. You can even hire one!

Have less land-fill rubbish bins; not every room needs a bin!

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, as you gathered the scraps after feeding the people  
inspire us to gather our left-overs to feed the soil  
that death may transform into new life  
and nothing may go to waste. Amen.

## Step 6) July: Paper Towels

**Bible verse:** Luke 21:1-4: *Jesus saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them."*

### **'Big Idea'**

Paper towels are the biggest single item filling our rubbish bins. A paper towel is small and seems insignificant, but it adds up to a huge impact. Placing them into organic waste is a simple humble act of service.

### **Questions** - *for reflection & discussion*

How do you respond to the idea that Jesus admires small acts of love?

How does this relate to how we deal with the rubbish?

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### **Action Step for July**

Set up a simple system to get paper towels into organic waste collection.

Each paper towel dispenser needs to have, right underneath it, a 'Paper Towel Only' bin, with no plastic bag liner, which gets emptied into the organic waste.

What other paper waste could be put into composting?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, your ways are humble and good -

May we be your hands in service to your world.

May we show your heart to care, even in little ways,  
for others and for this earth you made so well.



## Step 7) August: Batteries

**Bible verse:** James 3: 8-10: *The tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison! With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth comes both blessing and cursing. E te whanau, this should not be so!*

### ‘Big Idea’

Every cordless device we use has a battery in it. They are great while they work, but then what? If batteries are tossed out with your kerbside rubbish or recycling, the hazardous substances they contain could cause a fire in the rubbish truck or recycling plant. If they end up in landfill, the poisons inside batteries may leak out into soil and ground water.

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### Questions - for reflection & discussion

When we buy a battery, do we know what’s inside it? Do we know what will happen to it when it dies?

How come we use toxic substances every day, without a thought?

Discuss James’s challenge about the words that we speak. When can words be poisonous?

What toxic attitudes and behaviours do we take for granted as ‘normal’?

We often feel drained. How does God ‘recharge your batteries’?!

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### Action Step for August

Set up a Batteries Box at your church. Get an artist (or the kids!) to design it so it looks cool. Every couple of months empty it at your Council recycling depot.

At home and at church, stop buying things that need throw-away batteries.

Switch to recyclable rechargable batteries.

### Prayer

Lord of all, we confess that the words we speak can hurt.

Guard our tongues, that we may not wound one another.

We confess that the things we use every day hurt our environment.

Inspire our choices, that what we use, including batteries, may not wound your creation.

Guard our living that we might be people of faith in the small things and in the big things, through Christ our friend and the Holy Spirit our Energiser,

Amen.



## Step 8) September: Kids

**Bible verses:** Isaiah 11:6 *The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid goat, the lion and the calf together, and a little child shall lead them.*

Matthew 7:9 *Would anyone give your child a stone when he asks for bread?*

### ‘Big Idea’

We surround our kids with plastic! They eat out of plastic bags in plastic boxes. We buy them more and more brightly coloured plastic things to play with. Imagine a God-centred, creation-based play space for kids. Isaiah’s vision of God’s salvation *shalom* on earth is of a child leading all the animals in harmony – not just plastic toy animals but real living beings – where “nothing will hurt or destroy” (v10).

### Questions - for reflection & discussion

Do children really need everything to be brightly coloured and individually wrapped? What values are we teaching them?

What are good ways to engage with young people about environmental issues? How are they leading the church?

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### Action Step for September

Explore with parents, children, youth & ministry leaders how to reduce plastic and rubbish.

- Use natural materials for crafts
- Play outside, no matter what the weather
- Don’t laminate
- Choose natural fabrics for clothes and bedding
- Buy non-toxic crayons and chalk instead of felt pens
- Teach children about what happens to waste

### Prayer

Our Father in heaven, thank you for our children, each one made in your image.

Nourish them as they grow in a damaged world.

May we give them good things instead of junk and feed them hope instead of anxiety.

## Step 9) October: Cleaning

**Bible verse:** 1 Corinthians 8:9 *Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.*

### **‘Big Idea’**

As Christians we try not to get caught up in lots of rules. Following Jesus is not about being ‘good’. We are free to eat and to buy what we choose. However, as Paul warns us, not everything is good for us or good for those around us. Could our freedom damage the environment around us? The chemicals we use can have a destructive effect ‘down-stream’. They are a ‘stumbling block to the weak’, not just people but fragile ecosystems and creatures.

### **Question - for reflection & discussion**

In a global pandemic, of course we need good hygiene. But how does our human need for cleanliness impact on God’s creation?

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### **Action Steps for October**

What chemicals are used at your home, work or church? Look on the labels. Find out what is in the stuff you handle.

Buy ‘eco friendly’ cleaning products, or make your own from safe ingredients.

At church or work talk to your Cleaners about what they use, and work towards more environmentally safe alternatives.

### **Prayer**

The Lord has set us free! We are free indeed!

Dear God, thank you for our freedom and for our responsibility.

Thank you for ethics that guide our choices

May our actions not become a stumbling block for others

May our choices protect the vulnerable,

both people and environments. Amen.

## Step 10) November: Measure & Celebrate

**Bible verse:** Luke 15:8-10 *“And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

### ‘Big Idea’

The angels of God celebrate over each person who turns their life away from sin and towards God. Salvation includes right relationships with God, others and the world. Tackling the challenge of the waste we produce makes us part of the solution instead of part of the problem. So celebrate what you have achieved and give glory to God.

### Questions - for reflection & discussion

What place does sustainable living have in God’s salvation and Christian discipleship?  
As you have explored the problem of landfill waste and worked towards solutions, what have you learned?  
How has this informed your faith?

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### Action Steps for November

Measure your total waste again. Look back to what you did in Step 2 (March). Use the same time frame and system again to measure the rubbish across all bins. Report to your family or church. What have you achieved?  
Celebrate any reduction in landfill (red bin) waste. Did your recycling and organic waste increase?  
Find fun ways to share with your church and friends.

### Prayer

Rejoice with us, O God  
as we turn from our sin and turn toward you  
in every way, every day  
in little things and in big things  
that our living may resound with your praise!