

CHRISTIAN STUDY GUIDE - 2014 HUNGER REPORT

LEADER'S RESOURCE

Notes and Suggestions

1. The 2014 Christian Study Guide includes six small-group sessions rooted in the content of the 2014 Hunger Report, *Ending Hunger in America*. Session 1 introduces the Report's overall theme; the following five sessions develop specific topics emphasized in the Hunger Report. If your group cannot do all six sessions, we recommend that you do Session 1 and then as many others as you can.
2. We anticipate that each session will have a facilitator, but the leader needs no specific expertise on the report's content to facilitate the session.
3. The study guide is designed for Christians of many theological and political viewpoints. You should feel free to adapt the guide to enhance the experience for your group. The section below, Preparation Suggestions for Group Leaders, identifies websites for social policies of different Christian traditions.
4. The guide directs participants to read short relevant sections of the Hunger Report during the sessions. *Ending Hunger in America* and www.hungerreport.org are filled with detailed analysis, statistics, and stories; additional reading will enrich your conversation, but it is not required.
5. Each session includes:
 - The Word: Biblical reflection materials and reflection questions.
 - The Issue: A summary of the theme as presented in the Hunger Report and reflection questions.
 - The Application: Activities to engage group members in analyzing current realities, using content from the Hunger Report and their life experiences.
 - The e-connect: A way to use social media to engage others in the session's topic.

6. The sessions as written may take an hour to 90 minutes each, but should be adapted to meet the scheduling needs of the group. We invite you to open and close each session with prayer, especially remembering those most affected by the topics that you discuss.

Preparation Suggestions for Group Facilitators

1. A Bible is required for each session. Participants could be encouraged to bring additional translations to enrich the biblical reflection.
2. It will be helpful to have a copy of the session materials for each participant and most sessions include activities using newsprint, a flip-chart, or a whiteboard.
3. Most sessions also include an activity that will require access to the Internet. If your group will not have Internet access when they meet, have someone print out relevant pages or data.
4. After you familiarize yourself with the outline of the session, adapt the activities to best serve the needs of your group.
5. To learn more about social policy in your own Christian tradition, visit the website of your denomination or national group to see if it includes a discussion of social policies. You might also visit the social policy websites of:

National Association of Evangelicals

www.nae.net/government-relations

National Council of Conferences of Churches

www.ncccusa.org/NCCpolicies

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

www.povertyusa.org

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6. Throughout the year, www.hungerreport.org is updated with new stories and statistics. Two other resources which may be of interest are Bread for the World's recently published *Biblical Basis for Advocacy to End Hunger*, which can be downloaded or ordered at www.bread.org/biblical-basis, and the website www.evangelicaladvocacy.org.

Ideas for Further Action

We hope the Study Guide stimulates further interest in the issues discussed in the Hunger Report. Here are suggestions for activities to engage your group beyond this Study Guide.

1. Learn from firsthand experience

Find a way for your group to spend time with someone whose life experience has given him or her personal knowledge of hunger, poverty, and/or U.S. development assistance. Also, watch the movies *Inequality for All* (www.inequalityforall.com) and *A Place at the Table* (www.mag-pictures.com/aplaceatthetable/).

2. Engage with Bread for the World

a. *Bread for the World's Offering of Letters.*

Each year, Bread for the World invites churches and campus groups across the country to take up Offerings of Letters to Congress on issues that are important to hungry and poor people. The Offering of Letters enables individuals to see their concerns translated into policies that help hungry and poor people improve their lives. To learn more about Bread for the World's Offering of Letters this year, visit www.bread.org/OL

b. *Contact your Bread for the World Regional Organizer.*

c. *Visit us at www.bread.org to read the Bread Blog and Institute Notes blog. Find us on Facebook and follow us on [twitter@bread4theworld](https://twitter.com/bread4theworld).*

3. Write to your state or local representative

Write to your representative in the city council, state assembly, or Congress to share your thoughts and concerns about hunger and poverty.

4. Learn what your denomination or national association is doing related to hunger and poverty



For more information, interactive stories, data, or to download full chapters of the Hunger Report, see www.hungerreport.org

SESSION 1: ECONOMIC PROSPERITY TO BENEFIT EVERYONE

1

The Word

Read Exodus 16:15-20 and Luke 12:13-20

In scripture, when God's will is being done, resources are shared and everyone benefits. We see this perhaps most notably through iconic feeding stories such as manna in the wilderness, the miracle of the loaves, and the Last Supper. God provides for the good of the community and all are fed. This doesn't necessarily mean that everyone gets the same amount, but each person gets what he or she needs, and often abundance remains afterward. Likewise, greediness is said to be counter to faithfulness. In the Exodus story, wormy rotting manna represents taking and attempting to store up more of God's provision than one needs or can use. And in Luke's Gospel, Jesus uses the example of a greedy farmer to describe someone with the wrong priorities.

1. What does it mean to you as a Christian for everyone to have "as much as they need"?
2. What might have happened if the greedy farmer in Luke had thought about the needs of his community rather than just about how he could store more and more?
3. How do you identify and share your abundance? How do your family and your church do the same?

The Issue

Concern for the common good, the common "weal," was so important during the founding of our country that four of the newly unified states kept the title "commonwealth" rather than calling themselves "states." However, economic prosperity has not benefitted everyone. For example, between 1979 and 2007, the top 5 percent of U.S. income earners received 81 percent of the gains from economic growth.

The current median wage is \$16.30 an hour. Half of American workers earn more than this, and half earn less. But if wages for all workers had risen at the same rate as productivity growth, then today's median wage would instead be \$28.42. At the same time, inequalities in wealth (the value of accumulated assets, such as savings or equity in a home) have grown at a staggering rate. Wealth has proven to be at least as important as income, if not more important, to one's prospects of getting out of poverty for good.

1. What are some of the costs of not sharing economic prosperity more broadly? Are there potential benefits?

SESSION 1: ECONOMIC PROSPERITY TO BENEFIT EVERYONE

2. What are some possible reasons for the inequalities in income and wealth that we see today? Have you seen examples of how prosperity can be fairly shared?
3. How do you think our federal budget should share the gains from growth in the economy?

The Application

1. Review the Figure ES.1 on page 4 and Figure i.4 on page 16. Make a list of all the trends that you see in the graphics and all the connections you see between different measurements in those graphics. Put an X next to all the items on your list that hurt hungry and poor people. Put a check mark next to the things on your list that you think should concern people of faith. Who has the power to do something about the things on your list and what can they do? Now look at the “Ending Hunger in America” info-graphic at www.hungerreport.org. Discuss how the strategies in the infographic could affect the trends and relationships on your list.
2. Look at figure i.1 on page 11 and read the Conclusion, starting on page 169. Make a list of the challenges to ending hunger that you find in those sections. Develop a strategy to answer the question in the conclusion, “How are people doing?” by making a list of what needs to be measured in order to get an accurate answer.



The e-connect

Find the unemployment and poverty infographic on the Issues page at www.hungerreport.org/issues. Use the Facebook or Twitter tab to start an online conversation about why poverty and unemployment track so closely.

SESSION 2: FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS AS ECONOMIC UNITS

2

The Word

Read Isaiah 65:20-23

In the reign of God, we are all brothers and sisters—the family of God. The passage from Isaiah shares God’s promise for this family. The primary biblical unit of community was the household: Noah boarded the ark with his household, the Passover lamb was eaten by households, and, as he sent them forth, Jesus instructed his disciples to bless or release households. When asked about his family, Jesus said, referring to his disciples, “These are my brothers and sisters.” People were baptized along with their households, and in the Acts of the Apostles, households served as nuclei for the early church. In his letters, St. Paul consistently refers to fellow believers as “brothers and sisters.” In Jesus’ time and in ours, expectations of shared economic resources (food, housing, and money) are integral to the language of family and household.

1. Who is in your household?
2. As a Christian, who do you consider to be your brothers and sisters?
3. With whom do you share resources (money, housing, food)? Are there other economic implications of your first two answers?

The Issue

Amidst concern about the disintegration of the American family, our nation’s families and households that people share continue to serve as essential safety nets. They must be supported if we are to end hunger and poverty. The Hunger Report describes the uneasy relationship of employment in America with care for children, seniors, and people with disabilities and points out that ample research shows that marital stability is linked to favorable household economic conditions. It also shows the high frequency of temporary poverty. Since the official poverty rate is based on household income for a full calendar year, it doesn’t reflect the extent to which people cycle in and out of poverty during that year.

1. What are the effects on a household of moving in and out of poverty?
2. Many Americans are paid too little to work their way out of poverty. As a result, the majority of households that qualify for SNAP (formerly called food stamps) are working families with children. The Hunger Report calls for jobs that pay a living wage and enable people to feed their families without SNAP benefits. What are some of the many other ways that a household would benefit from a living wage for its workers?

SESSION 2: FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS AS ECONOMIC UNITS

The Application

1. Read Box i.4 on page 31 (or in the Featured Stories at www.hungerreport.org). Note the many causal relationships that affect families. On a flip chart page, make three columns. In the first column, list the “causes” (e.g., lack of economic stability) in the article, and in the second, list the potential “results” (e.g., people remaining unmarried) that are mentioned. Then in the third column, list “suggestions” for changing some of these cause and effect relationships.
2. Visit <http://www.epi.org/resources/budget/> and enter your location and the sizes of the households that your group members live in. Review the estimates of what it costs to live in your area. Then compare those numbers with the U.S. weighted poverty thresholds as shown here for households of these sizes. How do these numbers compare with your group’s actual experiences of the cost of living? Based on Figure 1.1 on page 37 make a list of policies that might help families move themselves out of the bottom fifth of household incomes.

The e-connect

Share the cost of living and poverty threshold numbers from this session with your online community on Facebook, Twitter, or other social media network. Start a conversation about what it means to live in poverty in your community.

2013 Federal Poverty Guidelines

48 contiguous states and DC

Household Size	100 percent
1	\$11,490
2	\$15,510
3	\$19,530
4	\$23,550
5	\$27,570
6	\$31,590
7	\$35,610
8	\$39,630
For each additional person, add	\$4,020

SESSION 3: EXPECTATIONS FOR THE COMMON GOOD

3

The Word

Read Deuteronomy 4:5-8 and Leviticus 19:9-10

Biblical instructions, whether they are the Ten Commandments, the Deuteronomic Code, or Jesus' great commandment, often focus on relationships—both relationships between people and the relationship between people and God. Strong values underlie these rules and expectations. The passage from the beginning of the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy is attributed to Moses and takes place just as the Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land after 40 years in the wilderness. Moses articulates the importance of the divinely revealed Torah—the rule of life for the Israelites. The Leviticus passage offers guidance on how to live in community. The instruction on gleaning connects holiness with neighborliness—demonstrated by being in relationship with poorer neighbors in ways that enable them to provide for their households.

1. What values do you see represented in today's laws and programs that affect hungry and poor people, and how are these values represented?
2. As a Christian, what values do you think should be reflected in our laws and programs as they relate to hungry and poor people?

The Issue

Over the years, a number of system-wide investments have been shown to improve living conditions for everyone. The Hunger Report argues for policies and programs that “lift all boats.” An adequate minimum wage, investments in infrastructure that also create jobs, and Social Security are discussed as specific examples of such system-wide efforts. The current minimum wage is not enough to support a family to live, and there is no consensus in Congress on how to proceed with investments in Social Security or infrastructure. Today, across-the-board cuts get more attention on Capitol Hill than strategic policies and programs to solve problems.

1. Read the section entitled “Invest in Infrastructure and Emerging Industries” in Chapter 1. What public works infrastructure improvements are needed in your community? Who would benefit, directly and indirectly?
2. What is your understanding of the costs and benefits of raising the minimum wage?

SESSION 3: EXPECTATIONS FOR THE COMMON GOOD

The Application

1. Read Box 1.2 on pages 44-45 and Figure 1.4 on page 45 (or in the Featured Stories section at www.hungerreport.org). On a flipchart page, make two lists. On one side, list the costs of sequestration mentioned in the sidebar, as well as any others you can think of. On the other side, list the benefits of sequestration and of making federal policy in this way. What do you think of your lists?
2. Review the household budget amounts you identified in Session 2, using the EPI Household Budget Calculator at www.epi.org/resources/budget/. Working 40 hours a week for 52 weeks a year adds up to 2,080 work hours a year. What hourly wage would be required for your households to reach their suggested income levels? Now look at Figure 2.8 on page 76. What would be the effect on your household if the minimum wage had grown in proportion with productivity?



The e-connect

Find the minimum wage infographic on the Issues page at www.hungerreport.org/issues. Use Facebook and Twitter to share it. Ask your network if someone working full time should have to choose between paying rent and buying good food for their children. What could help change this situation?

SESSION 4: MULTIPLIERS TO MAXIMIZE RESULTS

4

The Word

Read Matthew 13:31-33 and I Cor. 1:26-36

In God's economy, an investment in something small can make a big difference. Jesus likens the kingdom of God to a tiny mustard seed that grows into a bush or a bit of yeast that can leaven a whole loaf. Investing in a mustard seed can lead to a place large enough for birds to make nests, lay eggs, and hatch new life. In his ministry, Jesus focused his attention on seemingly unimportant people with significant results. For example, his "investment" in an outcast Samaritan woman alone at a well in the middle of the day resulted in one of the most prolific evangelists in the gospels. When Paul was writing to the Corinthians, a few people were wealthy and powerful, but most were poor and lacked social status. The apostle noted how God's grace uses that which is small and lowly to make a difference.

1. In your life, have there been times when a small investment has led to a surprising payoff?
2. How does your church decide what ministries to support (i.e., what to invest in)? How do you yourself decide?

The Issue

Just as corporations seek to maximize their return on investment, our country's economic policies should build on previous policies and programs that have proven multiplier effects (as the name suggests, "multiplier" means that they extend and maximize the value they produce). The Hunger Report offers examples such as investing in Pre-K education; investing in manufacturing; reducing the "output gap" (the difference between what the economy is producing and what it is capable of producing at full capacity); and reducing the high odds that having a disability will lead to hunger. Such investments produce a high rate of return for the common good.

1. Why might elected officials resist investing in programs that have been shown to be effective?
2. The Hunger Report points out that investments in clean energy technologies (see Box 1.3 on page 51) have a significant multiplier effect. What are some of the ways individuals and society at large would benefit from such investments?

SESSION 4: MULTIPLIERS TO MAXIMIZE RESULTS

The Application

1. Imagine that your group has just been charged with spending \$250,000 for the public good. Divide your members into three smaller groups. Ask group 1 to read *Support Entrepreneurs in Low-Income Communities* in Chapter 1, pages 51-54. Group 1 should prepare to advocate for the \$250,000 to be invested in a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). Meanwhile, ask group 2 to read “Human Capital Development” in the Introduction, pages 24-27, paying special attention to the paragraph that begins, “College can make a world of difference...” and Figure i.11, “Estimated Baccalaureate Degree Attainment.” Group 2 should prepare to advocate that the \$250,000 be invested in college tuition for very low-income students. After Groups 1 and 2 offer their arguments, ask the members of Group 3 to decide how the money should be spent and explain the basis for their decision.
2. Read the section entitled “Early Education” in Chapter 3 on pages 99-100 and look at the map in Figure 3.7 to find the percentage of 4-year-olds provided with early education in your state. How do you feel about the data for your state? Next, visit the website for the National Center for Children in Poverty’s “50 States Demographics Wizard” at <http://www.nccp.org/tools/demographics/>. Enter your state. Choose “child’s age” as your area of interest; choose “characteristics as denominator.” Then click the “create table” button. How do your state’s statistics compare to the national figures? Should your state be making different investments? Discuss how to share this information with your congregation.



The e-connect

Find the infographic on investment in early childhood education on the Issues page at www.hungerreport.org/issues. Share the image on Facebook, Twitter, or other social networks and ask your friends and followers to name ways that getting a head start is good for children, families, and for the country.

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SESSION 5: REDUCING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

5

The Word

Read Lev 13:45-46 and Matthew 8:1-4

The dream of God is for all to be included. But in Jesus' time as in ours, people who were considered to pose a threat to the community, to carry an infectious disease, or to simply be troublemakers were kept apart from the community. The 13th Chapter of Leviticus describes in detail the process by which priests should decide whether people with leprosy sores should be included in the community or excluded—in the words of Leviticus 13:46, sent to live “outside the camp.” Priests could also restore people to community if their sores disappeared. So, when Jesus healed a leper as described in Matthew 8, he not only solved a physical or spiritual problem, he also made it possible for disenfranchised members of society to return to their communities. Jesus healed, made whole, and reintegrated into society lepers, a hemorrhaging woman, and many people with “unclean spirits.”

1. Who in your community is set apart (in group homes, hospitals, prisons, or other facilities, or out on the street)?
2. What would it take for them to be more fully included in the community?
3. How does your church minister with and to people who are “outside the camp”?

The Issue

People on the margins of society need more than a full employment economy in order to overcome hunger and poverty. Without attempting to make a complete survey of all those who are marginalized, the Hunger Report describes how social exclusion compounds the problem of hunger for people with disabilities, ex-offenders/returning citizens, at-risk youth, and our most vulnerable seniors. The report also shows how programs meant to help special populations can sometimes disconnect them further from the community. It argues for both safety nets and programs that minimize social exclusion.

1. Who in your community would need extra support, even if jobs that pay a living wage were plentiful?
2. What is a community's responsibility to care for all its members? How can communities be encouraged to live up to and even expand these responsibilities?

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SESSION 5: REDUCING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The Application

1. On newsprint, make three columns. In the first column, list the things that a household can do to reduce the social exclusion of others. In the second column, list the ways that local communities can do so. In the third column, list things that only the government can do to reduce social exclusion. What do the lists have in common? What power do members of your group have to influence your own families, your community, and your government?
2. Read Box 1.1 on page 40, and watch Nadine's story at www.hungerreport.org. How are Sary's (Box 1.1) and Nadine's situations similar? How are they different? Where do you find hope in their stories?

The e-connect

Find Nadine's video in the Featured Stories page at www.hungerreport.org/profiles and share it on Facebook, Twitter, or other social networks. Urge your friends and followers to think about how people have been pushed to the margins of your community. How can you be an advocate for them?



Clean Energy Works Oregon

SESSION 6: LEADERSHIP FOR HUNGER FREE COMMUNITIES

6

The Word

Read Exodus 4:28-5:1 and Nehemiah 2:1-8

One of the many ways people exercise leadership in the scriptures is by using their voices. Moses and Nehemiah each speak with a political leader on behalf of their people. Moses seeks freedom for the Israelites who have been enslaved in Egypt, while Nehemiah seeks permission and support from the king he serves to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city wall. Although the situations are different, in both cases a leader who is in touch with people's needs on the ground seeks support from a national leader.

1. What are some examples you've seen of Christian leaders using their voices to bring attention to a concern facing their community?
2. Do any of the leaders in your church, whether lay or ordained, advocate with government for people in need?
3. What power do you have to influence leaders in your church or community?

The Issue

Ending hunger and poverty requires leadership and collaboration. Chapter 4 of the Hunger Report highlights the importance of leadership in efforts to make communities hunger free—whether those efforts are local, regional, or national, and public or private.

It stresses that leadership requires effective communication, particularly in sharing local and regional information with national leaders and systems.

1. What are some examples you've seen of effective collaboration between leaders?
2. Do you have a sense that national leaders understand the issues facing your state and region?

The Application

1. Divide your group in three. Have one group read *The Importance of Public-Private Partnerships in Combating Domestic Hunger* by Rep. Frank Wolf on page 32, another *Why*

SESSION 6: LEADERSHIP FOR HUNGER FREE COMMUNITIES

a Public/Private System Is Our Nation's Best Choice for Feeding the Hungry by Dave Miner on pages 124-125, and the third *The Importance of a White House Summit to End Hunger* by Rep. Jim McGovern on page 33. Have each group evaluate the specific suggestions offered in the piece they read. Then, on newsprint, make a list of the suggestions the groups find most helpful, leaving space between the suggestions. Under each suggestion, identify what leader(s) could help make it a reality. Put a check mark next to the suggestions that your group could help put in place.

2. Discuss as a group the most pressing need(s) for hungry people who live in or near your community. Now read *Data Do-Gooders: A New Force in the Fight Against Hunger* on pages 148-149. Make a list of the kinds of information or statistics that would help you persuade others that the need(s) you identified are important. Put a check mark next to the data that you believe are currently available and note where it can be found. Look at the items that remain. Who might be able to collect or access that information?

The e-connect

Find the data table that lists U.S. poverty and hunger statistics by state in the Data page of www.hungerreport.org/data. What percent of people are food insecure in your state? Share the link to this table through your social networks (Facebook, Twitter, and/or others). Ask your friends and followers to explain whether and how hunger is tracked in their communities.



Courtesy of Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance