



UNIT 5: HUNGER IS A CHURCH ISSUE

The Fast That I Choose

A Bible Study On Hunger

THE POLITICS OF HUNGER

When it comes to hunger and poverty, many people look to government for the solution. While it is clear from our earlier lesson that government does indeed have an important role to play in addressing hunger and poverty, it is also clear that government has been unable to solve those problems.

To illustrate the inability of governments to end hunger, consider this: According to the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the cost required to eradicate world hunger, over what is being spent today, is \$30 billion per year.¹ That is less than the amount of money Americans spend on diet products each year!² It also represents less than one percent of the President's \$3.6 trillion Fiscal Year 2010 budget for the United States government.³ On a global basis, \$30 billion represents only 2.1% of the amount of the world's annual military expenditures and a just minuscule amount of the \$70.65 trillion gross world product.⁴ Clearly, the financial resources are available for government to bring hunger to an end. Yet still hunger persists.

In 1963 President Kennedy said, "We have the means, we have the capacity to eliminate hunger from the face of the earth in our lifetime. We need only the will."⁵ The will has been lacking. And that should not surprise us. After all, governments establish their political priorities based on a variety of factors. Ending world hunger obviously has not been one of those priorities. One reason the political will to end hunger is lacking is that the hungry and the poor have little or no political power. All too often they are invisible. All too often they have no voice in the citadels of power.

A UNIQUE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

The people of God have always had a specific mandate to alleviate hunger and to meet the needs of the poor. We addressed this to some extent in Unit 1, *Hunger Is A God Issue*. While government certainly has a role in addressing hunger, the obligation to address hunger and poverty is especially clear with respect to the church.

In Luke's account of the beatitudes, Jesus concluded with a call to action. Give to those in need without question or hesitation, he demanded. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, he commanded (Luke 6:27-31). In Matthew 25:34-40 he made it clear that what we do to meet the needs of

others is not just done "for" Jesus but, in a very significant sense, to him. These and so many more teachings of Jesus constitute an unambiguous calling for his followers to feed the hungry.

The early church continued Jesus' stress on concern for the poor and the needy. For example, members of the Christian community in Jerusalem shared all things with one another so that "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:32). This concern was not limited only to those in the church, however. When Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was endorsed by the church's leadership in Jerusalem, he reported that they asked only that he remember the poor (Galatians 2:10).

There are numerous exhortations in the New Testament for the church to share its resources with those in need. For example, the writer of Hebrews called on his readers to "not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Hebrews 13:16). Passages such as this make clear that concern for those forced to live a marginal existence is not an optional activity for the people of God, nor is it only a minor requirement. Indeed, our identification with these persons is at the heart of what it means to be the community of faith.

EVANGELISM VERSUS JUSTICE

There are those who question the church's role as an instrument for social justice even in the face of such evidence as that cited in the preceding section. They argue that the primary mission of the church is contained in the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Those who subscribe to this view argue that the church's energy and resources should be devoted almost exclusively to evangelism, to "making disciples."

There is no doubt that the church is called to "make disciples." However, the Great Commission actually continues through verse 20 where it calls us to teach these new disciples all that Jesus commanded. Jesus commanded us to give to the needy (Luke 12:33) and to do good even to those who hate us (Luke 6:27). That means that justice relates to evangelism since we will not complete the Great Commission until the people we evangelize work also to alleviate hunger.

UNIT 5: HUNGER IS A CHURCH ISSUE

PURPOSE OF THIS UNIT:

- TO EXAMINE THE UNIQUE CALLING OF THE CHURCH TO RESPOND TO HUNGER.
- TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE CHURCH HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO ADDRESS HUNGER.
- TO RECOGNIZE THE VARIETY OF WAYS THE CHURCH CAN ADDRESS HUNGER AND POVERTY.



Little children, let us love not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

1 John 3:18

Justice also relates to evangelism because our active concern for the hungry and impoverished validates the reality of God in our lives. It is our love of Christ and his love for us that drives us into action to meet the needs of the impoverished and the hungry. And while we are involved in such action our witness has great power because it is certified by active love.

The connection between justice and evangelism highlights the fact that the church's focus on evangelism should never become an excuse to not engage in Biblically mandated acts of love, namely feeding the poor and doing good to all (Galatians 6:10). Nor should we become so focused on justice issues that we fail to be evangelists. As Christians, we are called to do both.



THE CHURCH'S CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY

The principle mission of the church is to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Its responsibilities include preaching, teaching, healing, nurturing, giving, administering, building, and many other tasks. As a result, church congregations have a dramatic positive impact on society. In fact, 92% of America's 353,000 congregations provide services to their communities designed to meet basic human needs.⁶

A study of churches in Philadelphia calculated that if the city had to pay for the services provided by its 1,376 congregations, it would cost \$247 million a year. That turns out to be \$178,000 per church! And

the study made the point that the real financial impact was probably many times more than that.⁷

Studies have shown that local churches are vital to the social fabric of their neighborhoods and that they have a major role in meeting the needs of people in their communities. In fact, in many ways churches are the true social safety net for those in need in America. As the Philadelphia study put it: "From mentoring programs for children to feeding the hungry, congregations are the most visible and frequent community institution to which people in need apply."⁸

Not only do churches provide direct services to those in need, but church people help beyond what their churches do. Some 85 percent of households that give to churches also give to other kinds of organizations. In fact, the majority of financial support received by secular non-profit organizations comes from those who give to churches.⁹

The impact of churches also extends to volunteering. About 67% of church goers donate their time to charity work while only 44% of those who do not go to church regularly volunteer.¹¹

UNIT 5 OUTLINE:

The two lessons of Unit 5 focus on the claim that hunger is a church issue. The first lesson asks, "What are the church's priorities?" The second asks, "How do we worship God rightly?"

In the first lesson, we will consider the constraints and limitations on the ability of governments to end hunger. We will also look at what the Bible identifies as the principle responsibilities and functions of the church.

The second lesson examines what the Bible says about how the people of God should worship the Lord. We conclude by dealing with the question of what it means to love in truth and action by looking at a variety of ways the church can address hunger.



Make sure to have the class materials recommended on page 8 ready for Unit 5.



Lesson 1 WHAT ARE THE CHURCH'S PRIORITIES?

UNIT 5: *Hunger is A Church Issue*

A Bible Study On Hunger

TEACHING LESSON ONE

OPEN WITH WORSHIP

- Tell the class that this lesson begins our look at the responsibilities of the church in addressing hunger in the world.
- Pray aloud this prayer from Latin America:
**O God,
to those who have hunger give bread,
and to those who have bread
give the hunger for justice. Amen.**
- Read aloud **1 John 3:18**.
- Collect the offering.

CONSTRAINTS ON GOVERNMENTS

- **NOTE:** You may wish to post (or point out if they are still posted) the lists created by the class in lesson 1 of Unit 3.
- Explain that in Unit 3 we examined the authority and responsibility of government to address justice issues including hunger.
- Point out that in Unit 3 we also talked about governments' accountability to God for treating their people justly.
- Finally, remind the class that in Unit 3 we reached the conclusion that God pays attention to how societies treat the poor through their use of governmental power. We even discussed how God might judge the U.S. government for how it "defends the cause of the poor."
- Divide the class into four groups. Give each group a copy of the *Millennium Development Goals*, page 48.
 - Explain that these eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted at the United Nations Millennium Summit on September 8, 2000
 - Tell the class that member nations pledged to meet these goals by 2015.
 - Ask each group to spend a few minutes going over the MDGs and discussing them
- Ask each group to reach a consensus for each of the first six MDG as to whether the world is on track to meet the goal or not.
- After the groups are finished, ask each to give their consensus for Goal 1. Then give them the actual

status as reported by the United Nations *2008 Millennium Development Goals Report* (these are given in the bullets below). Then do the same for Goal 2 and so on through goal 6.

- **Goal 1:**
 - ◇ **Poverty Rate:** The overarching goal of reducing absolute poverty by half is within reach for the world as a whole; however, the proportion of people in sub-Saharan Africa living on less than \$1 per day is unlikely to reach the target.
 - ◇ **Hunger and Malnutrition:** While the malnutrition rate has decreased since 1990, progress is insufficient to reach the MDG by 2015.
- **Goal 2:** In almost all regions, the net enrolment ratio in 2006 exceeded 90 per cent, and many countries were close to achieving universal primary enrolment.
- **Goal 3:** Of the 113 countries that failed to achieve gender parity in both primary and secondary school enrollment by the 2005, only 18 are likely to achieve the goal by 2015.
- **Goal 4:** Between 1990 and 2006, about 27 countries – the large majority in sub-Saharan Africa – made no progress in reducing childhood deaths.
- **Goal 5:** At the global level, maternal mortality decreased by less than 1 per cent per year between 1990 and 2005 – far below the 5.5 per cent annual improvement needed to reach the target.
- **Goal 6:** The number of deaths from AIDS fell from 2.2 million in 2005 to 2.0 million in 2007, and the number of people newly



Governments could have eradicated hunger long ago. That hunger remains the moral failure of our age suggests that government, by itself, is incapable of ending hunger. That means the church has a critical role in eliminating the scourge of hunger in our world.

UNIT 5, Lesson 1: WHAT ARE THE CHURCH'S PRIORITIES?



Little children, let us love not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

1 John 3:18

infected declined from 3.0 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2007. The incidence of tuberculosis is expected to be halted and begin to decline before 2015.

- Tell the class that according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, it would take \$30 billion a year on top of what is currently being spent to reach the hunger MDG. Then point out:
 - That is about what Americans spend on diet products each year.
 - It represents less than 1% of the U.S. president's 2010 budget.
 - It is just 3% of the world's expenditures on arms.
 - It is a tiny slice of the \$70.65 trillion gross world product.
- Discuss: Why do you think governments are falling short of accomplishing Goal 1?

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHURCH

- Tell the class that we will now begin to look at the responsibilities of the church.
- Ask the students what they think the responsibilities of the church are. Record their responses where all can see.
- After the list has been compiled, assign each of the four groups one or more items on the list.
- Ask each group to use a concordance to find at least one reference in the Bible that assigns the church responsibility for the item(s) they have been assigned.
 - **TEACHING NOTE:** While references abound regarding the responsibilities of Jesus' followers, the goal is to find references that pertain to the church as an institution. For instance, one might say that "helping church members in need" is a responsibility of the church. A reference that gives the church that responsibility is **Acts 6:1-6**, where the early church dealt with the problem of food distribution amongst its members.
 - Accept whatever references the groups provide even if they do not refer specifically to the church but rather to individual followers of Jesus. Ask them to highlight what the verses say. Record the scripture next to the item on the list.
 - Possible references include:
 - ◇ Worship: **Acts 2:46-47**
 - ◇ Evangelism: **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**

- ◇ Care for the poor: **James 1:26-27**, **Galatians 2:10**,
- ◇ Doing good works: **Titus 3:8**
- ◇ Generosity: **2 Corinthians 8:1-7**
- ◇ Healing: **Acts 5:12-16**
- ◇ Help one another: **Galatians 5:13-14**

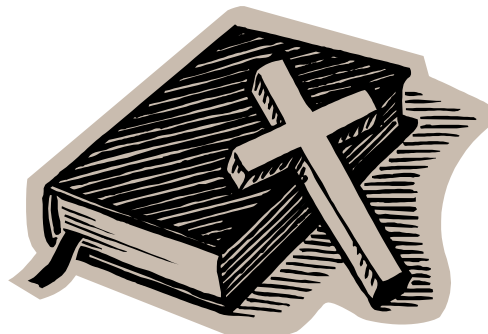
- Ask: Where does the church get its mandate to feed the hungry and help the poor? Use the following to guide a class discussion:
 - What is the Greatest Commandment.?
 - What is the second greatest?
 - Have someone read aloud each of these scriptures:
 - ◇ **Matthew 22:34-40**
 - ◇ **Mark 12:28-34**
 - ◇ **Luke 10:25-28**
 - What does it mean to "love your neighbor".
 - Read the key verse, **1 John 3:18**. Ask what it means to love in "truth and action."
- Ask if there are any other groups of people besides the church that have such a mandate.

WHY GOOD WORKS?

- Point out that feeding the hungry, calling on the sick, helping those in need, visiting the imprisoned, etc. are classified as "Good Works" by the church.
- Have someone read aloud **Ephesians 2:8-10**. Have another class member read aloud **Colossians 1:9-11**. Then discuss:
 - Based on these scriptures, is our doing good works connected to our salvation? How?
 - Why does our doing good works please the Lord?

CLOSING

- Have someone read aloud **Matthew 5:14-16**.
- Read aloud *Let Your Light Shine* from page 8.
- Remind the class that as people of God we are called to do good works to the glory of Jesus Christ.
- Close with prayer.





**UNITED NATIONS
MILLENNIUM
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS**

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Millennium Development Goals

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty

- Halve, between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day
- Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

- Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

- Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

- Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

- Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
- Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

- Integrate the principles of sustained development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources
- Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water
- Have achieved, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

- Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system
- Address the special needs of the least developed countries
- Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states
- Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term
- In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth
- In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries
- In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications

SOURCES: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>
The World Bank, *World View: 2003 World Development Indicators*



Lesson 2 HOW DO WE WORSHIP GOD RIGHTLY?

UNIT 5: *Hunger is A Church Issue*

A Bible Study On Hunger

TEACHING LESSON TWO

OPEN WITH WORSHIP

- Tell the class that this lesson continues our look at the responsibilities of the church in addressing hunger in the world.
- Say a prayer.
- Read aloud **1 John 3:18**.
- Collect the offering.

CHARITY AND JUSTICE

- Ask the class if anyone can explain the difference between justice and charity in the modern Christian context. The points below can be used to guide the discussion.
 - Charity (or mercy):
 - ◇ Typically involves private individual acts.
 - ◇ Is in response to immediate needs.
 - ◇ Involves things like providing direct services, food, clothing and shelter.
 - ◇ Requires actions to be repeated.
 - ◇ Directed at the EFFECTS of social injustice or its symptoms.
 - Justice:
 - ◇ Directed at the root CAUSES of social injustice.
 - ◇ Promotes social change.
 - ◇ Responds to long-term need.
 - ◇ Can require public, collective action to be achieved.
 - ◇ Often called “Social Action”.
- Point out that in the Christianity community charity and justice are sometimes approached as “either-or” rather than “both-and”. In other words, Christians sometimes tend to either extend charity or engage in social action rather than doing both.
 - Ask the class if they can think of any examples of this phenomenon.
 - Ask if this ever happens in their church.
- Discuss this statement: Christians are called both to help those who suffer by meeting their immediate needs as well as to work to change the unjust social structures that led to the suffering in the first place.

WORSHIPING GOD

- Remind the class that one of the priorities of the church is to worship God (refer to the previous lesson).
- Note that when we talk about worshipping God, one of the first issues we must deal with is how can we worship God rightly.
- Divide the class into three groups. Assign each group one of these scriptures:
 - **Acts 2:43-47**
 - **1 Corinthians 14:26-33**
 - **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**
- Ask each group to list the elements of worship identified in the assigned scripture. Then ask each group to share their list aloud with the class, recording the items on a chalkboard, white board, or newsprint.
- Have the class turn in their Bibles to **Isaiah 1:8-20**. Ask them to follow along as you read aloud the scripture. Then discuss:
 - What elements of worship are identified in this scripture?
 - How do they correspond to the list the class has just created?
 - How does God in this scripture react to the worship of the Israelites?
 - What does God desire in our worship?

THE BODY OF CHRIST

- Keeping the three groups from the previous section, assign one of these scriptures to each group:
 - **Romans 12:1-8**
 - **1 Corinthians 12:12-31**
 - **Ephesians 4:1-16**
- Ask each group to identify and list the spiritual gifts described in their assigned scripture.
- After the groups have completed their lists, ask one of the groups to write its list on a chalkboard, white board, or newsprint.
- Have the remaining two groups in turn add to the list any gifts identified in their assigned scripture that have not yet been listed.
- Referring to the scriptures, discuss why members of the Body of Christ are given spiritual gifts.

UNIT 5, Lesson 2: HOW DO WE WORSHIP GOD RIGHTLY?



Little children, let us love not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

1 John 3:18

- Read aloud **1 Peter 4:8-11** from the NIV or NLT translations (see Teaching Notes below).
 - Ask: What, according to this scripture, is the purpose of the spiritual gifts given to us?
 - Discuss: How can we use our spiritual gifts to glorify God
 - **TEACHING NOTES:**
 - ◇ This scripture in the NRSV calls on Christians to love and serve one another with their spiritual gifts. (v. 10) From this, one could conclude that the purpose of one's gifts is exclusively to build up the church. However, other English translations put it slightly differently.
 - ◇ For the purposes of this study, the NIV or NLT is a better translation of this scripture.
 - ⇒ The NIV says gifts should be used to "serve others"
 - ⇒ The NLT says, "*God has given gifts to each of you from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Manage them well so that God's generosity can flow through you.*"
- Point out that the imagery we have used in discussing spiritual gifts is that of the Body of Christ.
- Discuss: What attributes does this description suggest? Some possible ones are:
 - Members relate to one another and depend on one another.
 - The church is more than a collection of people.
 - The church is equipped to do all that God calls it to do.
 - The church is the physical body of Christ present in the world.
- Ask: If the church is indeed the physical body of Christ present in the world, in what ways could local your church address hunger as Jesus would? Record the answers on a chalkboard, white board, or newsprint. Some ideas might include:
 - Operate a food pantry or soup kitchen
 - Meals on Wheels
 - Pray for the hungry
 - Help people fill out food stamp applications
 - Write to legislators
 - Have a hunger awareness Sunday
- Once the list is completed, ask the students to identify those which their local church is currently doing. Then identify those which their regional or national level church is doing.

CLOSING

- Have someone read aloud **1 John 3:18**.
- Read aloud **2 Thessalonians 3:10**
- Read aloud *Are Their Limits To Compassion* from below.
- Remind the class that as people of God we are called to be Christ's body at work in the world.
- Close with prayer.

Are There Limits To Compassion?

2 Thessalonians 3:10

Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica that "anyone unwilling to work should not eat". How do we square this sentiment with the compassion for the hungry shown in so many other places in scripture?

The answer to this question lies in the understanding that as followers of Christ, God's will for us is that we give and work as much as we can to alleviate hunger and suffering in Jesus' name.

Apparently there were those in the church in Thessalonica who had lapsed into idleness. They had quit working altogether and ended up just sponging off other Christians. Paul's response was simple. As harsh as it might sound, he said that if they would not work, then don't feed them.

There are two points that need to be made about this scripture. First, Paul's admonition applied specifically to those within a particular community of faith who refused to work. It would be over-reaching to conclude that this verse has universal application.

The second point is that the idle ones in Thessalonica were failing to practice real love. They not only had stopped working to feed themselves, but they had also stopped working to help others. At the same time, by taking advantage of the compassion of the church, they were reducing the church's capacity to feed the hungry outside the church. Therefore, Paul's instructions to the church were designed to get the slackers back to working to do God's will. They were not a general call for the church to feed only those who work.

The limit to our compassion should be no less than the limit to Jesus' compassion for those in need.



TEN STEPS TO FIGHT HUNGER

The Fast That I Choose

A Bible Study On Hunger

Hunger is a complex and many-faceted tragedy that holds much of the world's family in bondage. Because of the scope of hunger, many of us feel there is nothing that one person can do. We think the tragedy is too massive for one person's action to be effective. Such is not the case. Each of us can make an impact on behalf of our hungry brothers and sisters. Here are ten steps to help you fight the unnecessary evil of hunger.

1. **PRAY:** Pray for those of our human family who do not have sufficient food. Pray also for wisdom in discovering what you can do to help those who are hungry.
2. **BECOME MORE INFORMED:** Learn more about hunger. Read and study books, magazine articles, and newspaper stories dealing with hunger and related issues. Learn about hunger in your own community.
3. **DISCUSS THE TRAGEDY OF HUNGER WITH YOUR FAMILY:** It is important to help our families realize the scope of hunger. Take time to discuss the issues raised by living in a hungry world with those nearest you.
4. **RAISE AWARENESS OF OTHERS:** When you share what you learn about hunger with others, you will find out that you are not alone in your concern for the hungry. Many of your friends and neighbors are also looking for ways to help.
5. **FORM A LOCAL HUNGER ACTION GROUP:** Help interested people in your church and/or community to organize on behalf of the hungry. Working together provides inspiration and support to tackle hunger head-on.
6. **CONTRIBUTE TO A HUNGER MINISTRY:** Most hunger ministries provide high service return. Many spend every dollar donated on hunger relief.
7. **WORK TOWARD A MORE RESPONSIBLE LIFE STYLE:** Most of us can consume less of the world's resources than we now use. We certainly can be less wasteful and more mindful of the needs of our hungry world.
8. **BECOME AN ADVOCATE FOR THE HUNGRY:** Speak on behalf of the hungry. They have little or no voice, but you can support public policies that help the hungry around the world as well as around the corner.
9. **VOLUNTEER:** Most hunger relief organizations need the help of volunteers. Become involved in ministering directly to the needs of others by helping at a soup kitchen, food pantry, etc. You can even help salvage food from farmers fields or grocery stores and deliver it to those in need.
10. **START NOW:** There is no better time to begin than right now. If you wait for a better time to come along, it probably won't. Begin your fight against hunger right now. A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Do something now.