

## Why Should I Feed Hungry Children?

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Rich Nathan  
January 25 & 26, 2020  
Just Mercy  
Matthew 25:31-40

Have you ever been hungry? I don't mean that your stomach was grumbling a little bit because you were between snacks. I mean really hungry. Maybe you took a super long hike that turned out to be twice as long as you anticipated. By the end of it, you were not only tired but you were starving.

It may be that some of you grew up in situations where being hungry was a regular part of your life. Your family frequently ran out of food. For many Americans, it's really hard to imagine that there are people who are hungry. There's such an abundance of food and we eat so much food. The greatest health problem in the United States is not that people in our country have too little food. It's that people in our country eat too much food.

A research study from Cornell University several years ago studied the famous cookbook, *The Joy of Cooking*. It has been in print for 80 years. There's been some version of *The Joy of Cooking* since the 1930s. The researchers discovered that over the last 80 years portion sizes recommended by *The Joy of Cooking* have continually increased. So, the calorie count of every meal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the cookbook is two-thirds greater than the portions suggested in the 1930s.

In doing this extensive study of *The Joy of Cooking* recipes over the last 80 years, this Cornell researcher concluded saying:

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"These recipes were once intended to serve twice as many people as they do today, so don't let a full portion get anywhere near your plate."

We often talk about the problem of fast food and eating outside the home. But we don't talk about how much we eat in our homes. When Europeans come to the United States, they are often shocked by the size of the portions we serve here in American restaurants and in our homes. They are particularly shocked by the size of our dinner plates. If you compare your Grandma's dinner plate to dinner plates sold to newlywed couples today, Grandma's dinner plates look like cake plates to us. Her plates look like what we're supposed to put our dinner roll on. Our dinner plates look like hubcaps. Despite the obesity epidemic in America and the size of the portions we eat, there are still many hungry families in our nation.

To meet the needs of hungry families in our community, Vineyard Columbus has been operating two food pantries for years. One is the Northside Food Pantry on Cleveland Avenue, just north of Morse Road. And the other is the Fifth Avenue Food Pantry.

Slide (pictures of both pantries if available)

Northside Food Pantry  
4664 Cleveland Ave.

Fifth Avenue Food Pantry  
181 E. Fifth Ave.

Every year, we serve nearly 9,000 different people in our city and they come back multiple times. The actual number of meals provided by our two food pantries is over 214,000 meals each year. What's unique about our food pantries is that they are incredibly kind and caring environments. Our neighbors come in to the food pantry and they are often under stress. They may feel a sense of shame. Many of our neighbors have never needed to receive free food. Most of our neighbors who come to the food pantries are the working poor. They're single moms who are working two minimum wage jobs. They may be traveling on a bus to get to the food pantry or they are riding up on their bicycle or pushing a shopping cart for a mile or two. They may need medication for one of their kids or new shoes. They feel overwhelmed. The Vineyard people who serve, give our neighbors a sense of dignity and treat our neighbors with respect and love.

By the way, our food pantries are moving toward becoming choice pantries. Historically what we've done is filled grocery bags with different items and then we gave the items to neighbors of ours who came to the pantry. This year, we're converting our pantries so that our neighbors can have some choice in what they eat the same way you have choice in what you eat. They'll be able to go through and say, "Gosh, we want eggs, we want these fresh vegetables, we want this kind of cereal." They'll be able to go through and pick items out.

We need a lot more volunteers to make this new choice program work. Following the service today, we're going to have an information meeting about our food pantries in our East Lobby. If you're someone who says, "I would like to volunteer. I would like to help or bring my child to help." I did that for years. I brought my granddaughter to the food pantry to help. If you are someone who says I would like to assist my neighbors in the community to feed their families, we've got a meeting after the service in the East Lobby.

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Go to the East Lobby right after the services for a Food Pantry Interest Meeting.

But the hunger here in America barely compares with the hunger we find in other parts of the world. Pastor Irene who pastors La Vina, our Spanish language service, a couple of weeks ago in an interview I did with her, spoke movingly about starvation that is spreading throughout her home country of Venezuela. There is no food on the grocery shelves. The economy has cratered. People can't afford food for their children. Children are fainting in their classrooms.

Right now, about 800 million people in the world – one out of nine – go to bed hungry according to a recent report from the United Nations Food Agencies. Over the past few decades, the number of hungry people was declining, but recently the number has begun to spike again because of wars and the refugee situation.

Here's the simple question I'd like to pose today. With all that we've got to worry about, why should you and I care about hungry children around the world? We've got our own kids to get to soccer practice or piano lessons or doctor's appointments. We've got projects at work, car trouble, relationship problems, our own health issues and our own aging parents. So many other things vying for our attention including how the Buckeyes are going to fill some of the gaps left by players going to the NFL. Why should we care about a child living somewhere far away who is hungry? What can we do about it anyway? The problem is so big. I'm just one person. I need to focus on myself and my needs.

Back in the 1930's during the depth of the depression, Franklin Roosevelt said,

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"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have too much...it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

More recently, Bryan Stevenson, the author of *Just Mercy* (where we got our series title from) said,

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"The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned."

As we finish up this series titled *Just Mercy*, here's the question that I'd like to pose that each of us would ask ourselves personally: "Why should I feed hungry children?"

Let's pray.

Slide Matthew 25:31-40

<sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup> “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. <sup>35</sup> 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, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

<sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

<sup>40</sup> “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Why should we help to feed hungry children? Why should you and I give some of our money to feed hungry children? I’ll tick off three reasons for you.

First,

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Because feeding hungry children is a way to do something for Jesus

Here’s what we read in

Slide Matthew 25:35

<sup>35</sup> 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,

God is the source of every good thing. He is constantly a giver and never a taker. If there’s anything working in your life, it’s a gift to you from God. If you’re not in pain today, that is a gift from God. If you were able to sleep last night, that’s a gift. If you have a bed to sleep in, if it was warm in your house, those are gifts. You came to church wearing clothes. That’s a gift – not only to you, but to everyone around you. Is there anyone in the world who cares about you? Someone that you care for? Do you have meaningful work? Are you making a difference? Are you able to think? Those are all gifts! God showers us with gifts.

Sometimes we want to say, “Lord, I’m grateful for all the gifts you give me. But I’d like to give you something. I know you don’t need anything. What can I give to you simply because I love you? Of course, we can always give God thanks for the various gifts in our lives that we take for granted. We can always give God praise and worship. But Jesus says – OK, I’ll let you give me a gift. Read this again with me.

Slide Matthew 25:40

<sup>40</sup> “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

God is willing to get so low that the God who needs nothing says, “I am going to so identify myself with people in need that when you do something for them, you do something for me.

Of course, this was the philosophy that drove Mother Theresa’s whole ministry. She wanted to love the poor. But she always said that her mission to the poor was driven first and foremost by her love for Jesus Christ.

When Mother Theresa was asked about her philosophy of ministry, she said,

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“It’s very simple. I see Jesus in every human being. I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene; I must wash Jesus and tend to him. I serve the poor because I love Jesus.”

There’s a wonderful story that the writer Shane Claiborne tells of meeting Mother Theresa. He said to her, “Mother Theresa, I wouldn’t do what you’re doing for a million dollars.” She replied, “I wouldn’t do what I’m doing for a million dollars either. But I’m doing it for Jesus.”

Why should you and I feed hungry children?

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- Because feeding hungry children is a way to do something for Jesus

Here’s the second reason:

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Because feeding hungry children is a way to imitate God

Everywhere, the Bible teaches that God cares about the poor and the hungry. Listen to some of these verses:

Slide Psalm 145:14-16

<sup>14</sup> The LORD upholds all who fall  
and lifts up all who are bowed down.

<sup>15</sup> The eyes of all look to you,  
and you give them their food at the proper time.

<sup>16</sup> You open your hand  
and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, said this about the Lord:

Slide Luke 1:52-53

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.

<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.

Before Jesus taught the people, he had pity on them and he fed them. He blessed the bread and then began to feed 5,000 hungry people. Jesus didn't just do church with people. He didn't simply say, "Let me preach to you. I have some really cool things to share today." He looked out on a crowd of thousands and said, "I know you're hungry." He didn't just view people as disembodied souls on their way to heaven. He saw people in their full humanity with real physical needs in addition to their spiritual needs.

Feeding the hungry is incredibly important to God. Do you know that there are only two miracles recorded in all four gospels? Just two. One is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The second is Jesus feeding hungry people.

Why should you and I feed hungry children?

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- Because feeding hungry children is a way to do something for Jesus
- Because feeding hungry children is a way to imitate God

And third,

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Because feeding hungry children is a way to bless ourselves

God is so generous that he constantly tells us in the Bible "you can't outgive me!" He gives us gifts. You say, "I want to give you something back." And he says, "What are you going to give me back?" "Well, Lord, I'll feed a hungry child because what I do for this hungry child is what I do for you." God says, "I love what you're doing. Now I'm going to bless you even more."

Here's what we read in the Psalms:

Slide Psalm 41:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Blessed are those who have regard for the weak;

the LORD delivers them in times of trouble.

<sup>2</sup>The LORD protects and preserves them—  
they are counted among the blessed in the land—  
he does not give them over to the desire of their foes.

<sup>3</sup>The LORD sustains them on their sickbed  
and restores them from their bed of illness.

Here's what we read in Proverbs:

Slide Proverbs 22:9

<sup>9</sup>The generous will themselves be blessed,  
for they share their food with the poor.

For years, Vineyard Columbus did our own relief work all over the world. Recently, as we're going through our leadership transition from me to Eric and Julia Pickerill as our new Senior Pastors, we've begun to look over everything we do as a church. We've asked ourselves the question, "Are there some things that we do that others are doing a lot more effectively than us? Are there some things that other organizations are exclusively focused upon where it would be wise to partner with them?" One of the things that others do a lot better than us is relief work when there's a natural disaster – a hurricane or a flood in a community. Another is providing meals to hungry children around the world.

I had the privilege to travel with one of the nation's best Christian relief agency called Convoy of Hope to El Salvador. El Salvador is one of our hemisphere's poorest countries. I got an on the ground look at what Convoy of Hope was doing in El Salvador and got to see if we as a church would want to enter a partnership with them. I've known of Convoy's work for more than a decade, but I've never actually personally witnessed what they were doing.

Let me show you a video of my trip to El Salvador. At the end of this video, I'm going to be asking you to give one day's salary – that's less than one-third of 1% of what you earn – to feed hungry children.

Convoy Video

We're going to take a special offering now. We almost never take a second offering during our services. We might do that once a year. But in this series titled Just Mercy, we felt led to call our church to financially sacrifice in order to care for some of the most vulnerable people on earth and that is hungry children.

This offering is called "One Day to Feed the World". We've been talking about that over the last few weeks here at Vineyard Columbus. What I'm going to ask you to do is to

consider giving one day of your salary to feed hungry children. If you make \$36,000 and divide that by 365, that's \$100. If you make \$72,000 that's \$200. Do the math.

The money will go to Convoy of Hope to feed hungry children. I do want to let you know that if we get an offering that's over the top, if we get more than \$100,000, Vineyard Columbus is going to save some of that money to give to Convoy of Hope in the future to do additional relief work in case of a hurricane, tornado or an earthquake in our world rather than take up another offering at that time. We want to help Convoy provide assistance immediately after a natural disaster.

If you write a check, put "Convoy of Hope" in the memo line. You have an opportunity to text to give to this offering.

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Text to Give with "Convoy"

Of course, you can always give cash. If you're not prepared to give but you want to give next week, bring a check and make it out to "Vineyard Columbus" with "Convoy of Hope" in the memo line.

After the bags go through your aisle, feel free to stand and join the worship song.

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Matthew 25:31-46

- I. Because feeding hungry children is a way to do something for Jesus
- II. Because feeding hungry children is a way to imitate God
- III. Because feeding hungry children is a way to bless ourselves