



Week Six: World Hunger

In today's world, nearly 1 billion people are malnourished. Half of the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day, and many of those people are city dwellers who must purchase the food they feed their families. As the global population grows and the earth's resources begin to diminish, world hunger teeters on the brink of disaster. Jesus warned that in the last days there would be great famines and pestilence, but he also said that we are blessed if we feed the hungry.

In his dissertation in Matthew 25, he told us that giving water to the thirsty and food to the hungry was criteria for separating "sheep from goats"; true believers from nonbelievers.



MONDAY

How can we feed these people?

Reflect

⁵⁻⁶ When Jesus looked out and saw that a large crowd had arrived, he said to Philip, “Where can we buy bread to feed these people?” He said this to stretch Philip’s faith. He already knew what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered, “Two hundred silver pieces wouldn’t be enough to buy bread for each person to get a piece.”

⁸⁻⁹ One of the disciples—it was Andrew, brother to Simon Peter—said, “There’s a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But that’s a drop in the bucket for a crowd like this.”

¹⁰⁻¹¹ Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” There was a nice carpet of green grass in this place. They sat down, about five thousand of them. Then Jesus took the bread and, having given thanks, gave it to those who were seated. He did the same with the fish. All ate as much as they wanted.

¹²⁻¹³ When the people had eaten their fill, he said to his disciples, “Gather the leftovers so nothing is wasted.” They went to work and filled twelve large baskets with leftovers from the five barley loaves.

John 6.5-13 |MSG

Receive

Was Jesus content to let the people go away hungry? No... He sought to feed the people spiritually AND physically-- just as his Father in Heaven fed the Israelites manna many years ago. Jesus seized the opportunity to demonstrate that the Kingdom could come through Him, in truth and in meeting their practical needs. Heaven could invade earth in this moment.

Why? Jesus was not a Savior who talked about compassion, but He lived it. He practiced it and demonstrated it as the very nature of the Kingdom. He knew that by helping people with their physical needs, he would empower them to receive more spiritually, and that they would be more capable of receiving His authentic and active love for them. The miraculous abundance proved that the kingdom of Jesus was real and included not only the twelve tribes of Israel, but could include ALL people.

How did Jesus feed them? He did it via a miracle that used what was there: a boy’s meager provisions and the disciples’ willingness to participate. He could have produced the food by himself out of nothing, but instead, he sought to involve this young boy so that his faith might

increase. He allowed the disciples to distribute the food and collect the remnants, so that their faith and confidence might grow in walking in Jesus' authority.

So when Heaven invades earth, we see that the Kingdom of Heaven is real, full of compassion, practical, spiritual, miraculous, abundant, inclusive of all people, and there is a multiplication factor involved.

Relate

Do I respect or disregard my neighbor's physical needs?

How is my local community physically and spiritually hungry? What is God's heart for them?

How can I help usher the Kingdom of Heaven into this hunger? How can I do this in community?

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that about *795 million people of the 7.3 billion people in the world* (or one in nine) were suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2014-2016. Almost all the hungry people, *780 million, live in developing countries*, representing 10.7 percent (or one in eight) of the population of developing countries.

Respond

Lord Jesus, grow your compassion in my heart. Help me see the hunger around me with your eyes, and help me discern through the Holy Spirit, how I might help them.

→ Pray this week for God to open your eyes to the hunger around you and have courage to take the first step toward doing something. Share with someone what God shows you and how you can participate with Him.

→ Consider how your small group might be able to impact your local community or a partnering global community. (See application sheet for ideas)

TUESDAY

Leave them for the poor

Reflect

When you reap the harvest of your land, don't reap the corners of your field or gather the gleanings. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners. I am God, your God.

Leviticus 23.22 |MSG

When you harvest your grain and forget a sheaf back in the field, don't go back and get it; leave it for the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow so that God, your God, will bless you in all your work. When you shake the olives off your trees, don't go back over the branches and strip them bare—what's left is for the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow. And when you cut the grapes in your vineyard, don't take every last grape—leave a few for the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow. Don't ever forget that you were a slave in Egypt. I command you: Do what I'm telling you.

Deuteronomy 24.19-22 |MSG

Receive

Richard Stearns in his at times searing tome *The Hole in Our Gospel* gives us this synopsis of world hunger:

- Roughly 1 of 4 children in developing countries is underweight.
- Some 350 to 400 million children are hungry.
- About 854 million people do not have enough food to sustain them.
- Approximately 25,000 people die each day of hunger or its related causes
 - about 9 million people per year.

The problem with statistics is seeing the number and not the face. We must move beyond statistics. We must also move beyond just throwing spare change at hungry panhandlers when we're in the mood.

The Old Testament isn't known for its grace and compassion. We more readily associate the Hebrew Scriptures in popular culture with fire and brimstone and "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" than we do with benevolence and feeding the poor. But as harsh, and often confounding, as Old Testament Law can be, it is here that we see the heart of God. The Law worked the virtue and practice of benevolence into the very fabric and flow of life. In an agricultural society, that meant that when harvest time came, those who farmed the land were to leave the edges of their fields along with the gleanings along the paths for the poor. In fact it went so far as to tell harvesters not to go back to retrieve forgotten produce. They weren't to pick every apple, every grape, or every fig. Leave it for the poor. It was all a way of weaving the value of sharing with those who had nothing into their society. It was the edges of *their* fields, of *their* harvest.

Hunger requires more than the spontaneous act of kindness towards the poor with a generous tip – though that's still better than the close-fisted sneer, "Go get a job!" Kingdom people are an upstream-moving-people who cultivate more kindness than that. We're an upstream-moving-people who move beyond the occasional and spontaneous to the strategic and sustainable.

Relate

What are the edges of the field of my life that God would have me leave for the poor and hungry? We typically alternate between telling the poor to go get their *own* field, or insisting that the wealthy gut the center of theirs. But it's the *edges* of *my* field. The *edges* of *my* life are spoken of here.

Respond

Merciful Father, open my hand and heart to the hungry. Let me be driven not by guilt in the shadow of statistics, but by grace in the light of your goodness. Let me follow Christ's example of abundant compassion. Help me see the faces and not the statistics, both around my own home and out in the nations.

What "corner of your field" is God challenging you to leave for the poor as part of the ongoing, sustainable strategy to feed the hungry and show compassion for the poor? How will you do this?

- Thank God for your garden and/or produce available to you that He has provided.
- Share with someone what God is speaking to you about His heart for the poor and what your response is to be.
- Consider how your small group might make a positive impact for the hungry this week.

WEDNESDAY

God-talk without God-acts

Reflect

Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?

James 2.14-17 |MSG

This is how we've come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears.

1 John 3.16-17 |MSG

Receive

Much of the history of Christendom has been fixated on getting the words right. Biblically, the whole point of "sound words" and "sound doctrine" is that they lead to "sound living." And you can't help but notice that each time James raises the issue of a practical, working faith, it's not in the context of religious or doctrinal compliance, but in the context of how we treat *people* – in particular, how we treat the poor standing right before us. For James, sound doctrine is observing the orphan and the widow in their troubles and intervening; it's seeing the poor man "in filthy clothes" and offering him the best seat in the house; it's beholding the half-starved and not just wishing them well as you pass them a Gospel tract, but passing the potatoes and helping them to plant their own.

It's the same litmus test for John. Love is only known by what it *does*, not by what it *says*. What is his "exhibit A" for what faith does? Seeing a fellow human being in need of food and clothing and doing something about that need. Biblically, this is called "doing compassion." We usually talk about "having compassion." But from a biblical perspective, compassion is not something you *have*, it's something you *do*, or *do not*. And the same very much applies to "faith."

Relate

What compassion have you been *doing* lately with someone who is hungry and poor?

Imagine doing compassion like that described by James and John... What might that look like for you?

Respond

Dear Jesus, please move me from just thinking and talking to DOING. I believe compassion is right. I know you are a God of compassion. Will you please protect me from walking in my selfish apathy and indifference? Help me DO something and walk in your footsteps, Jesus.

→ GO: What's one simple act of compassion you can do today?

THURSDAY

Giving to the needy as worship

Reflect

38-39 Peter said, “Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are far away—whomever, in fact, our Master God invites.”

40 He went on in this vein for a long time, urging them over and over, “Get out while you can; get out of this sick and stupid culture!”

41-42 That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.

43-45 Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met.

46-47 They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

Acts 2:38-47 | MSG

Receive

After Pentecost when the early church received the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter shared the Gospel and over 3,000 people were saved. Then the text describes how their faith in Jesus changed their daily life. They began to pray and fellowship. They worshiped together, gave praise, and enjoyed celebration. And in the middle of this, as a natural byproduct of their new life in Christ, they “sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met (v45).”

What a wonderful expression of worship to the Lord! It was as natural as singing and praising; praying and communion. They personally sacrificed and sold their own belongings so that each person could be without need. Their new love for the Lord spilled over into their growing love for people, and it was a joy to sacrifice for the poor.

A truly changed heart longs to show love through generous sacrifice.

Relate

Has giving to the poor been a natural outflow of my salvation? Why or why not?
How can I personally sacrifice for the sake of loving my brothers and sisters in need?

Respond

Heavenly Father, we love to worship you! Let us find joy and worship in our expression of giving to others. Show me the joy in giving today and let it be a blessing to you. I am so

*thankful for what you have done for me that I want to bless others and give you all the glory.
Praise you, Lord!*

→ Do: Praise the Lord today in worship and include a personal sacrifice for others in your worship.

FRIDAY

I was hungry and you fed me

Reflect

³¹⁻³³ “When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

³⁴⁻³⁶ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why:

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.’

³⁷⁻⁴⁰ “Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’

Matthew 25.31-40 |MSG

Receive

It’s truly one of the most brutal of all the parables of Jesus. It leaves no doubt that calling Jesus “Lord” cannot be separated from seeing and responding to his face among the seemingly most insignificant.

It’s striking that both the sheep and the goats are usually clueless as to why they are where they are. They usually have no idea. Contrast this with the loud protests of those who are confident they are part of the “insider club” as they shout, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not do many marvelous deeds in your name?” There is the dumbfounded, “Wait, WHAT?” of the sheep. A little of the truth seeps into their sheep-brains & sheep-hearts. Is “being religious and devout” really about subscribing and conforming to approved doctrine, or was it about caring for the poor: feeding, clothing, visiting, even intercession for them?

It all comes down to *did we love?* Did we walk in *his* steps and minister to the least, the lost, and the last? Because, quite simply, that’s what faith expressing itself by love *does*. That’s what Christ does. And that’s what his true followers do after they make Him Lord of their hearts.

And it all starts with actually *seeing* them; *seeing* the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the shivering, the sick, and the imprisoned. And then, having seen, moving towards them right where they are...

Relate

In what disguise does Christ come to you today?

How will I respond this week to the least, the lost, and the last?

Respond

Lord, help me to see your face in the face of every poor and needy person I encounter; remind me today of your promise that “whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones will in no way lose his reward.” Let me see your face in each little one I encounter, and let me throw caution to the winds as I embrace them through your mercy!