



UNIT 4: HUNGER IS A COMMUNITY ISSUE

The Fast That I Choose

A Bible Study On Hunger

HUNGER IS WIDESPREAD IN AMERICA

As many as 11.9 million people in the United States were hungry at some time during 2007 because they did not have enough money for food. Single mothers with children had the most difficulty in getting food for their families. Minority households also had rates of food insecurity above the national average.¹

Low income is the biggest factor in food insecurity and hunger in the United States. Nearly 40 percent of households below the federal poverty line experienced food insecurity and almost 15 percent experienced hunger. Hunger afflicts people living in every state in the union.²

Just over half of the households in America that are food insecure participate in federal food assistance programs. Some food insecure households are not eligible for these programs. At the same time, 3.9 million households received emergency food from a food bank, food pantry, or emergency kitchen during the last year.³ However, that was only 20% of all food insecure households. Among those food insecure households that did not use a pantry, 28% reported that there was no such resource in their community and an additional 17% said they did not know if there was. Among those who knew there was a food pantry in their community, only 32% of food insecure households used it.⁴

Hunger is often thought to be only a problem of metropolitan areas in the United States. However, it is a problem in rural areas, as well. In fact, the rate of food insecurity in America's rural areas is slightly higher than the national average.⁵

Despite the pervasiveness of hunger in the U.S., those who experience hunger in our country are usually invisible. In some places the hungry are unseen because they look like everyone else. In other places they simply fade into the scenery where they become simply part of the landscape. Nonetheless, there are hungry people in virtually every community of the nation.

THE FACE OF HUNGER IN AMERICA⁶

Who experiences hunger in America? A comprehensive study of the nature of hunger in the United States was conducted for *Feeding America* (then known as *America's Second Harvest*) in 2006. The study found that of the 25.3 million different individuals served through their network in a year, 40 percent were white, 38 percent were African American, and 17 percent were Hispanic. The remainder were from other racial or ethnic groups. Ten percent of those served were elderly. Only twelve percent were homeless.

Thirty-six percent of *Feeding America's* client households included at least one employed adult. However, 68 percent of the households had incomes at or below the official federal poverty level. Children were members of 36.4 percent of client households.

Those who experience hunger in the U.S. often face very difficult choices. For instance, 42 percent reported having to choose between paying for food or paying for utilities or heating fuel. Thirty-five percent had to choose between paying for food or paying their rent or mortgage bill. Thirty-two percent had to choose between food or medicine or medical care.

Only 35 percent of *Feeding America's* clients received food stamps even though it is likely that many more are eligible.

Some Astonishing Figures⁷:

- **The number of households with a net worth of more than \$5 million reached 840,000 in 2008**
- **The number of households with a net worth of \$1 million or more has more than doubled since 1983 — to total 6.7 million in 2008.**
- **Among those households holding the top 1 percent of assets, 5 percent are headed by someone 35 years of age or younger — compared to only 0.7 percent in 1983.**
- **Forbes magazine identified 357 Americans with a net worth of more than \$1 billion in 2009 — while it could find just 13 in 1982.**
- **The 400 wealthiest Americans in 2006 had a collective net worth of \$1.25 trillion.**

UNIT 4: HUNGER IS A COMMUNITY ISSUE

PURPOSE OF THIS UNIT:

- TO RECOGNIZE THE PREVALENCE OF HUNGER AND POVERTY IN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES.
- TO UNDERSTAND THE FACE OF HUNGER IN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES.
- TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE EXISTENCE OF HUNGER IN OUR COMMUNITY IS A RESULT OF OUR INDIFFERENCE.



He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

Luke 14:12-13

Thirty-nine percent of their clients were male; 60.8 percent were female. Ninety-three percent were American citizens.

About 30 percent of adult clients were married and over 62 percent had completed high school or higher. Eighty percent of client households had an income of \$20,000 or less over the previous year.

THE HUNGRY IN OUR COMMUNITY

There are people who face food insecurity in virtually every community in America. The hungry are not just someplace else. They are also in your own town, city, or county. The hungry go to your child’s school. They might even sit next to you in church.

Earlier in this study we examined the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). Lazarus had faded into the scenery and the rich man didn’t even notice him. The rich man’s sin was his indifference to Lazarus’ situation (see page 24).

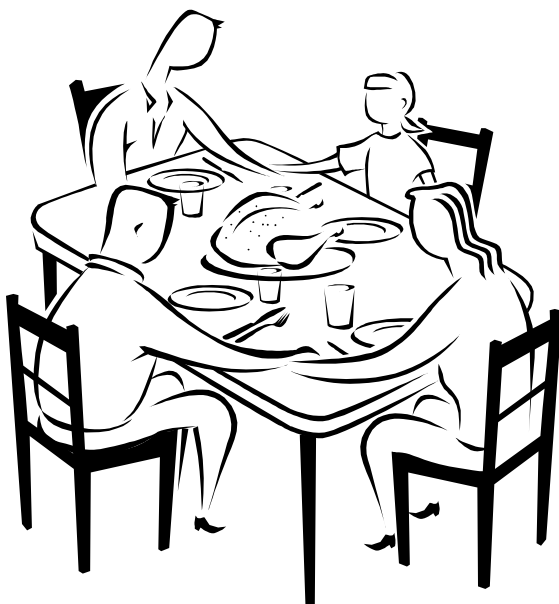
The reality of hunger in our communities points to the indifference we have toward those in need in our own neighborhoods. Hunger exists and food insecurity exists in our communities for only one reason: Because we in the Christian church tolerate it.

UNIT 4 OUTLINE:

The two lessons of Unit 4 focus our attention on hunger as a community issue. The first lesson looks at the question, “Are there hungry people in my neighborhood?” The second asks, “What can we learn from a communal meal?”

The first lesson examines the reality of food insecurity and hunger in communities across America. We will also look at who is hungry in the U.S.

The second lesson involves a class communal meal where we discuss what we can do about hunger in our community as we share food with one another.



Make sure to have the class materials recommended on page 8 ready for Unit 4.
NOTE: *This unit involves the class sharing a meal during the second lesson. Instructions for the meal are on page 41.*



**Self-Sufficiency
Exercise**

***The Fast That
I Choose***

A Bible Study On Hunger

What is the Self-Sufficiency Standard?

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Estimate the hourly minimum wage that a single-parent family with an infant and a preschooler living in your community needs to be entirely self-sufficient (needing no public or private assistance):
\$ _____
2. Look at each cost category in the budget below. Fill in for each category what you think the monthly cost estimate is for each basic need. Do not consider public or private assistance).
3. Add up the estimated costs. Multiply by 12 to get an annual wage. Divide that amount by 2,080 (52 weeks x 40 hours/week) to get an hourly wage.
4. Compare your estimates to the actual costs for a typical American city.

Item	Cost Estimate	Actual Cost
Housing (rent for 2 bedroom apartment)		
Child Care (1 infant, 1 preschooler)		
Food		
Transportation		
Health Care		
Miscellaneous (telephone, clothing, etc.)		
Taxes (Federal, State, Local)		
SUBTOTAL		
Subtract: Earned Income Tax Credit		
Subtract: Child Care Tax Credit		
Subtract: Child Tax Credit		
MONTHLY TOTAL		
TOTAL x 12 = ANNUAL WAGE		
ANNUAL WAGE/2080 = HOURLY WAGE		

NOTE: The Self-Sufficiency Standard was developed by Dr. Diana Pearce for *Wider Opportunities for Women*. To find the Self-Sufficiency Standard for your area, visit <http://www.sixstrategies.org/states/states.cfm>



Lesson 1
ARE THERE
HUNGRY PEOPLE
IN MY
NEIGHBORHOOD?

UNIT 4: Hunger is
A Community Issue

A Bible Study On Hunger

TEACHING LESSON ONE

OPEN WITH WORSHIP

- Remind the class that we have thus far looked at hunger and poverty from a distance. Today we begin to look at the reality of hunger from a closer perspective.
- Say a prayer.
- Have someone read aloud **Luke 14:12-13**.
- Collect the offering.

THE PREVALENCE OF HUNGER IN AMERICA

- Ask if anyone in the class has experienced working in a soup kitchen or other activity that directly fed hungry people. Ask them to talk about their experience, addressing these points if possible:
 - Where and when did this experience take place?
 - What were the people you served like?
 - ◊ Race, age, sex, etc.
 - ◊ How about clothing, appearance?
 - Did you talk to any of the clients?
 - What was most memorable about your experience?
 - Would you do it again?
- Ask why the class thinks people go to soup kitchens. Allow the class time to discuss.
- Tell the class that only 20% of all food insecure households in the U.S. receive emergency food assistance from a food bank, food pantry, or emergency kitchen. Then ask why they think that is the case. Some reasons might be:
 - Did not know one was available.
 - Too proud to use one.
 - Too ashamed to use one.
 - Federal programs such as food stamps meet their needs.

THE FACE OF HUNGER IN AMERICA

- Share with the class some of the information found in the section, “The Face of Hunger in America,” on page 35.
- Ask the class if any of the statistics surprised them. Discuss.
- Point out that children were members of 36.4 % of the households served by *Feeding America’s* food bank network in 2006.

- Ask someone to read **Lamentations 4:9**. Discuss how this scripture makes the members of the class feel. Ask if they think it is a true sentiment.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD

- Divide the class into three or four groups.
- Give a copy of the *Self-Sufficiency Exercise*, page 37, to each group.
- Explain about the self-sufficiency standard:
 - The self-sufficiency standard is the minimum hourly amount that a family wage earner needs in order to live without public or private assistance.
 - This standard is different for various situations. A single-parent family with one child, for instance, will have a higher self-sufficiency standard than will a two-parent family because the two parents can both earn income.
 - This standard also is different for each location across the nation as the cost of living varies.
- Ask each group to follow the instructions on the hand-out.
 - Provide each group with local newspaper classified advertisements and real estate sections to assist them.

The Self Sufficiency Standard for a Single-Parent Family with an Infant and a Preschooler For Charlottesville, Virginia (Sample)

Item	Actual Cost
Housing (rent for 2 bedroom apartment)	\$ 677
Child Care (1 infant, 1 preschooler)	909
Food	345
Transportation	232
Health Care	153
Miscellaneous (telephone, clothing, etc.)	232
Taxes (Federal, State, Local)	607
SUBTOTAL	\$ 3,155
Subtract: Earned Income Tax Credit	0
Subtract: Child Care Tax Credit	80
Subtract: Child Tax Credit	100
MONTHLY TOTAL	\$ 2,975
TOTAL x 12 = ANNUAL WAGE	\$35,700
ANNUAL WAGE/2080 = HOURLY WAGE	\$ 17.16

UNIT 4, Lesson 1: ARE THERE HUNGRY PEOPLE IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD?



He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

Luke 14:12-13

- When they come to number 4, wait until all groups are finished. Then, either use the sample figures for Charlottesville, VA provided on page 38 or those for the Self-Sufficiency Standard for your geographic area (see Note on p. 37).
- Ask the class if anyone knows the minimum wage for your area. Tell them that as of July 2009, the federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. If the minimum wage for your area is different than that, let them know what it is.
- Discuss how families are impacted by the difference between the Self-Sufficiency hourly wage and the minimum wage for your area.
- Ask: What kinds of programs and funding sources are there that can help bridge the gap between the Self-Sufficiency wage and the minimum wage?
 - The Self-Sufficiency wage does not include food stamps, welfare payments, WIC, subsidized housing, and other Federal and state aid (public assistance).
 - It also does not include any private assistance including child care payments by the children’s other parent, emergency food assistance from private organizations, medical assistance from free clinics, etc.
- Ask if the minimum wage is fair. After a few minutes of discussion ask if the current minimum wage is just.
 - If necessary, remind the class about what we mean when we talk about God’s justice (see *To Do Justice ~ To Act Justly*, page 15)
 - **TEACHING NOTE:** The issue of the “fairness” or “justness” of the minimum wage can be a touchy one. For instance, high school students working at a fast-food place do not support families. However, we can’t escape the question about whether it is right for a person working full time to be unable to support his or her family. The purpose here is simply to get the class thinking about these kinds of issues in terms of God’s justice.
- Have someone read aloud **Proverbs 14:20-21** and **Proverbs 28:27**.
 - Ask what these verses suggest to us today with respect to the needy in our own community.
 - Ask:
 - ◇ What does it mean to be kind to the poor?
 - ◇ In what ways do we as a society show our dislike for the poor today?
 - ◇ How does society today give to the poor?
 - ◇ How do we as a community of believers give to the poor ?

WHAT IS FAIR? WHAT IS JUST?

- Point out that we live in a society that pays people based on the value of their work rather than the extent of their need, which is why we do not use a Self-Sufficiency Standard to determine wages.
- Note that with a minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour a person will earn \$15,080 per year. Then ask the class to discuss how a person might support a family on that level of income.

CLOSING

- **EXPLAIN ABOUT THE COMMUNITY MEAL YOU WILL SHARE AT THE NEXT SESSION**
- Read aloud “Community Justice” from below.
- Remind the class that they live in a community where people have to struggle to get enough to eat.
- Ask someone to read **Luke 14:12-13**.
- Close with prayer.

Community Justice

Fiorella LaGuardia was mayor of New York City in the 1930s and 1940s. He presided occasionally at Police Court. One bitter cold day a trembling old man charged with stealing a loaf of bread was brought before him. “I’ve got to punish you,” declared LaGuardia. “The law makes no exception. I can do nothing but sentence you to a fine of ten dollars.”

The mayor then reached into his pocket as he added, “Well, here’s the ten dollars to pay your fine. And now I remit the fine.” LaGuardia tossed a ten-dollar bill into his famous sombrero.

“Furthermore,” he declared, “I’m going to fine everybody in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a man has to steal bread in order to eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to this defendant!”

The hat was passed around the courtroom and an incredulous old man later left with forty-seven dollars and fifty cents.

SOURCE: Bennett Cerf, *Try and Stop Me*, New York, 1945 as cited by Urban Legends Reference Pages, November 15, 2004 (<http://www.snopes.com/glurge/laguardia.asp>)



STONE SOUP

The Fast That I Choose

A Bible Study On Hunger

There are many variations to this classic story...

A FOLK TALE: STONE SOUP

Once upon a time in Russia, there was a famine. Little food had been harvested that year because of the lack of rain. One day a beggar came into a village carrying a guitar. The beggar went from house to house, offering to play music in return for food and a place to spend the night, but the villagers hid their food and said that they, too, had nothing to eat. Then they would tell the beggar to move on.

So the beggar went to the town square where he built a fire. He found a large pot and filled it with water. Into the pot he placed a large stone. Then he placed the pot over the fire. He sat down and waited for the water to boil. He played beautiful music on his guitar while he watched the fire.

Meanwhile, the villagers became curious about what the beggar was up to. Eventually, several townspeople decided to investigate the matter and approached the beggar. They engaged him in conversation. After a short while the sound of merriment could be heard as the beggar, who turned out to be quite friendly, shared songs and stories about the lands and people he had met on his journeys.

More and more of the villagers gather around the friendly, outgoing beggar. Finally a young boy asked, "Why, sir, are you boiling a stone?"

The beggar replied, "So I may eat stone soup."

"Oh, it must be terribly bland!" said an old woman. "But I have a cabbage. That will add some flavor!"

"And I have a few carrots, which will add color!" said another villager.

"A couple of potatoes!" offered another.

"I have a bit of meat," said still another.

Soon, everyone in the village had contributed a small amount to the soup, which was turning into quite a hearty fare. In fact, as they all shared the soup everyone in the village thought it was the best they had ever tasted.

The very next day, the traveler (who by now could no longer be called "beggar"), continued on his journey, leaving the little town and its people behind. But the villagers never forgot him and the lesson they had learned. In fact, during the hardest of times the little village thrived because the townsfolk never forgot how to make "stone soup".



THE COMMUNAL MEAL

UNIT 4: *Hunger is A Community Issue*

A Bible Study On Hunger

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR THIS LESSON:

This session is unique for this study as it involves the class sharing a meal together.

ADVANCE PREPARATION IS ESSENTIAL.

*The meal cooked and/or served during this class session is “Stone Soup.” There are two ways to approach this lesson. The preferred method is to include the meal preparation as part of the lesson. The impact of the lesson is much greater this way. **However, cooking the meal together will require the class session lasting quite a bit longer than an hour and, of course, calls for the use of a kitchen.** Therefore, you may want to have this session at a person’s home instead of your regular meeting place.*

The less preferred method is to have someone prepare the “stone soup” beforehand and then to simply serve it during the classroom session. If you choose this method, a recipe for “stone soup” is provided on this page. You may substitute this recipe with your own if you prefer.

In deciding which approach to take, take into consideration the class size. “Stone Soup” is better with more ingredients. If you choose to cook the meal during class, simply have each student bring a soup ingredient (vegetables like carrots, celery, potatoes, onion, tomato, corn, etc., and perhaps meat and/or pasta or noodles). For smaller classes, you might ask each to bring two ingredients. Don’t assign particular students to bring specific vegetables, pasta, or meat. Rather, just tell the students that each of them need to bring something to put in a soup. This is more in keeping with the story of Stone Soup.

One person (probably the class leader) should bring the stone, crusty bread enough for everyone, bowls, eating utensils, napkins, a large soup pot, serving spoon, etc.

NOTE: It is best if this lesson is scheduled for a lunch or dinner hour. If you plan to use meat, make sure there are no vegetarians in the class.

PREPARATION FOR CLASS

- During Unit 4, Lesson 1 (the previous session) make sure the students are told about your plans for this lesson. Engage them in setting the time and place of meeting and make sure they understand how long the session will last.
- Explain that the community meal is a vital part of this Bible study on hunger as important lessons are learned.
- If the class wishes, families can be invited. If you decide to do this, adjust plans accordingly for the number of people.
- Make sure you know what you plan to do with any leftovers. Wasting the food is not an option.
- Pray in advance of the meal that God will be present in both the planning and in the gathering.

STONE SOUP FOR FIVE

About 2 quarts water, simmering on stove
1 large smooth stone, scrubbed and boiled to sterilize
Salt and pepper to taste
5 carrots, washed and cut in chunks
3 cups cut-up cabbage
1 pound stew meat, cut into small pieces
4 potatoes, washed and cut in half
1 cup rinsed barley
1 cup milk

Cook the stone soup in large soup pot for about 1 hour, until potatoes are tender and meat is done. Makes five generous servings. Multiply ingredients (except the stone) to accommodate class size.

NOTE: A cup of cooked macaroni may be substituted for the barley. Add the macaroni shortly before serving.



Lesson 2
WHAT CAN
WE LEARN FROM
A COMMUNAL
MEAL?

UNIT 4: *Hunger is A Community Issue*

A Bible Study On Hunger

TEACHING LESSON TWO IF MEAL PREPARATION TAKES PLACE DURING CLASS



Have the soup pot with about two quarts of water for each five students simmering on the stove when class begins.

OPEN WITH WORSHIP

- Remind the class that we in the last lesson we began to look at the face of hunger in the United States and the reality of hunger even in our own community. Today we will consider what we can do about hunger in our community.
- Have someone read aloud **Luke 14:12-13**.
- Have a moment for silent prayer.
- Collect the offering.

PREPARE STONE SOUP

- Make sure everyone has brought their ingredients for Stone Soup.
- Read aloud *A Folktale: Stone Soup*, page 40.
- Add the clean, sterilized stone to the simmering water.
- Have each person prepare his or her contribution to the soup (by cutting, slicing, dicing, etc.) and add it to the simmering water.
 - Simmer the soup for about an hour, or until meat (if any) and potatoes are fully cooked.
 - Season to taste.
 - Bouillon powder or cubes may be added as desired.
- Ask each person as they prepare their contribution to explain why he or she chose the particular item he or she brought to share.

WHILE THE SOUP COOKS

- Ask the class to think about the story of Stone Soup. Discuss:
 - ◇ Why did the villagers lie about having no food?
 - ◇ Do you think the beggar was manipulative? Why or why not?
 - ◇ What is the moral of the story?

- Ask: How do you think the villagers would have reacted if the beggar suggested from the beginning that everyone pool their resources? Allow time to discuss.
- Ask the class if “Stone Soup” has any application to our own community today.
- Point out that God made provisions in Old Testament Law to insure that no one in the community ever went hungry.
 - Have someone read aloud **Deuteronomy 14:28-29**.
 - Discuss the meaning and ramifications of this scripture.
- Point out that our key verse for this Unit is **Luke 14:12-13**. Ask someone to read it aloud. Discuss:
 - Why does Jesus tell us to invite the poor, the lame, and the blind when we have banquets?
 - What do you think would happen if we took this seriously and invited such people to our next church dinner?
 - Does Jesus expect us to take these verses seriously? If so, why don’t we do as he says?
- Discuss the kinds of things we can do in our community to address hunger as individuals and as a church. Make a list that can be posted in the classroom where you regularly meet.

SERVE THE MEAL

- Once the Stone Soup is done, before it is served ask God’s blessing on the meal.
- Serve the soup in bowls. Pass bread to all if it has been brought. Serve water as a beverage.
- During the meal, ask if anyone has heard a different version of the Stone Soup story. Allow them to share what the versions have in common and how they are different.

CLEAN UP

- Once everyone has finished eating, everyone should share in the cleanup tasks.
- Thank everyone for participating.
- Close with prayer.

UNIT 4, Lesson 2: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM A COMMUNAL MEAL?



He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

Luke 14:12-13

TEACHING LESSON TWO IF THE MEAL IS PREPARED BEFORE CLASS



Have the soup prepared earlier brought to the gathering in a crock pot or have some other means to keep it hot.

- Point out that our key verse for this Unit is **Luke 14:12-13**. Ask someone to read it aloud. Discuss:
 - Why does Jesus tell us to invite the poor, the lame, and the blind when we have banquets?
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- Have someone read aloud **Luke 14:12-13**.
- Have a moment for silent prayer.
- Collect the offering.

BEFORE THE MEAL

- Read aloud “A Folktale: Stone Soup” from page 40.
- Tell the class that you have prepared Stone Soup using similar ingredients from the story. Share the recipe you used.
- Ask the class to think about the story of Stone Soup. Discuss:
 - ◇ Why did the villagers lie about having no food?
 - ◇ Do you think the beggar was manipulative? Why or why not?
 - ◇ What is the moral of the story?
- Say: “How do you think the villagers would have reacted if the beggar suggested from the beginning that everyone pool their resources?” Allow time to discuss.
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