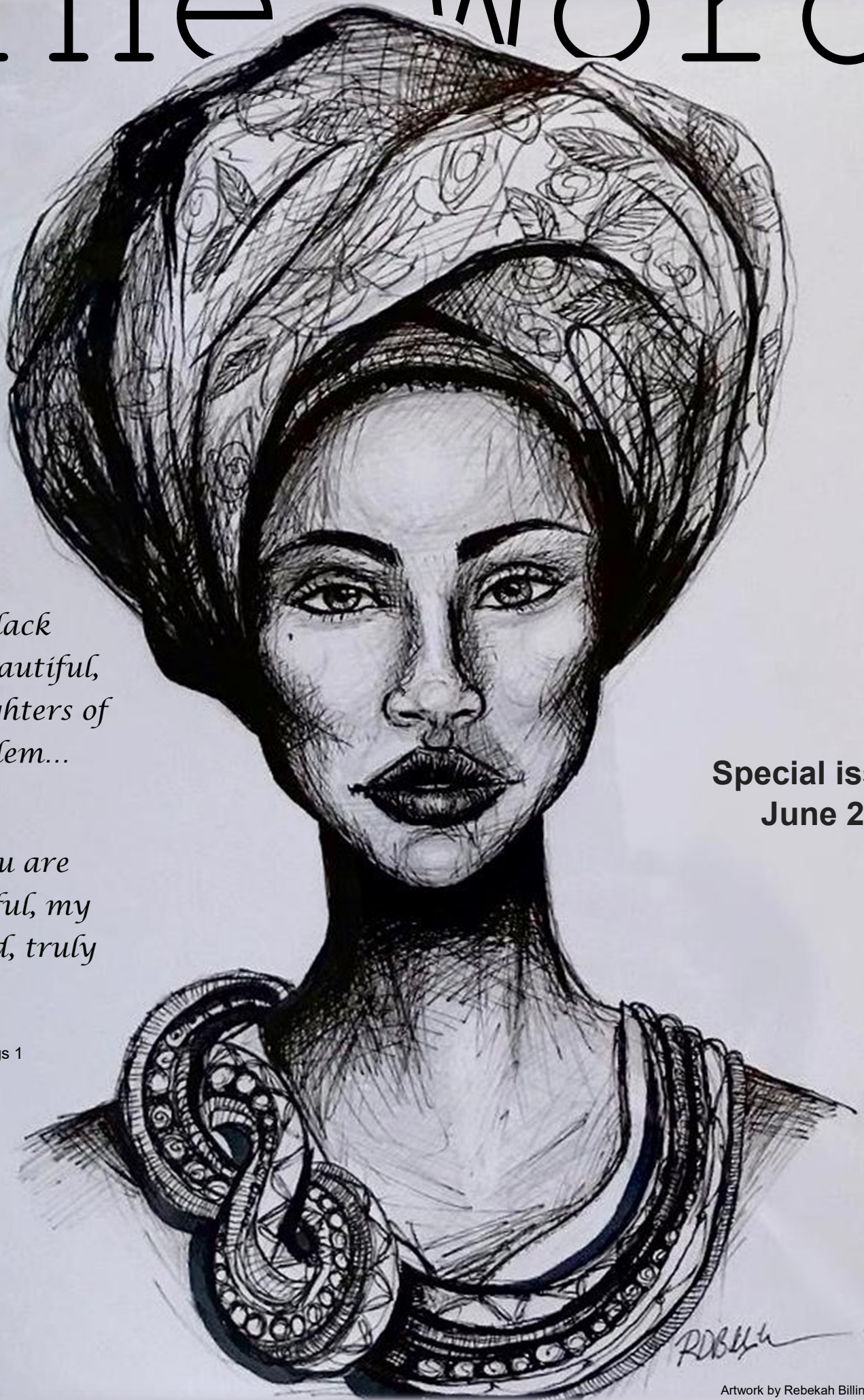


# The Word



Bride:

*I am black  
and beautiful,  
O daughters of  
Jerusalem...*

Groom:

*Ah, you are  
beautiful, my  
beloved, truly  
lovely.*

Song of Songs 1  
(NRSV)

**Special issue  
June 2020**

# The Word

## Introduction

With centuries of Western Christian art presenting us with white-skinned Biblical characters, it can come as a surprise to be reminded that most of these people would have looked quite different. This is just one example of how any culture can reshape history and religion to suit itself, and (either accidentally or purposely) leave out those who don't fit in. It is issues like this, concerning race and privilege, which have been brought out into the open by the shocking events last month surrounding the death of George Floyd, and the protests that followed.

It is important for us all to listen and learn in times like this, even when we may feel detached from these events – perhaps especially if we are still living in a kind of lockdown bubble, away from school and church. Maybe for the first time, many of us are facing the stark truth that people are treated unfairly and harshly in this world simply because of the colour of their skin – not only by thoughtless or cruel individuals, but also by the very systems and powers which are meant to keep us all safe.

As people who are seeking to follow Jesus, how do we respond to these difficult issues? How do we approach a problem as ugly and ingrained as racism? Is there any point in even trying? What difference can we make?

This special edition of The Word aims to provide some ideas and resources for tackling racism from a Biblical point of view. I hope you will join me in learning more about this important issue, because recent events have shown that plenty of us (including myself) have room to learn and grow here. It is likely we will make mistakes along the way, but as Jesus taught, it is far better to try than to bury all hope in the ground. May we work together to develop our understanding, and to demonstrate to others the love and inclusivity of Christ.

With love to you all,

Becky Lewis



## Where to start

# LISTEN

"Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered." (Prov 21:13)

# CARE

"The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern." (Prov 29:7)

# EMPATHISE

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." (Rom 12:15)

# LEARN

"Rescue those being led away to death...If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?" (Prov 24:11-12)

# REFLECT

"How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?" (Matt 7:4)

# SPEAK

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute." (Prov 31:8)

# ACT

"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (1 Jn 3:18)

Why Did You Make Me Black Lord  
Lord... Why did you make me black?  
Why did you make someone  
the world would hold back?...

Black is the color of dirty clothes,  
of grimy hands and feet...  
Black is the color of darkness,  
of tired beaten streets...

Why did you give me thick lips,  
a broad nose and kinky hair?  
Why did you create someone  
who receives the hated stare?

Why do people think I'm useless?  
How come I feel so used?  
Why do people see my skin  
and think I should be abused?

Lord, I just don't understand...  
What is it about my skin?  
Why is it some people want to hate me  
and not know the person within?

Lord, don't you think  
it's time to make a change?  
Why don't you redo creation  
and make everyone the same?

## The Black Prayer

by RuNett Nia-Ebo

### *God's Reply*

Why did I make you black?  
Why did I make you black?

Your color is the same as the rich dark soil  
that grows the food you need...  
Your color is the same as  
the black stallion and panther,  
Oh what majestic creatures indeed!

All colors of the heavenly rainbow  
can be found throughout every nation...  
When all these colors are blended,  
you become my greatest creation!

Your hair is the texture of lamb's wool,  
such a beautiful creature is he...  
I am the shepherd who watches them,  
I will ALWAYS watch over thee!

Your stature is strong,  
your bone structure thick  
to withstand the burden of time...  
The reflection you see in the mirror,  
that image that looks back, that is MINE!

So get off your knees,  
look in the mirror  
and tell me what you see?  
I didn't make you  
in the image of darkness...  
I made you in the image of ME!

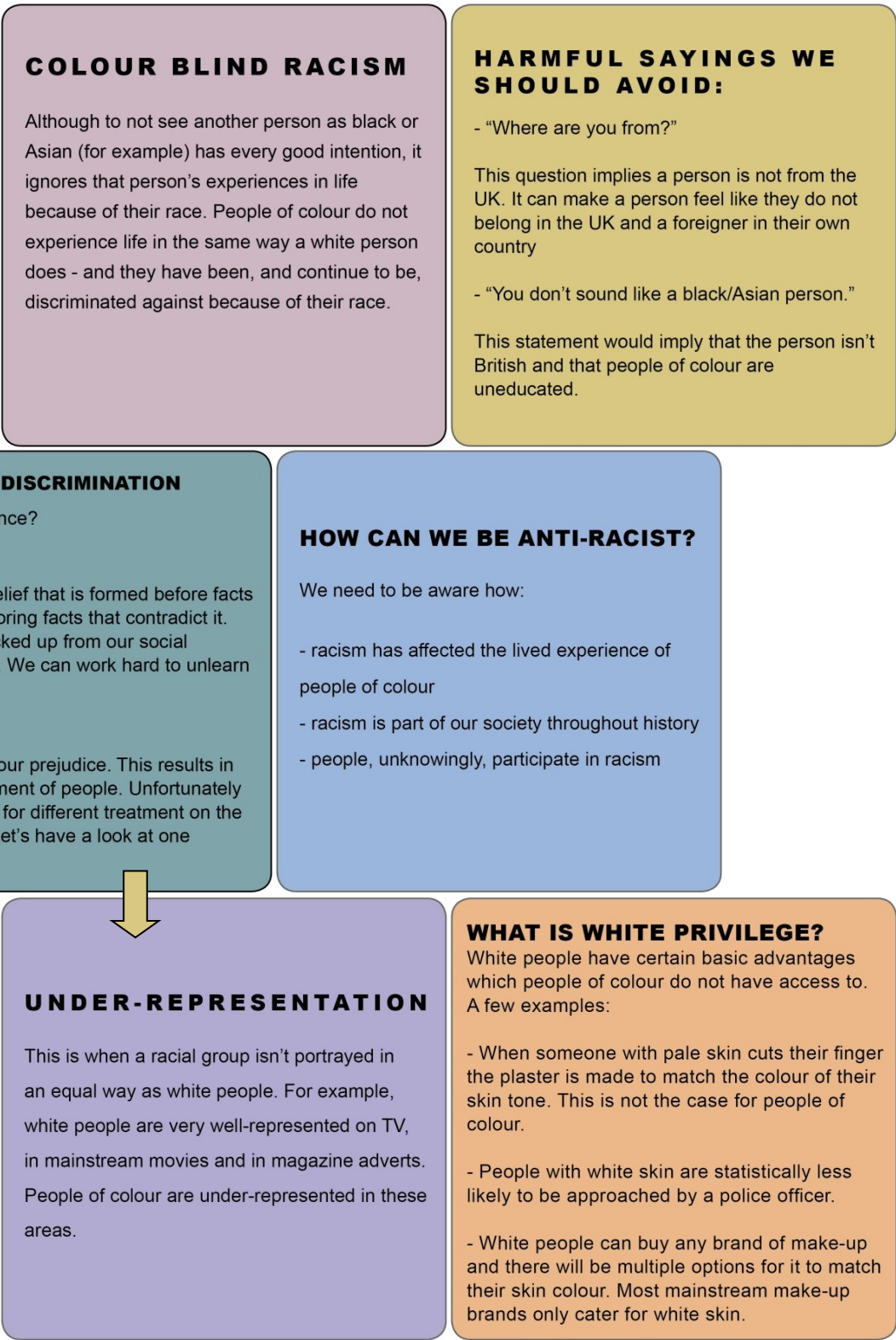
This is a shorter version of the poem.

The full version is here: [https://  
www.wattpad.com/11746207-inspire-the-  
black-prayer-in-honor-of-black-history](https://www.wattpad.com/11746207-inspire-the-black-prayer-in-honor-of-black-history)



# Building awareness

Racism takes many forms. Some are unconscious – they are done without thinking, and often without meaning any harm. Some subtle forms of racism include applying stereotypes to people, or accepting ‘mild’ racist behaviour such as jokes or slang, even when they are not said directly to a person. Let’s learn a little more about everyday challenges in the UK:



# RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Where are you from? Where are you really from? No, where are you really really from?

What are you?

You speak English so well.

You're not like other Muslim people.

**RACIAL**  
MICROAGGRESSIONS

What do your people think about that?

You don't act like a normal Black person.

You're really pretty, for someone so dark.

Why do you sound so White?

Your name is too hard to pronounce, can I call you Mary?

# POWER in the Bible

*Many serious problems in this world – such as **racism**, **abuse** and **injustice** – stem from issues around power. School bullies often hurt others because they have low self-confidence and feel more powerful when they make others feel small.*

## So, what does the Bible have to say about power?

### A huge amount!

Everyone else was seen as beneath these rulers, and worth next to nothing. Genesis opens very differently. Here, an all-powerful God is in complete control of heaven and earth. **He creates humans to be co-rulers with Him.** Every single human is an image of this mighty Being.

This view continues throughout scripture – see Genesis 9:6 and Acts 17:24-29, for example.

As image-bearers, humans were given the high calling of managing God's creation with wisdom, as Joseph did in Egypt. Part of our task in this life is to learn how to do this fairly, in a way which respects all people, and the planet that we have been given as our home (1 Corinthians 6:2).

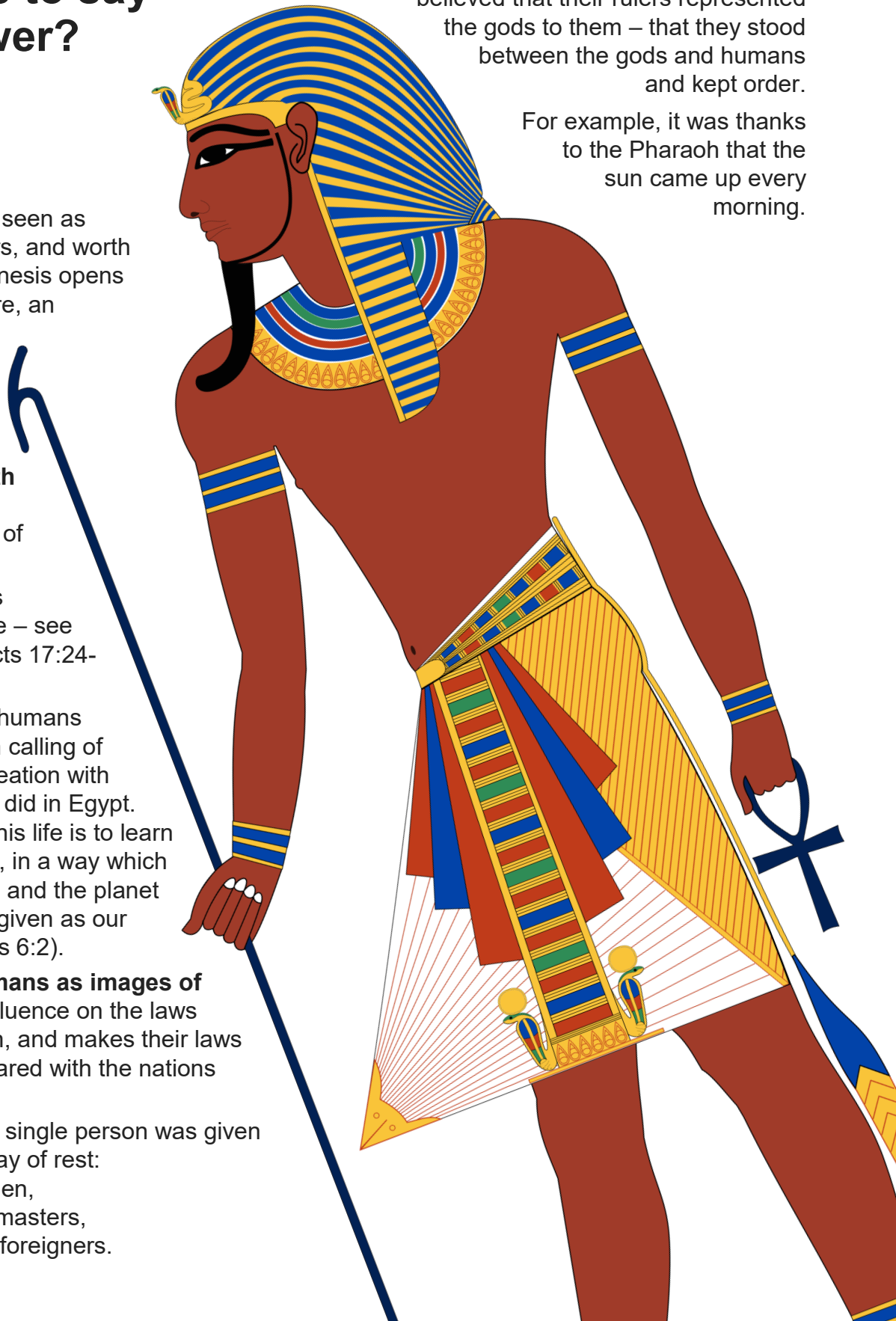
This idea of **all humans as images of God** has a deep influence on the laws that Israel are given, and makes their laws unique when compared with the nations surrounding them.

For example, every single person was given the Sabbath as a day of rest:

- men and women,
- servants and masters,
- Israelites and foreigners.

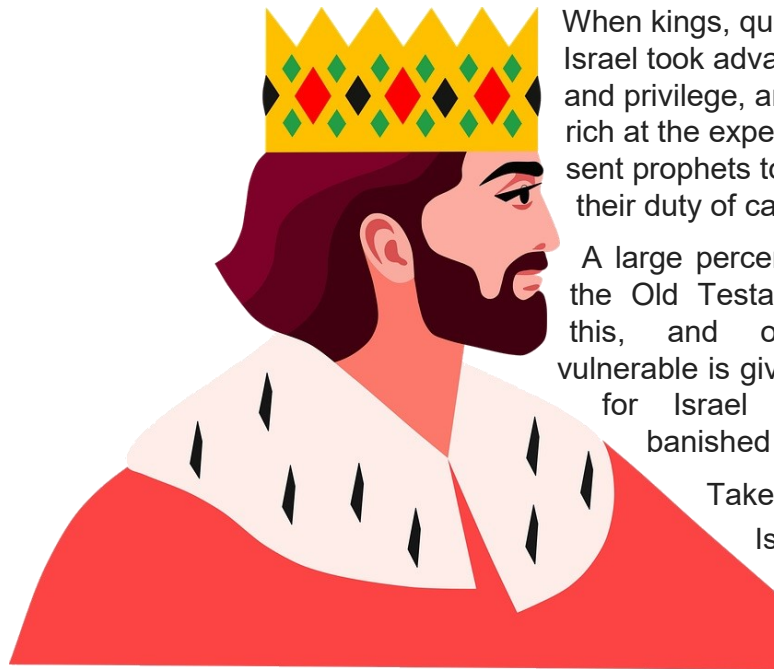
When the early books of the Bible were being written, surrounding nations believed that their rulers represented the gods to them – that they stood between the gods and humans and kept order.

For example, it was thanks to the Pharaoh that the sun came up every morning.



*How can we love God if we do not love His images (humans)?*

When Israelites made idols of other gods to worship, they were not simply breaking one of the Ten Commandments. They were bringing in lifeless statues to replace themselves as God's images. This made it easier for them to ignore their responsibility to behave like images of God to others, removing the need to reflect His character, which stood for mercy and justice (Exodus 34:6-7). It also meant that they could forget to treat others as the images of God, and could instead treat them as beneath them, abusing their power and ignoring their cries for help and fair treatment.



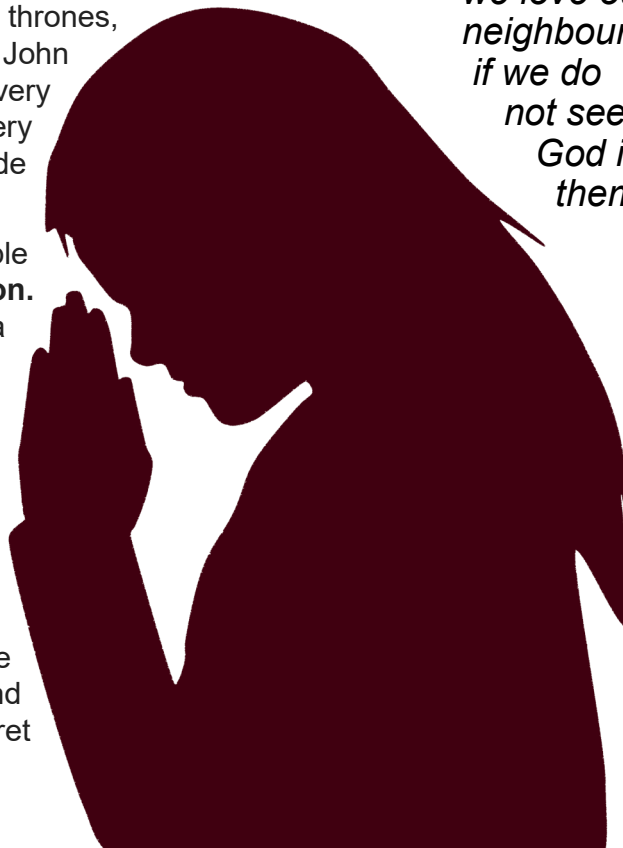
When kings, queens and priests of Israel took advantage of their power and privilege, and made themselves rich at the expense of the poor, God sent prophets to remind them of their duty of care to His people.

A large percentage of prophecy in the Old Testament is focused on this, and oppression of the vulnerable is given as a main reason for Israel and Judah being banished from God's land.

Take a look at Isaiah 1:17,  
Isaiah 10:1-4,  
Isaiah 58:6-12,  
Jeremiah 22:13-17  
Zechariah 7:9-13.

At the start of the New Testament, **Jesus is announced as God's leveller of society.** Mary prays that God has "brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly", and John the Baptist preaches that "every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low".

What Jesus brings is an example of **humility and compassion.** Not because being humble is a nice characteristic to have, but because it is essential in order to fulfil the great commands of loving God and loving neighbour. For example, Jesus notices outsiders who are ignored by others. He teaches that the last shall be first (Matthew 20:25-28). He washes his disciples' feet and tells them to do good in secret and to take the lowest seat.



*How can we love our neighbour if we do not see God in them?*

*How can we truly love anyone if we secretly view ourselves as above them?*

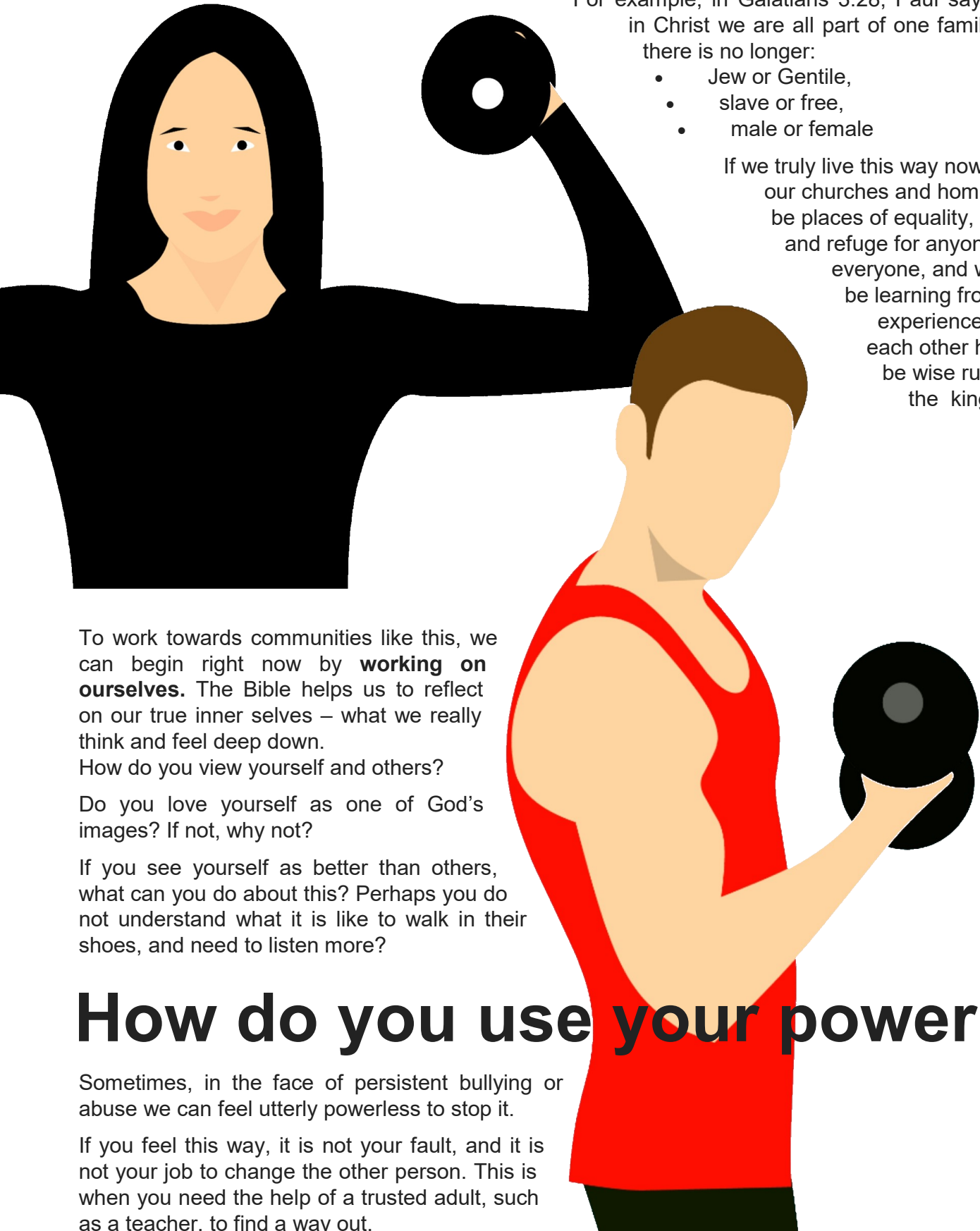


The letters in the New Testament encourage all believers of whatever worldly status to view one another as equal – to prove to the world that humility and compassion are the solution to power and privilege. The church is seen as the **weaker partner** – God is the father and we are all His children; Christ is the master and we are all the slaves; Christ is the king and we are all his subjects.

For example, in Galatians 3:28, Paul says that in Christ we are all part of one family and there is no longer:

- Jew or Gentile,
- slave or free,
- male or female

If we truly live this way now, then our churches and homes will be places of equality, safety and refuge for anyone and everyone, and we will be learning from our experiences with each other how to be wise rulers in the kingdom.



To work towards communities like this, we can begin right now by **working on ourselves**. The Bible helps us to reflect on our true inner selves – what we really think and feel deep down.

How do you view yourself and others?

Do you love yourself as one of God's images? If not, why not?

If you see yourself as better than others, what can you do about this? Perhaps you do not understand what it is like to walk in their shoes, and need to listen more?

## How do you use your power?

Sometimes, in the face of persistent bullying or abuse we can feel utterly powerless to stop it.

If you feel this way, it is not your fault, and it is not your job to change the other person. This is when you need the help of a trusted adult, such as a teacher, to find a way out.

Sometimes in our lives we do have power, and we must learn to use it wisely.

**POWER AS A FRIEND**

If you are with a close friend and they say hurtful comments to someone, you have the social power to stop them.

**POWER AS A CONSUMER**

We all have power as a consumer. We can spend our money on systems which pay workers very little and cause them suffering, or we can choose to support systems which offer fair wages and sustainable livelihoods.

Throughout our lives, in different contexts, **we can feel both powerless and powerful.**

**POWERLESS**

When you feel **powerless**, remember that Jesus is with you and that he gave up his power on the cross. Pray, and seek help and support.

**POWERFUL**

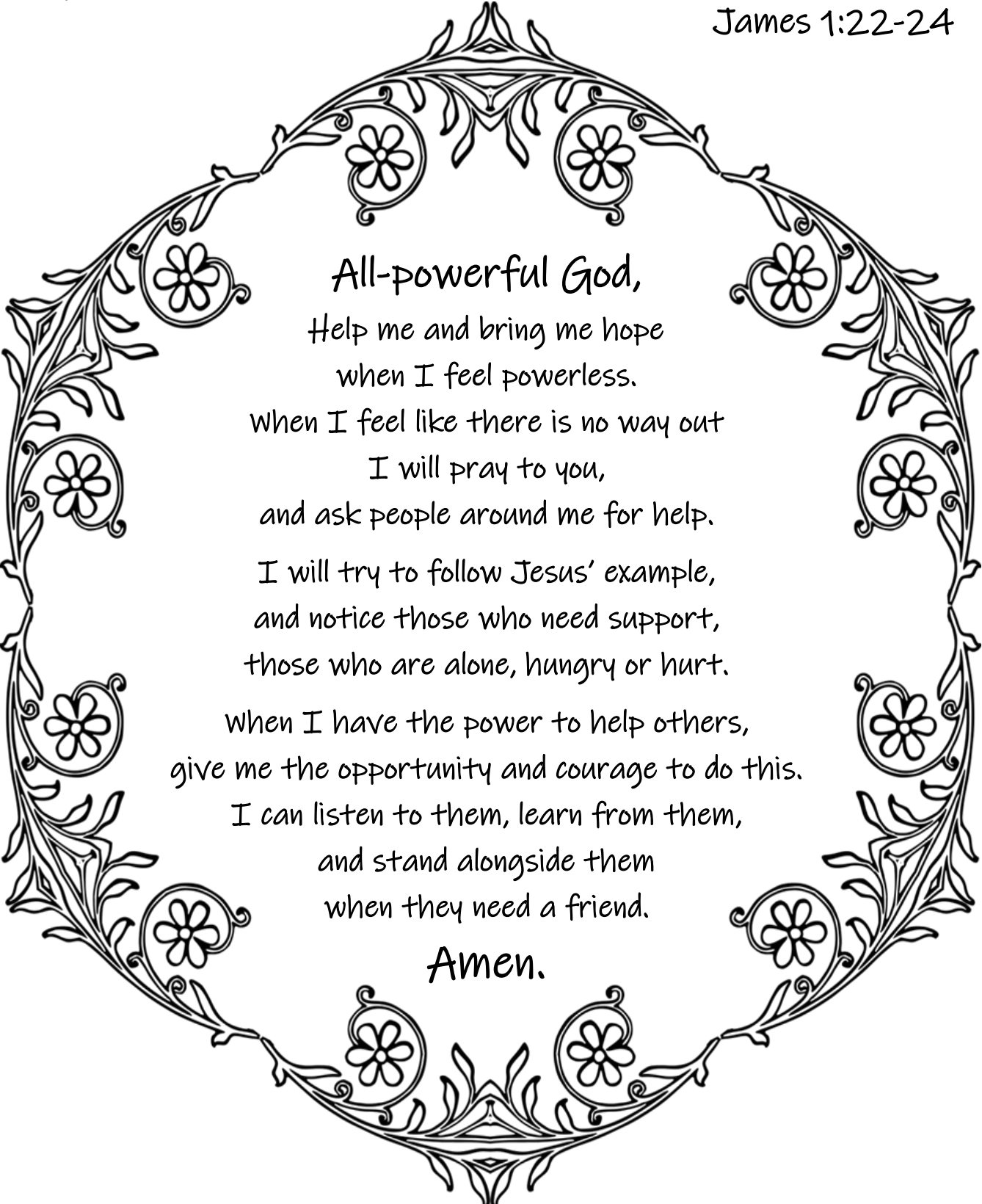
When you feel **powerful**, use that power to help others, to lift them up, include and welcome them.



## Reflection

"But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like."

James 1:22-24



All-powerful God,  
Help me and bring me hope  
when I feel powerless.  
When I feel like there is no way out  
I will pray to you,  
and ask people around me for help.  
I will try to follow Jesus' example,  
and notice those who need support,  
those who are alone, hungry or hurt.

When I have the power to help others,  
give me the opportunity and courage to do this.  
I can listen to them, learn from them,  
and stand alongside them  
when they need a friend.

Amen.

## Does the Bible Support Slavery?

Since the first century, many Christians have claimed that the Bible supports slavery, and that to enslave a race is part of the natural order, ordained by God. How do we respond to people who blame the Bible for slavery?



Access to freedom through the protection of runaway servants (Deut 15:1&12; Deut 23:15)

Legal rights and physical protections. (Exodus 21:20 to

A compulsory holiday every week. (Exodus 20:10; Deut 5:14)

### The Law of Moses Provided...

New World slavery did not obey in any way the Law of Moses' commandments concerning servants. The Law of Moses prohibited the capturing of people and selling them into slavery (Exodus 21:16). Servitude under the Law of Moses was voluntary, to pay off debts.

The Bible never bases servitude on the basis of ethnicity, nor does it justify servitude through racism.

### The Bible and slavery

People who tried to use the Bible to justify New World slavery, were actually deliberately disobeying the Bible. If they had even followed the Law of Moses, New World slavery would not have been possible. The plantations could not have existed.

New World slavery began very late in Christian history. Even back during the Roman Empire, there were many Christians (but not all), who set their slaves free, and also bought slaves from the market to set them free. Important Christian leaders condemned slavery.

Slavers in the 1800s actually printed a heavily edited version of the Bible, called the Slave Bible, which deliberately omitted many passages which they knew condemned what they were doing. The very fact that they felt the need to remove all the anti-slavery passages of the Bible proves that they knew the Bible's teaching was destructive to the institution of slavery. The Bible only contained 232 out of the 1,189 chapters of a Protestant Bible, and missed out 90% of the Old Testament.

<https://www.npr.org/2018/12/09/674995075/slave-bible-from-the-1800s-omitted-key-passages-that-could-ignite-rebellion>

By Jonathan Burke





## Online Bible School

The Online Christadelphian Bible School is offering classes for age 11-14. The school is running for five weeks, starting on 27<sup>th</sup> June. It doesn't matter if you have missed the start – download the free app Flipgrid (if possible), and email Rene Larsen at [rlasensa@gmail.com](mailto:rlasensa@gmail.com) to sign up. [onlinebible.school/children](http://onlinebible.school/children)



## Bible videos

*The Lumo Project* – productions of the four gospels that stick to the Bible text and aim to be as authentic to the time as possible. Watch the early chapters of Luke, which have Mary's prayer & John the Baptist's preaching, mentioned in this issue. (Be aware that later chapters show scenes of Jesus' crucifixion, which you may find hard to watch).

[youtube.com/watch?v=O0AoA4qY7\\_8](https://youtube.com/watch?v=O0AoA4qY7_8)

*Bible Project – Overview of Amos*

[youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4)

*Bible Project – Character of God: Exodus 34:6-7*

[youtube.com/watch?v=nxwzq1PJlmm](https://youtube.com/watch?v=nxwzq1PJlmm)



## Information videos

*Advice to help you if you're upset about racism*

[bbc.co.uk/newsround/53068444](http://bbc.co.uk/newsround/53068444)

*"I'm sorry for being a racist when I was younger"*

[bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-52992534](http://bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-52992534)

*What is Fairtrade?*

[youtube.com/watch?v=JolZWd2q2Ec](https://youtube.com/watch?v=JolZWd2q2Ec)

Unless otherwise stated, scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

## Further activities



## Reading

Age 11+

*When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, by Judith Kerr

*Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, by Mildred D Taylor

Age 14+

*The Wedding Drums*, by Marilyn Rodwell (Christadelphian)

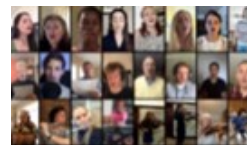


## Movie

*Amazing Grace* (2006, PG)

A biopic of William Wilberforce, starring Ioan Gruffudd and Benedict Cumberbatch.

Currently available to rent or buy on Amazon Prime.



## Music

*Here at last* by Phil Rosser (Purple Worship book no.78) was recorded this month by Christadelphians from all over the world. It refers to Rev 7:9, which describes the saints in the kingdom as "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages".

[youtube.com/iB7wkj4mTWM](https://youtube.com/iB7wkj4mTWM)