

World Hunger and Us

by John Piper

John Piper's sermon calls Christians to respond to global hunger as a reflection of their faith, emphasizing both physical and spiritual needs.

Scripture: Psalm 41:1

Topics: "Global Hunger", "Christian Stewardship"

Description

John Piper preaches about the global issue of hunger, suggesting that God may be allowing physical hunger to awaken His church to the spiritual starvation worldwide. He emphasizes the importance of addressing hunger in our world, connecting it to Biblical teachings, evangelism, and practical actions. Piper urges Christians to consider the poor, give generously, and actively work to alleviate suffering, highlighting the critical need to pour ourselves out for the hungry and satisfy the afflicted to experience God's blessings and guidance.

Transcript

November 1, 1981

WORLD HUNGER AND US I would like to talk about hunger. It may be that God is allowing physical hunger to ravage our globe in order to awaken his church to the worldwide (and local) ravages of spiritual starvation. Our hearts break more quickly when we see a skin-draped skeleton in its mother's arms than when we hear a missionary say: millions have never heard the gospel and are bound for hell in the wickedness of their worldliness or idolatry. Of course our heads tell us that it is much worse to be happy in this life and in torment for eternity than to be miserable only in this life. But visible earthly misery reaches our hearts more directly. Perhaps God is touching us this way in order that we might feel the horror of spiritual starvation when our heads declare: Do you weep over the suffering of these bodies now?--How much more, then, should you weep over the suffering of soul and body in eternity!

So I want to talk about hunger in our world, then relate it to Biblical teaching, then to evangelism and then make some practical suggestions as to what we should do.

Let's begin with a multiple choice quiz:

1) Of the 60 million deaths recorded each year, about what percentage are due to hunger or to problems related to hunger?

a) 10% b) 30% c) 50% d) 70%

2) The United Nations reports that, by the most conservative estimates, more than million people are permanently hungry?

a) 10 b) 50 c) 230 d) 460 (almost ½ billion)

3) Currently what proportion of the world's preschool children suffer malnutrition sufficient to permanently damage their physical and mental growth?

a) ¼ b) $\frac{1}{3}$; c) ½ d) $\frac{2}{3}$;

According to Patricia Harris, former secretary of the department of Health and Human Services, "If all of America's 25 million poor people lived in one state, it would be the nation's largest. If they were a separate nation, their total population would exceed that of more than half the nations of the world." But what is called poor in this country is often vastly better than the destitute of the third world. Hunger is mostly a threat to the southern hemisphere, namely Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Here is where the horrendous statistics come rolling in: one person in four has an inadequate diet; one in 10 suffers severe malnutrition; one third of the world's children die of malnutrition and disease before their 5th birthday; each year 100,000 children go blind due to lack of vitamin A in their diets. Whatever the reasons for the food shortages (high birth rate, poor weather conditions, rising cost of oil, cash cropping, war and marauding) one thing is sure: the children who suffer most are not to blame and so even the most calculating recompenser of merit and demerit should be moved to pity and action. All the more should Christians, whose lives are owing entirely to mercy.

The most critical area in the world right now is the Sub-Saharan nations of Africa where crop failures, merciless band of marauders and terrible refugee masses are creating unbelievable suffering. The death rate among children in Sub-Saharan Africa is more than 20 times as high as the United States. In one specific country, Uganda, the good news of Idi Amin's departure has been followed by equally devastating crisis: famine. Last week Festo Kivengere wrote:

At least 800,000 of my countrymen are literally starving to death right now. Within weeks 100,000 to 150,000 more could be dead. At least 250 people are dying each day!

How can I adequately describe to you the horrors my people face?

*An 84-year-old tribesman stands patiently in line waiting for a precious handful of cornmeal. He is only three people from the head of the line when famine strikes its final blow--he collapses and dies. His skeletal body is dragged a few yards away. And the long line shuffles forward.

*A gaunt young mother holds a tiny bundle of skin and bones to her withered breast ... but there is nothing there. Soon--perhaps tomorrow--her child will be dead, and she will have only bitter memories of unbearable suffering.

*A missionary steps out of his home to find the hunger ravaged corpses of small children at his doorstep - left there in the dark of night by distraught parents.

*At a feeding station, a fine trail of white flour drifts to the ground from a punctured bag. The children who can still move their arms and legs scoop the flour up with dirt and swallow it before the wind can blow it

away.

*A gaunt and withered man is shot in the head for his 12-cent bowl of maize porridge.

*In town after town, village after village, local trash collectors pick up the shriveled little bodies of dead children by the ankles and carry them out to their garbage trucks.

And the horror goes on!

These stories could be duplicated over and over especially now that there are 9.5 million refugees in the world huddled often in packed camps with little food and sanitation and hope (e.g. refugees in Somalia from Ethiopia and in Honduras from El Salvador and in Thailand from Laos). The reason this has now become a pressing personal ethical problem for us is that we now know about it, channels exist to help and we have more than we need. Let's see what the Scriptures confront us with?

Luke 3:11, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food let him do likewise."

Psalms 41:1, "Blessed is he who considers the poor!"

Proverbs 14:31, "He who oppresses a poor man insults his maker, but he who is kind to the needy honors him."

Proverbs 21:13, "He who closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself cry out and not be heard."

Proverbs 28:27, "He who gives to the poor will not want but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse."

Isaiah 58:10, "If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire with good things and make your bonus strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters fail not."

This is but the tip of the iceberg (see Cry Justice by Ronald Sider). God's will for us is that we give and work as much as we can to alleviate suffering in Jesus' name. This relates to evangelism (bringing people to the obedience of faith) in four ways. 1) It is included in the great commission which says we should teach the nations to do all Jesus commanded. And Jesus commanded us to give to the needy (Luke 12:33) and to do good even to those who hate us (Luke 6:27). So the great commission is not complete until the people we evangelize are giving generously to alleviate hunger. And we can be sure they never will if we aren't. 2) Active concern for the hungry and homeless validates the reality of God in our lives. Men will glorify our Father in heaven not because of what we say only, but because our lights are shining and they have seen our good deeds (Mt. 5:16). 3) Concern for the hungry helps us feel the spiritual lostness of men. For if our hearts break for their temporal physical suffering, will not our theology drive us to see the inconsistency of not being broken-hearted because of their spiritual hopelessness. 4) Concern for the hungry creates witness opportunities. If Christian ethics means for us primarily avoiding bad behavior and staying home in our comfortable houses, we will meet very few non-Christians and when we do our words of witness will be weak because they are backed up with no labor of love. But if our love of Christ and his for us drives us into action to meet the needs of refugees and the world's hungry, then we will cross paths with unbelievers and our witness will have great power because certified by active love. So never play off evangelism against other Biblically mandated acts of love, namely feeding the poor and

doing good to all (Gal. 6:10).

Now let's be specific. What can we do? 1) Set aside some time to educate yourself about the problem and the many things Christians are doing to help. You would start with a book like Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger by Ronald Sider. Then you might want to join Bread for the World, "a Christian Citizen's Movement in the USA," and get their newsletter and learn how to respond politically. U.S. Representative Paul Simon said, "Someone who sits down and writes a letter about hunger ... almost literally has to be saving a life." There are many things to be learned. For example:

*Enough grain is produced now to supply everyone on earth with more than 2 pounds of grain per day.

*The average American consumes 2,000 pounds of grain a year, mostly indirectly through meat products. On the other side of the world, the average Colombian eats 400 pounds of grain a year, mostly through grain itself. Compare this to an average steer in a feed lot, which eats 400 pounds of grain in one month. Our cattle are better fed than most of the people in the world.

*80% of all the grain produced in North America is fed to animals.

*Americans throw away enough food in a year to feed over 50,000,000 people.

*25% of the food products in North America is thrown away.

*One restaurant in New York City kept track of a portion of leftover food on people's plates for 12 months; in one year, threw away 2½ tons of meat!

2) Besides education we can change some of our own eating habits, or at least think about them. If we Americans substituted chicken for 1/3 of our own beef consumption and the cattle-people responded appropriately this could provide enough grain to feed 100,000,000 people for a year. One of the best ways to stay thin and healthy and maintain empathy with the world's needy is to make a practice of eating one helping and never eating between meals. We should think hard about how often we eat out since you can usually eat for several days on what you pay for one meal at a restaurant.

3) We should engage in regular prayer and fasting. If fasting was ever in order it is today. Prayer is enlivened and deepened by fasting. Fasting unites us to God in the dependence of hunger and it unites us to Uganda in the fellowship of hunger. And so our love and our prayers are more fervent and effectual.

4) Some of you should go. There is a book entitled, Overseas List: Opportunities for Living and Working in Developing Countries, by David Beckmann and Elizabeth Anne Donnelly. Any inclination you have, young or old, to cut loose and fly into an adventure with God should be pursued. There are opportunities for all kinds of professions as well as the traditional missionary. The need is for people passionately eager to magnify Christ through sacrificial loving service.

5) We need to give. So to encourage us in this we are having a Rice Bowl Reception after the service. November is World Hunger Month in our Conference and in the Baptist World Alliance. Rice bowls have been provided to be used like this: Each person or family should take one home and put it on your table to remind you each day and every meal to pray for the starving of the world (physically and spiritually). At each meal if you put about 15 cents in it, the bowls would have \$10 each by the last Sunday in November when we collect them and send the money through our Conference to World Relief. If 100 families or individuals do this we can send \$1000 which we will scarcely miss. Maybe some of us will want to keep

such a little bank on the table as long as hunger remains. It is so easy to grow callous, and weary of well-doing.

I urge you all to come down and pick up a bowl and enjoy fellowship. There is no food at all. So this is a test. Can we stand around and enjoy each other without cookies and coffee. I think we can because, there is a promise that should cause our hearts to overflow: "If you pour out yourself for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire with good things and make your bones strong and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters fail not" (Isaiah 58:10-11).

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