

LESSON THREE: THE FACE OF THE HUNGRY

The United States of America is a nation of vast prosperity. We have virtually eliminated poverty. “But,” you protest, “what about all the people who get food stamps and all the children the media talks about that live below the poverty level?” While it’s true, there are people living below the poverty level in the midst of all this vast prosperity, even the poorest of households have at least one car, a microwave, a television, and other amenities. Our nation’s poor live much better lives than the poor of less-developed countries. Indeed, Walter Williams, a PhD in economics from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, has posited that if someone knew they would live in poverty before they were ever born, they would choose to be poor in the United States if they had a choice. So, what does the face of the hungry look like?

PRAY: Father in heaven, all that we have and all that we are comes to us as a gift from You. Help us to be truly thankful for all You give us. Give us a hunger for Your Word. Send us Your Holy Spirit to empower and equip us to seek Your face always through Your Word. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: The impact of giving can be far greater than you’ll ever know. A few years ago, I was buying a newspaper at the airport in Bangladesh when a man tapped me on the shoulder. I recognized his face but couldn’t recall his name. He looked at the two men behind the newsstand and told them, “This man saved my life.” He went on to explain: “Several years ago, I had lost two children, because I couldn’t feed them. This man gave me a job. Today, all six of my children are in school, and we don’t go hungry.” He hugged me and began to cry.

During my six years in Bangladesh working with locals to develop sustainable micro-enterprises, I was reminded daily of the value of providing people with income. Jobs that pay fair wages enable people to live with dignity—and to arrive at a point where they, too, can contribute to their community and to society.
—Paul Meyers, Be more intentional about where you buy, *Fast Company*, December, 2000, 126.

BIBLE BASE: Ask a volunteer to read John 6:1-15. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Why did the crowd follow Jesus as He sailed across the Sea of Galilee?

In the case of many of the people, they were looking for entertainment. They had seen the miracles He was doing, and they wanted to see more. Modern Christians must remember that the people of Jesus’ day had few diversions. Miracles were something that fascinated them, and they were an important topic of conversation.

2. Why did Jesus withdraw up on the mountain?

Jesus was about to begin the final year of His ministry. He was seeking time for solitude for prayer. The solitude was also an opportunity for Him to have some time with His Apostles as He prepared them for the final months of His ministry.

3. Why did Jesus ask Philip where they were going to buy bread for the people to be fed?

Jesus was certainly not looking for advice or information. John himself tells us that Jesus was testing Philip. Philip and the other Apostles had seen many miracles before. Perhaps Jesus wanted them to recall some of those miracles. After all, He had turned water into wine.

4. How did both Philip and Andrew fail the test?

Philip concentrated on money. He concluded that they did not have enough money to buy bread to feed the people. Andrew found food. He concluded that the food was of insignificant quantity to feed the crowd. He dismissed what he had as being inconsequential.

5. What would you have thought had you been one of the Apostles when Jesus began to distribute the bread and the fish?

Reactions of participants could range from surprise to disbelief. Note that the Apostles acted as waiters for this huge banquet. Please also note that the number of men fed totaled five thousand. The number did not include women and children. No doubt the distribution of all the food took a few hours.

6. What was the significance of the leftover food?

The twelve baskets of food were not large baskets. R. C. H. Lenski and other commentators have suggested that the baskets were small ones used by travelers to carry one day's ration of food. Jesus calculated the leftovers right down to the last crumb. Ask participants to discuss whether the Apostles shared some of their food with Jesus.

7. What was the reaction of the crowd?

The crowd wanted to take Jesus by force and make them their king. The next day He chastised them for only wanting to be fed. The crowd wanted only physical food. They were not interested in the spiritual food that Jesus had to offer them.

CHALLENGE: Consider hosting a picnic or potluck dinner for the people that live in the neighborhood around your church. This could be an opportunity to find out what needs there are in the neighborhood. It is also an opportunity to share the Gospel with your neighbors and show them that you really care about them.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: One of the patients at the community hospital in Milford, Connecticut, where I regularly visited, was a tough-looking man with long hair and a shaggy beard, not a member of my church, whose face was screwed up in pain from an intense headache. He was hurting so badly he could barely talk, but he managed to communicate that the hospital didn't know what to do for him. I offered a very simple prayer for healing, asking that God ease his pain and make him well. His eyes stayed closed after, more from pain than piety, and he gave me a nod of thanks as I left.

The next day he looked like a different person, and he greeted me with a big smile. The headache was gone, he announced, and the doctors didn't know why or how. Our prayer had been answered. Frankly, I was amazed. A little of God's power had flowed into the life of one man. Never again would I be casual with prayer.

—Faith Healing Goes Mainstream, *Presbyterians Today*, September, 1995. Prayer changed the face of a man who hungered for healing.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear God, move us to seek Your face always. Use us as Your instruments to feed the hungry both physically and spiritually. Help us to pray fervently for the things You want us to have and do. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.