



So They Can Eat

Eleven Days Exploring
God's Response To
Hunger, A Devotional

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A Devotional

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DAY ONE INTRODUCTION:

The Gift Of Food



'Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.'—Genesis 1:29-30

There's nothing quite like a good meal. The aromas, the tastes and mostly, the people gathered around, all make the gift of food a celebration on many levels. Whether it's a five-star banquet or a simple community gathering, well-planned meals nourish our bodies as well as our souls.

In fact, ever since God created seed-bearing plants and trees as food, its nourishment has been as much about physical wellbeing as it has spiritual. When the Lord made trees of all kinds, as Genesis 2:9 tells us, he made them to be both pleasing to the eye *and* good for food (as we'll explore in Day Two). Creation's food is for body *and* spirit.

So when a person goes without the

daily provision of nutritional foods, it affects many parts of their lives, from mental health and physical development to spiritual wellbeing. A lack of food is the opposite of God's best because it keeps people from the fullness of life he's intended since Creation. Hunger, and especially famine as we see today, has no place in the Creator's desire for his people.

Today, millions of people across God's good earth are living in what humanitarians call a catastrophic state of food insecurity, that is, a *whole of life* problem. It affects a child's development as well as a parent's ability to provide. And it's happened because of a combination of crises—war, pandemics, natural disasters and greed. Many people

today don't know when—or if—they will eat another piece of bread, let alone a meal. It's unlike any other time in history, one the United Nations believes points to a scenario where we'll need to *take food from the hungry to feed the starving*.

And so, global hunger is as much a contemporary crisis as it is biblical issue. The only miracle—apart from Christ's resurrection from the dead—included in all four gospels is the feeding of the 5,000. What follows here is an overview of that scriptural theme, how God provides food *for* his people so that their hearts and minds might see he is Lord overall.

Yes, from Genesis to Revelation we see how God wants his people to be fed, to be healthy in body so they have opportunity to enjoy the fullness of life available in Jesus.

Dig Deeper:

- 1** Have you thought much about the role of food in the Bible?
- 2** Recall a time when you gathered around food with a community. How did you sense God's presence?
- 3** What are some practical ways you might respond to the global food crisis?



Prayer:

Great Creator, Lord God, we give you thanks for all that we receive from your hand, for fruit, vegetables and meats that nourish our bodies so we may live as you intend. Thank you that Jesus is our Bread of Life; we pray you might speak to us through this devotional, in his name, Amen.

DAY TWO:

Something About Those Trees



'Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.'—Genesis 2:8-9

There are many names for God: Creator, Lord, Master of the Universe, Saviour. And when we read through Genesis 1-3, we could easily add 'Tree-Maker' to the list.

In Genesis 1, we discover how God makes seed-bearing trees for food for his people as well as for all the animals and birds of the earth. Whether fig or mandarin or mulberry trees, we know trees were created—and continue—to be an essential source of nourishment for humans and for the earth's wellbeing. And the above verse in Genesis 2 reveals how God made trees to be as pleasing to the eye as they are good for food. In other words, their impact on soul and body are linked.

The apple tree, though, has gotten a bit of a bad rap as it is often associated with the forbidden fruit Eve and Adam were to avoid. Of course, the account in Genesis doesn't identify the apple—its evolution as the 'bad apple' has a long literary and artistic history. But it has come to symbolize the overt defiance those first humans made toward God. He'd told them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and yet they did.

And so ever since, humans have struggled and sweated to grow or capture, cultivate or harvest their food. That initial disobedience—which we call original sin—ushered in hard work and injustices distinguishing 'haves' from the 'have

notes' History itself can be measured in terms of famines, disparity, hunger crises, and broken or burning trees.

It's not that trees and other plants haven't produced enough food for everyone in the world to eat. It's that injustice, greed and conflict have often meant starvation for many and gluttony for those in power.

For followers of Jesus, we want our lives to reflect the fruit of God's abundant life, so that we might nourish others with the spiritual food we find in Jesus. Just as God made all kinds of trees to be both pleasing to the eye and essential for our bodies, we are to enjoy the gift of his creation as much as we might a well-planned meal. The pleasure we derive from nature is linked to the nutrition we receive from a tree's fruit; it's a whole of life approach.

And it comes with an amazing privilege and responsibility. We're to care for trees, woods and forests as they uphold an ecosystem crucial to humanity's survival. And we're to acknowledge the beauty of God's creation in the process so that others might know him, the one who sent his Son Jesus to die on a tree for our sins. Why? So we might know the love and forgiveness that comes with his sacrifice and consequently, produce fruit in our lives that will last for eternity.

Dig Deeper:

- 1 What are a few of your favourite trees? Why?
- 2 What might be some practical ways you can take care of trees?
- 3 What fruit in your life might point others to Jesus?



Prayer:

Creator of the Universe, Great Tree-Maker of our world, would you make us, as the prophet Isaiah says (61:3), into 'oaks of righteousness', so that others might eat of your life and find delight in your ways? In Jesus name, we thank you for the great provision of trees! Amen.

DAY THREE:

Joseph & His Hungry Brothers



'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.'—Genesis 45:5-7

Recently my 12-year-old son asked me, 'why was I born with so much, while kids around the world have so little?'

I've asked myself the same thing. Why do I live in suburban comfort with plenty to eat, while 828 million people are hungry? Is life a game of chance, randomly dealing out comfort for some and terrible hardship for others?

The story of Joseph in the Bible teaches us to think differently. Up until Genesis 41, Joseph's life is full of chaos. His brothers sell him into slavery and he is taken to Egypt, falsely accused by his employer's wife, and sentenced to jail. Only when we step back do we see that God has orchestrated everything perfectly. While imprisoned, Joseph wins Pharaoh's trust by predicting seven years of famine. Wise and resourceful, he is put 'in charge of the whole land of Egypt' (Genesis 41:41)

and creates food reserves, so people don't starve when the famine begins.

Then along come Joseph's brothers, seeking grain from Egypt so their families back home won't starve. When they discover who holds their fate, they are ashamed and terrified.

But Joseph offers hope with these surprising words: *'it was not you who sent me here, but God'* (Genesis 45:8).

Though the brothers tried to harm Joseph, God had better plans. He saw his people in desperate need, and as their Provider, God cared for them—even when they didn't deserve it. And God did all this *through* Joseph, placing him at just the right time and place to provide his family with food, pastureland, and livelihoods (Genesis 47:1-6).

Joseph didn't know it at the time, but his actions had eternal consequences. God wasn't just feeding a hungry family; he was keeping his promise to grow a kingdom that would one day bless all of humanity. Survival from this famine meant thousands of years later, Joseph's descendant, Jesus, would bring an everlasting deliverance. At just the right time and place, God sent Jesus to die for sins, giving humanity the gift of eternal life.

Life is not a game of chance. The same God who had plans for Joseph has plans for us. We are 'created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do' (Ephesians 2:10). Joseph could have turned his treacherous brothers away, but he chose to provide for their needs. Jesus didn't use his position for gain, but willingly laid his life down to serve. As God's dearly loved children, are we using the things he has given us—our resources, money, time, and talents—for his good purposes?

While I may never know the answer to my son's question, I believe we can trust that no matter who we are or where we live, God has placed each of us at this time and place on purpose, and for a purpose. And so, together we ask how can we use what God has given us to be a blessing to others?

Dig Deeper:

1 Take some time to thank God for all the blessings you enjoy, both physical and spiritual.

2 Why do you think Joseph could act so graciously to his brothers?

3 How can you be a blessing to others—especially those in need?



Prayer:

Dear God, you are our Provider in all things—food to eat, means to support our families, and eternal life through your Son. Please provide for those who are hungry, so they can enjoy fullness of life. Thank you for your gifts and for placing us at the right place and time, for a purpose. May we bless those in need. Amen

DAY FOUR:

Recipes For The Wilderness



'The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.'

—Exodus 16:3-4

It was never God's intention that his people starve. He *was* certainly testing the Israelites in the desert—testing their ability to trust him despite their circumstances—but the test didn't involve the deprivation of food.

At the start of this chapter, it's two and half months since Israel's exodus from Egypt. Seventy odd days since they'd left a civilization that had oppressed them, enslaved them, beaten and exploited them for generations. It didn't take long for the Israelites to yearn for the certainty of captivity, in comparison to the vast unknown that stretched before them with the gift of freedom.

In captivity, they were well fed. But at what cost?

This story in Exodus 16 encapsulates so much about God's character. He is a generous provider. Of food and of rest. Every day there was enough. Not too much, not too little—'everyone had gathered just as much as they needed' (verse 18). And on the sixth day, the people could collect more food so they could rest on the seventh day.

God's heart displayed here also reveals that his abundance was something to be experienced corporately, not individually. The people could collect enough for their

whole family. The maths was perfect. Collect even a portion more and it will be full of maggots by morning. The maggots would thwart any attempt at individualism and the temptation to hoard!

Together the people would eat, together they would learn to trust God and together they would learn to rest. They'd often been deprived of this ritual of rest under the relentless drive of Pharaoh.

When we think about the unequal distribution of food, and often labour, across our globe today, it's important to come back to this story. To the consistent provision of bread and meat, for forty years, equally distributed among God's people. No one went hungry. And everyone was invited to rest.

Today, God is inviting us to live as if we are all in this together—corporately trusting he will provide for us, our families, and our brothers and sisters around the world. As we look to Jesus, who is the Bread of Life, we are invited to join him in feeding the hungry. We pray with him for daily bread and learn to share what we have, and to trust in God's provision in a deeper way.

Dig Deeper:

1 Why do you think the Israelites attempted to stash food overnight?

2 How were the Israelites prevented from hoarding too much food and what can that teach us today?

3 In what ways is God inviting you to trust in his provision?



Prayer:

Generous God, you have always provided. We trust you to provide for us, and we ask you to show us how to rest. Out of your glorious riches, strengthen us to follow you and to trust you, even when we feel surrounded by the unknown. Amen.

DAY FIVE:

5,000 Is A LOT To Feed



“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered. “Bring them here to me,” Jesus said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.’—Matthew 14:13-21

Imagine a crowd of thousands of people, roaming around in the bush. They’ve been walking a while and they’re hungry. But there’s no electricity or food trucks or barbecues, no cars or mobile phones to order takeaway. And no one’s brought a picnic basket.

For us, the scene would be chaos. And in many parts of the world, a gathering of this size is indeed waiting for food to arrive. Camps for displaced people or valleys where families are escaping conflict or disasters do call for some kind of miraculous provision of food. Hunger and famine today in remote areas of the world (like parts of Africa and the Middle East) are at an all-time high.

In this first story in the gospels of the feeding of the multitudes, we see how much Jesus cares for the hungry and asks his followers to do the same. If you read the beginning of Matthew 14, you’ll see that John the Baptist has been beheaded, and Jesus then was looking for a solitary place, no doubt to grieve. But the crowd followed him and we learn in verse 14 that Jesus had ‘compassion on them and healed their sick.’

He seized the moment and showed God’s love in practical, caring ways. When the sun began to set, though, no one was leaving that particular remote place, and his disciples were getting anxious. They wanted Jesus to send them away, to find their own

dinner. Instead, Jesus tells *them* to give them something to eat.

What happens next must have astonished everyone. Not only are they ALL fed from five loaves and two fish, there's enough for leftovers! God's provision for his people—this is a Jewish region after all—is once again the sign of his presence, revealing his desire for people not just to have their basic needs met in a meal, but to be satisfied as well. To flourish in him.

The miracle reminds us also of the time when Jesus, the bread of life, gives his own body on the cross so that all who follow him may enjoy abundant life. True satisfaction indeed, available for thousands!

Dig Deeper:

- 1 Why do you think there is so much hunger today?
- 2 What might be some practical ways you can help feed others?
- 3 What does the feeding of the 5,000 plus in Matthew 14 teach you about Jesus?



Prayer:

God of the remote places, we thank you for your great provision of food for us, and we pray that others might have enough food as well to feed their families. Please guide us in helping others so they can eat. In Jesus name, Amen.

DAY SIX:

And 4,000 Too?



'Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way." His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?" "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish." He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children.'—Matthew 15:32-38

Again, we see Christ's compassion for the people, and this time in a Gentile region. In other words, Jesus does not want *anyone* to go hungry, regardless of their background. He knows that sending away hungry people is dangerous, that they might collapse for lack of nourishment.

But his disciples seemed to have forgotten how he'd fed the 5,000 men, plus women and children. And now all they see is a remote place with no access to food or bread. This time they have seven loaves of bread

and a few small fish—again not nearly enough for the 4,000 people in front of them. They don't see how they could feed all these people because they're focused on what seems impossible.

Yet God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, desires that all people should flourish. That's been his plan from the beginning. So, Jesus takes what they do have and gives thanks to his Heavenly Father. Then the disciples are able to feed the people, with leftovers again!

Jesus is able to take an amount of food barely able to feed his disciples and multiply it into enough for the 4,000 men, plus women and children. Why? So they would not collapse from hunger, yes, and also so that he might reveal his authority over the elements of the earth.

The Lord is so concerned with the reality of hunger that he takes a meagre offering and uses it to display his power and love. In the same way, when we give him even a small offering, he is able to use it to accomplish his purposes, and to reveal his desire for good. We don't know if these people believed he was the Christ—we only know they were hungry and he demanded they be fed.

Jesus showed compassion, which means *to suffer with*, because he himself came to earth as the suffering servant. He would suffer for all hungry people when he went to the cross, so that they might be filled. And when he conquered death, rising from the grave, he even cooked breakfast for his disciples on the beach (see John 21)! If Christ's abundant life meant meeting the needs of others so they wouldn't go hungry, those of us who are his followers must do the same.

Dig Deeper:

- 1 Why do you think Jesus cares so deeply about people going hungry?
- 2 How can you help those who are doing it tough this week?
- 3 How can you offer up a small portion in thanks to God so he may multiply it for others?



Prayer:

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your deep compassion and concern for your people. Please soften my heart that I too might be compassionate toward others, especially those who are hungry. In your name, Amen.

DAY SEVEN:

Buying Food For 5,000 Hungry Families?!



'By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish." Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass.'—Mark 6:31-39

As our world struggles with a global food crisis in 2022, we're feeling the effects here in Australia. Prices at the shops are higher than we've seen in a while and many Aussie families are struggling to feed their families, relying on the kindness of neighbours or the crucial work of local food banks. In fact, the national Food Bank of Australia reports that one in six adults haven't had enough to eat in the past year and 1.2 million children have gone hungry.

So while Mark's account of the feeding of the 5,000 is similar to that of the other gospel writers with many similar details, it records more about the costs of food. After a long day of ministry, the disciples and Jesus are in a remote place, far from villages, seaside towns or farms that could

have food to sell to the thousands who've joined them. And at first, the disciples' plea 'to send them off to buy their own' seems reasonable, a strategy that could certainly help the local economy.

After all, feeding 5,000 plus would take more than a year's wages, so why not send them out to spend their own money to buy their own food and support small businesses in the process? Surely, it couldn't be the responsibility of the disciples to feed this number of people, many of whom were strangers to them and likely without much of an income themselves.

Jesus listens to the disciples' concerns but he has another solution, as we know. He asks them to do an inventory of the

food they have brought with them. Since they only have five loaves, surely the people could do better for themselves to go and get their own bread. And with a meagre two fish, well, a fish market they passed on their way could do far better.

But Jesus is interested in something else. He no doubt knew that their yearly wages would indeed be drained if the disciples bought the food themselves. Instead, he took what they had *in the moment* and reminded them that he was the ultimate provider of all they possessed. Though they might have earned their salaries, God was the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17).

Consequently, the people did not have to buy their own food in the villages. They were given an amazing gift of grace: a free meal! They did as the disciples instructed them, sat down on the grass and waited. Jesus then gave thanks, and the people watched a tiny meal, one barely enough for a few of them, suddenly become a feast for thousands. They all had their fill, nourished both in body and in spirit because their eyes were turned back to the God who was not content to let them go hungry.

Jesus would go on to spend all he had as a man so that all of mankind would have access to his fullness of life (John 10:10). He became poor so that we could enjoy the riches of God for eternity (2Corinthians 8:9). On the cross, he gave up all he owned for those who follow him, and three days later, reminded them he was still committed to their wellbeing. He shared meals and cooked a breakfast of fish on the beach (John 21) during the forty days he walked the earth as a resurrected man. And he invites all those who've been raised anew with him to make sure others have enough to eat as well.

Dig Deeper:

- 1 Recall a time when you were given a free meal. What did it mean to you?
- 2 How could some of your wages go to provide food for others?
- 3 In what ways have you seen God provide for you lately as the Giver of all good Gifts?



Prayer:

Thank you, God, for your many blessings, for the gift of daily meals we enjoy and for the opportunity we have to share with those who do it tough. Help us to respond to the needs of others with grace and kindness in each moment. In Jesus name, Amen.

DAY EIGHT:

You Give Them Something to Eat



'Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here." He replied, "You give them something to eat."'—Luke 9:12-13

Luke's is the third account out of four retellings of the story of miraculous multiplication for the 5,000. By now, we are probably paying attention! Luke was committed to the task of meticulously conveying the stories surrounding Jesus, even when they'd been recorded elsewhere, as he said in Luke 1:3-4, 'I too decided to write an orderly account . . . so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.' So we can be sure this is an important story.

At the sight of the hungry crowds, the disciples' first instinct is to ask Jesus to make 'the problem' go away. Send them off and make them someone else's need to meet. But Jesus sees the hunger in its very present need and says to the disciples—and to us—, 'you give them something.'

Incredulous, the disciples need some event-planning assistance to get their heads around this so Jesus directs them to arrange the people into groups. It's a sensible way to break 'the problem' down. And then he asks them to share what *they* brought. He takes what they have in their hands and multiplies it—by a lot!

While this story is about Jesus' miraculous multiplication, it is also about a willingness to share. And today, for us to become people who offer what we have is a radical move in a world where we're encouraged to self-protect first. We will meet our own needs *first* and then we can help others. But sharing what we have reflects how we are made in God's image, our *Imago dei*—formed after our provider God.

When the equitable distribution to the crowds was done, there were 12 baskets of leftovers. That's one for each of the disciples. Jesus' didn't intend that they would go without so the crowd could eat. His intention was, and is, that all would eat and be satisfied. Because the kingdom of God, which Jesus ushers in, is one where, as Joel prophesised, we all 'will have plenty to eat, until you are full,' (Joel 2:26)

When we read these stories of this miraculously abundant meal, we are supposed to think back to Exodus. We're invited to connect the dots and see that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. The God of Israel who provided food in the desert is the God telling the disciples to give the crowds something to eat, and who gives his own son so that all could know his abundant life.

Today, we are confronted with the reality of 50 million people on the brink of famine. This number is hard to wrap our minds around—as hard as a crowd of 5,000 physically in front of you I imagine. But still today Jesus says to us, 'you give them something to eat.' We can trust that we will not be deprived when we give what we have to Jesus. When we bring to him what we have in our hands, we join him in the miracle of his abundant provision—no matter the size of the need.

Dig Deeper:

1 What do you think is different in Luke's account of this story than Matthew's or Mark's?

2 Why do you think Jesus tells his disciples to feed the 5,000 when he knows they don't have enough?

3 What can you offer to God so that others may benefit?



Prayer:

God of miracles, I confess I'm often overwhelmed and tempted to turn inward and away from the needs of our world. Help me, Jesus, to hear your gentle voice inviting me to join you in the miracle of providing for hungry people today. Amen.

DAY NINE:

The Ultimate Master Chef



‘When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up.

“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”—John 6:5-9

Cooking shows on television have been popular since Julia Child started hers. The challenges, the recipes, the ingredients and the presentation of each dish have a way of drawing in an audience. But the real test comes down to taste, whether or not the chefs have gotten each measurement and portion just right. The judges know what to expect but will the chefs pass the test?

By now we’ve watched Jesus literally do wonders with only a few fish and a handful of bread. Twice. Whether preparing to feed 5,000 plus or 4,000, Jesus knew exactly what the mass crowds required and how to guide his ‘kitchen’ crew in serving them a meal.

Now as we come to John’s account of the feeding of the 5,000, we get a few new details that give us more insight into

the character and vision of this ultimate master chef. First, Jesus sees the great crowd coming toward him and knows they’re a hungry group of men, women and children. He cares deeply for each individual’s needs and wants to make sure they’re given enough to sustain them for their journeys. He’s preparing the recipe in his mind.

But then he turns to one of his helpers, Philip. And though Jesus knows what is about to happen, he tests Philip to see if he has confidence in him. ‘Where shall we buy bread for all these people to eat?’ Jesus asks. He knew there were no bakeries around but he wanted to teach Philip an important lesson. Philip was incredulous—at first. ‘It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!’ Just a bite of a piece of bread—Philip had done the maths and

knew this was a big and expensive job, one that seemed impossible.

So another eager helper named Andrew jumped in and gave Jesus a quick inventory: 'This boy has five small barley loaves and two small fish.' Small is the key word here. Hardly enough to go around. And barley was a sign that this was not a wealthy boy; barley was a common food for the poor. The more well-to-do preferred wheat bread. And the fish were probably dried or preserved, possibly pickled.

At any rate, the disproportion between the need and the available resources was striking. Jesus didn't flinch. He simply instructed his disciples—including Philip—to seat their guests and he'd do the work—the work of giving thanks to his father for all that he could do. What seemed again a potentially difficult moment, where hunger was great and resources were slim, Jesus turned to the Creator of the Universe to provide for his people. And his father heard. Everyone received as much as they wanted.

Our Maker wants all people everywhere to flourish and provided a way through Jesus for us to enjoy his fullness of life. He also gave us what we need to be able to serve others with the food he's provided, the way the disciples served the 5,000 plus people. John records some of Christ's greatest claims as the one who has ultimate authority over the resources of the earth because he was the ultimate sacrificial lamb. That's why he's given us the responsibility to steward enough foods so that all people have enough nourishment. There's no shortage of food in today's world—just a shortage of willingness to serve those who are hungry. May God move his people to respond to the crowds as Jesus did—making sure they get all they need.

Dig Deeper:

1 What difference do you see between Philip and Andrew in their response to Jesus' question about feeding the crowd?

2 What new insights do you gain about Christ's character in John's account of this story?

3 What practical and creative ways can you gather people together to enjoy a meal and to encourage them to care for those who are hungry, here or overseas? (Perhaps you could use some resources from Baptist World Aid to inform them of the global needs or to make a group donation for those most vulnerable.)

Prayer:

Gracious Provider, how great of you to give us delicious and nutritious combinations of food so that we might enjoy fullness of life. Help us to provide the same for those who are hungry, as Christ himself did. Amen.

DAY TEN:

Feeding Jesus



'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in . . . Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'—Matthew 25:31-40

It's a perspective thing. We all desperately want our children and grandchildren to spend their youth wisely, to understand that it's a finite commodity. 'Please invest well'—we want to scream from our lofty tower of adulthood and hard-won experience of life. If we can just help them see how important today is in light of tomorrow, they will have a good life.

In Matthew 25, Jesus is taking a similar approach with us, his much-loved sheep. But he's not thinking about someday but *The Day*. He wants us to reconsider how we are investing our time, money, emotions, and our very selves, to grasp his perspective before it's too late.

And, on-brand for Jesus, it's a revolutionary upside-down perspective.

The good life doesn't come from investing in ourselves, but from loving and serving others, especially the 'least of these.' We're never going to be living in the fullness of life that God intends if we're chasing our own wealth and happiness. We're not made for that.

What are we made for? Well, worship. This passage encourages us to remember that we follow the one who sits on the throne in glory. He will sort the sheep from the goats, he will rule with justice and bestow blessing, and it is only through his death and resurrection that

any of us can receive an inheritance into his eternal kingdom.

And this very same risen king, from his heavenly throne, calls us to worship him in the dusty, streets of our world. His heart is for the most vulnerable, the least powerful, the most urgently in need of our attention.

It is no small task with 828 million hungry people, 771 million without clean water, 89 million displaced people, and countless others living with significant unmet needs. Jesus calls us to serve each of them with the dignity and love we would show him; when you feed them, you feed him.

At Baptist World Aid Australia, we have the privilege of partnering with people who live *this* perspective of the good life. The faithfulness of our supporters and their motivation to love the vulnerable as they love Jesus frequently moves us. We see lives changed as resources are channelled through God's people to those who need it. We are thankful and praise God for each one of them.

God doesn't want us to simply have a good life. He wants us to have a life full of purpose and joy. One where we love and serve him, and give ourselves willingly as a means of his goodness to others, especially 'the least of these.' When we feed the hungry, we feed Jesus and he feeds our hearts.

Dig Deeper:

1 What aspects of Jesus's character are most evident in this passage? How is he described?

2 Why do you think God calls us to be part of his work in caring for 'the least of these'?

3 What areas of your life need a perspective recalibration to align with Jesus' view of the needs of others, especially those who face hunger?



Prayer:

We praise you, King and Creator, for our lives and the way you have created us to serve and love one another. Please help us to see vulnerable people through your eyes and to give them the honour and respect we would show you, receiving satisfaction, purpose and joy in serving you, rather than ourselves. Amen.

DAY ELEVEN:

Banquet Table: Our Future Hope



'Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God."—Revelation 16:9

When you start looking for them, you'll find a lot of references to meals in the Bible. Right from the beginning, food is a part of God's story. The Garden of Eden was resplendent with food that was varied, colourful and I imagine, delicious.

Throughout the Old Testament, there are stories about meals that denote favour (Genesis 43:34), or wealth—the meal at Solomon's table took the Queen of Sheba's breath away (2 Chronicles 9:3-4). When David uses the image of a table set with a meal in Psalm 23, it articulates God's loving, generous presence with him always, even in dark times or in the *presence of enemies*. In Proverbs 9, a table set with food and wine is used as a poetic image for listening to wisdom.

And then the Gospels are peppered with accounts of the meals Jesus shared with the people he encountered. As we've seen throughout this devotional, God cares about food for his people; there's something important about meals. Shared meals in particular—the communal experience of being nourished

together—are an important element of the fullness of life God intends.

So, when Jesus walked the earth in human flesh, it's no surprise he enjoyed a good meal. He took many opportunities to 'sit with' people and share food and fellowship. In his presence, sinners were brought into a place of acceptance and love. He ate with friends, religious leaders, and sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes (Luke 7:36, Mark 12:3, Matthew 9:10 are good examples).

Our earlier reflections on feeding the multitudes (days five through nine) reveal the value of food to Jesus. It wasn't good to send away hungry crowds. It was a reflection of God's goodness to provide them with food. When the disciples later argued about who was the greatest, Jesus challenged them to rethink 'greatness' based on his example. Where the seat of honour may appear to be at the table, Jesus suggests the Kingdom of God is evident when we join him in serving and providing the meal (Luke 22:27).

In the lead up to the cross, Jesus initiated the most sacred meal with his disciples. In sharing bread and wine before his death, Jesus invited generations of believers to join him around *that table* and remember his love, his provision, and his sacrifice (Matthew 26:26-27).

From the first meals Adam and Eve shared in the Garden, God the Father has been providing for his children. Sometimes at grand tables like Solomon's, sometimes around the simple, sacred act of communion. Every meal, every table points to God's plan for fullness of life.

When we get to Revelation and John's prophetic vision of the future kingdom, we're invited to the most satisfying meal of all: the meal set in the New Creation, where the thirsty can drink without cost (Revelation 21:6). When heaven and earth are united, as in the Garden, there will be a great feast, an abundant celebration where all will see and know that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

We know from all the tables and meals throughout Scripture, especially in the Gospels, that 'those who are invited' is everybody. All people are invited to the wedding feast—the sinner, the Pharisee—everyone is welcome to come and eat and be nourished. As Isaiah 55:1 says, it's an invitation we're called to echo to the people around us and across the world: *'come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.'*

For more information on the global food crisis and how you can help, [click here](#).

Dig Deeper:

- 1** Have you thought much about the role of food in the Bible?
- 2** Recall a time when you gathered around food with a community. How did you sense God's presence?
- 3** What are some practical ways you might respond to the global food crisis?



Prayer:

God of creation, you formed our world ready to nourish our bodies with good food. In your death, Jesus you made a way for all people to come join you at your table. Give us courage to follow you into our hungry world and serve as you lead us. Amen

So They Can Eat

Leader's Guide

Dear Leader,

Our world in 2022 is experiencing a hunger crisis unlike any in history, one which many Australians don't know about. It's a story that rarely makes the nightly news and aside from our rising grocery prices, some of us might never know the ripple effect this global tragedy is having.

Yet, the combination of intense conflict, climate disasters and a global pandemic has meant millions of people are on the brink of famine, with crops failing, food, seed and fertiliser supplies blocked and food prices skyrocketing globally. It might feel like a distant problem, but the effect is real for millions of people who wonder if—not when—they will eat another bowl of rice, let alone a meal they can share with their family.

Famine and hunger are not new issues in our broken world. Just as the Bible records numerous examples of famine, hunger and injustice toward those most vulnerable, it also shows time and again God's amazing provision in seemingly impossible scenarios. From such stories we know God cares deeply about those facing hunger and starvation. He wants his people to experience fullness of life, and food is the first necessity toward healthy living.

This 'So They Can Eat' devotional and leaders' guide explore these biblical examples as well as God's consistent and loving response to caring for vulnerable people. We invite you to use each as an opportunity to guide your group through the issues of global hunger while prayerfully considering your collective response as God's people. Included here are biblical passages, reflections, discussions and prayers which point to Jesus' sacrificial offering on the cross as the Bread of Life.

We pray that this leader's guide may inspire anew a sense of God's provision as well as daily gratitude for what has become too easy to take for granted in our country: meals. Thank you for journeying with us in exploring God's response to hunger, So They Can Eat.

Baptist World Aid Australia

DAY ONE—INTRODUCTION

The Gift Of Food

Review Genesis 1, noting in particular verses 29-30 as a reminder of God’s original plan to provide food for his people through creation. You might want to read some news articles to contrast the creation story with today’s hunger crisis. Then read the devotional aloud with your group.

Activity

Ask your group to recall their favourite memories of food within a community (family, church, etc.) and then imagine those memories without food. How does that feel? How can they begin to think about hunger and famine and their response as God’s people?

Takeaway

Pray together that each meal you and your group have in the coming week might remind them of God’s loving provision.

DAY TWO

Something About Those Trees

Review Genesis 2, noting in particular verses 8-9 and how trees are God's design for nourishment and beauty. Consider the tree Jesus hung on as well. Then read the devotional aloud with your group.

Activity

After reviewing the gifts of food/meals from this past week, ask the group to talk about their favourite trees and why. Maybe visit one outside your church and admire it, or draw/paint some trees. What does the tree represent to them? How does it remind them of God's character?

Takeaway

Pray that God might make you and your group 'oaks of righteousness' in the coming week.

DAY THREE

Joseph & His Hungry Brothers

Review Joseph's story in chapters 37, 43, 44 and 45 of Genesis. Note that this is as much a story about God's provision of forgiveness and mercy as it is of food. Then read the devotional aloud with your group.

Activity

Today, some mothers facing famine are having to decide which child to feed or to sell, an impossible choice for a parent. Joseph's brothers sold him off into slavery out of jealousy, without thinking of the consequences. Then when they themselves face famine, Joseph is in a position of providing for them. How do you think he would have felt? What are some ways you can act graciously to others who have wronged you?

Takeaway

Pray that God might lead you and your group to know how best to provide for others facing hunger because of injustice.

DAY FOUR

Recipes For The Wilderness

Review the story of Moses leading the Israelites, in Exodus 14:21-16:36. Note that this is another story of God's provision while also desiring his people to turn to him and trust him. Then read the devotional aloud with your group.

Activity

Discuss reasons why the Israelites might have thought slavery was a better option than freedom, perhaps narrowing in on the sin of entitlement versus gratitude. What are some specific ways you and your group can trust God to provide? What can we learn from Moses in his leadership of the Israelites?

Takeaway

Give thanks to God for all the ways he has been generous with you and your group.

DAY FIVE

5,000 Is A LOT To Feed

Review all of Matthew 14 noting what is happening for Jesus and his disciples at this point in his ministry. Imagine a modern day setting that would draw at least 5,000 people, such as a concert or sporting event. Describe what that event might be like without any food. Then read the devotional aloud with your group.

Activity

This is the first of four times we'll look at the story feeding the multitudes. Make a list of the details or words the group notices that you can add to later as you study the other examples. What does this first story reveal about Jesus? What are some ways you and your group might help those in remote places?

Takeaway

Consider ways you can share some of your food this week with others, maybe dinner with friends at your home, lunch with a colleague or classmate, or a special treat to deliver to a neighbour.

DAY SIX

And 4,000 Too?

Review all of Matthew 15 to note what else is happening in Christ's ministry. Consider a modern-day event that might attract 4,000 people or less, and all the planning that might be required to feed them. Perhaps a camp for displaced people or refugees. Then read the devotional aloud with your group.

Activity

Add to your list some of the details or words that your group notices about how this story of feeding the 4,000 is different from the previous story. Why do you think the disciples asked where they could get enough bread? What does Jesus' response teach you about his character?

Takeaway

Together, ask God to make your hearts more compassionate toward others this week, especially those who face hunger.

DAY SEVEN

Buying Food For 5,000 Hungry Families?!

Review all of Mark 6 to note how Mark’s description of Christ’s ministry might include different details. Discuss how wages are necessary for food and affect a person’s ability to care for their families. Perhaps consider the challenges farmers in Australia face as well as those in countries like Uganda or Nepal. Then read the devotional aloud.

Activity

Add to your list some of the details or words that your group notices about Mark’s version of this story. Share times you were given an unanticipated meal and what that meant to you. How do you think these people felt receiving a meal that they didn’t expect? What might this experience have taught the disciples?

Takeaway

Consider collecting food donations for the Food Bank of Australia or for your church to give away to those who might be doing it tough. Pray for those people who help people get enough to eat.

DAY EIGHT

You Give Them Something To Eat

Review Luke 1:1-4 and all of Luke 9 to note how and why Luke describes Christ's ministry, in particular his feeding of the 5,000. Though it's not the first time we see Jesus telling his disciples, 'You give them something to eat', it's the focus of this week's reflection. Then read the devotional aloud.

Activity

Review and add to your list some of the details or words that Luke uses in this story. Why do you think Jesus tells his followers to feed these people when he knows they don't have enough to do that? Do you think Jesus is inviting his disciples to be a part of his miraculous work in caring for others?

Takeaway

Pray together that God might give you courage and discernment to join him in miraculous ways to provide for others.

DAY NINE

The Ultimate Master Chef

Review John 5:30-47 and all of John 6, noting the other claims Jesus makes in these chapters. Specifically, we hear him say, 'I AM the bread of life'. This might remind you of Moses and the manna God provides in the wilderness. Then read the devotional aloud.

Activity

Review your list of details that describe the feeding of the masses. How have the disciples responded to Jesus and the crowds? Then, discuss fast forward to the impact of cooking shows on modern Australia, and the creative ways you and your group might make a meal for others. What new insights have you gained together about God our Creator and Jesus the Bread of Life from this chapter?

Takeaway

Consider planning a beautiful community meal together to raise money for an organisation that helps provide food for our neighbours in other countries, like Baptist World Aid.

DAY TEN

Feeding Jesus

Review all of Matthew 25 and the context of these parables that point to the final judgment of Christ. Consider the call to care for and feed the hungry as if we were feeding Jesus himself. Then read the devotional aloud.

Activity

Discuss the needs of the vulnerable Jesus explores in this passage: the hungry, thirsty, stranger, etc. He is explaining that how we treat these people, those most vulnerable is also how we treat him. Why do you think he identifies so closely to the 'least of these'? In what ways do these examples of God's people caring for the 'least of these' challenge you?

Takeaway

Pray together that God might provide you clear and real opportunities to care for those who are hungry, thirsty, lonely, displaced, or sick, asking him for his mercy and grace in responding as he would.

DAY ELEVEN

Banquet Table: Our Future Hope

Review Revelation 16 as well as other passages that point to the New Creation (Rev 21) and to the hope we have in Christ (Titus 2:13). Consider the 'now but not yet' vision we have of Christ's return and the New Creation we're to work toward. Then read the devotional aloud.

Activity

Review the various lessons you've learnt together from this devotional, including the various descriptions of feeding of the crowds, feeding 'Jesus' in the least of these and the consistent provision of God through his people. What do you know more about who God is, his character and attributes? How can you reflect his compassion to those who are hungry around the world?

Takeaway

Thank God for nourishing your bodies, minds and spirits, and ask him to lead you together to bring hope in practical ways to those who need both. Then please let us know at Baptist World Aid what impact this devotional has had on you and your group as you respond to God's call to join him during today's hunger crisis. We'd love to hear from you! (Hello@baptistworldaid.org.au)



**BAPTIST
WORLD
AID**

**'Your kingdom come, your will be
done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.'**

—MATTHEW 6:10-11