

Forty Days to Better Understanding

The folks at Seeds of Hope believe that authentic work towards healing hunger comes from an inner strength derived from spiritual discipline. We also believe that a concerted effort, even by a small number of people, to observe a time of prayer together can make a huge difference in how we face the problems of hunger and poverty. This 40-day calendar is designed to help you prepare spiritually for the work ahead. We challenge you to use the scriptures and suggestions on these two pages to make the next forty days a holy season. —with blessings from the Seeds of Hope staff and Council of Stewards

7 To do your part in conserving water, landscape with native plants—vegetation that is already thriving in your region will not need much extra water—and eat less meat—a large amount of water is required to grow the grain that feeds livestock.

Genesis 1:28-31

11 Next time you go to your closet, take a moment to look and see how many outfits you never wear. Bag up these unused clothing items and take them to a local family shelter.

Matthew 25:31-46

14 Take the Food Stamp Challenge. For one week, live on a food budget (\$118.07 for a family of four). All food eaten during the Challenge must be included in your budget (don't cheat and eat what's already in your pantry!).

2 Kings 4:42-44

1 Using a Bible concordance, look up how many references there are to feeding the poor—the number might surprise you. Compare these verses with those that reference other current issues.

Luke 9:10-17

4 *Hunger for the Word: Lectionary Reflections on Food and Justice*, edited by Larry Hollar, is now available for Lectionary Years A-C. Order Year C now for yourself or your pastor at www.litpress.org.

Luke 1:46-55

8 Learn what you can about fair trade products, specifically coffee. Talk to someone in your church about becoming involved in the Equal Exchange interfaith coffee program (visit www.equalexchange.com for more information). Before purchasing coffee for your own use, find out the nature of the company's buying practices.

Proverbs 14:31

12 Buy a meal, and, instead of eating it yourself, take it to a homeless person.

James 1:27

15 Go to bed hungry and pray for those who have to do so every night.

Psalms 41:3

2 Consider this as an alternative to your church's usual youth group retreat: *Living on the Other Side*, a poverty experience at World Hunger Relief's training farm in Elm Mott, Texas. For more information, visit www.worldhungerrelief.org.

Leviticus 23:22

5 Watch the movie *Easy Street*, a feature-length film that documents one year in the lives of homeless people in St. Petersburg, Florida. For more information, visit www.wideyedfilms.org.

1 Cor. 9:6-10

9 Kosovo became the world's newest country in February 2008 when it declared independence from Serbia. Pray for the Kosovo people, that they would enjoy peace and prosperity.

Mark 10:17-21

16 Overpopulation is a significant problem in many countries, particularly those that already fail to meet current population needs. How should Christians address this problem? Read *Six Billion and More: Human Population Regulation and Christian Ethics*, written by Susan P. Bratton, Environmental Studies chair at Baylor University, to learn how to apply theology, ethics, and Christian values to this important issue.

Job 5:1-16

3 Something to think about: one toilet flush uses the same amount of water that the average person in a developing nation uses all day for washing, drinking, cooking and cleaning. Ask God to make you thankful even for the things that we take for granted.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

6 Find out if your community has a CROP Walk to raise money for hunger causes. If so, get involved. If not, consider organizing one. For more information, visit the CROP Walk page at www.churchworldservice.org.

Deut. 10:12-19

10 Bread for the World's 2009 Offering of Letters is concerned with the Initiating Foreign Assistance Reform Act of 2009. Go to www.bread.org to find out how to write your legislators about this act.

Proverbs 31:8-9

13 It has been four years since Hurricane Katrina, and many poor neighborhoods are still struggling to rebuild. See how you and your church can help Churches Supporting Churches, a group dedicated to rebuilding minority churches along the entire Gulf Coast area. For more information, visit www.cscneworleans.org.

Ezekiel 16:48-49

17 In the United States alone, one out of six children lives in a food-insecure household, not knowing where their next meal will come from. Sit down with your children and have them thank God for providing them with enough good food to eat.

Acts 4:32-37

18 Reflect on your experience of the Lord's Supper and how it is connected to your daily food. Does your view of daily food change when you see it as sacred—as a gift from God?

Luke 11:2-4

19 Environmental justice is concerned with ensuring that environmental ills and benefits are distributed evenly among the population. To advocate for environmental justice, attend environmental justice rallies or lobby against toxic waste sites being located in poor communities. For more information, visit www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/ej2.htm.

Amos 2:6-7

22 Where does your chocolate come from? If it came from Hershey, M&M, /Mars, or Nestle, chances are the cocoa used to make that chocolate was produced by forced child labor. Write to these and other chocolate companies, asking whether or not they have signed the Harkin-Engel Protocol and what they have done to end the exploitation of children in cocoa farming.

Luke 19:1-10

26 Read *Christian Principles for a Healthy Body and Spirit*, a document created by a coalition of faith-based eco-justice groups in conjunction with the National Council of Churches of Christ (visit www.nccecojustice.org/ehprinciples.html).

1 John 3:16-18

30 Research the connection between war and environmental destruction. What environmental health concerns are left in the wake of war and what can we, as the body of Christ, do to promote peace and recover lost ecosystems and ways of life?

Isaiah 65:17-25

34 Volunteer to work at a soup kitchen and then sit down and talk to the guests.

Deut. 15:7-11

38 Third world countries are not the only places where sweatshops are found. According to the Department of Labor, over 50% of US garment factories are sweatshops. Contact the companies from which you get most of your clothes—do any of them violate labor laws?

Psalms 140:12

23 Emergency food assistance plays a vital role in the lives of low-income families. Each time you buy groceries, get extra non-perishable items for your local food pantry.

Matthew 22:37-40

27 3 million people in the world live on less than \$2 a day. See if you can do the same.

Job 31:16-28

31 Look a homeless person in the eye.

1 Cor. 13:3

35 For next year's Vacation Bible School, suggest that your church use "Water U Doing?", a Passport, Inc. VBS curriculum that teaches kids about the Malawi water shortage, shows them ways that they can conserve water and encourages them to show the love of Jesus by serving others. Visit www.passportstore.org for more information.

John 4:13-14

39 Learn to live by the 3 R's—reduce, reuse, recycle.

Proverbs 19:17

20 For more stories regarding water shortages and more practical ways that you can make a difference, read the newest issue of *Hunger News and Hope*, Vol 10, No. 3. Go to www.seedspublishers.org to download the issue.

1 Samuel 2:1-8

24 Check out *Simply in Season: World Community Cookbook* by Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert. Explore how the food we put on our tables impacts our local and global neighbors. From Herald Press: www.heraldpress.com, 800.245.7894

Luke 16:19-31

28 Host a food-and-fund drive at your office, school, or church. To receive a coordinator's kit, contact your area food bank. Visit www.feedamerica.org for more information.

Luke 12:48

32 Host an Oxfam America Hunger Banquet Event. Guests draw tickets at random that assign them each to either a high, middle, or low-income tier and they then receive a corresponding meal. Visit www.oxfamamerica.org for more information.

Jeremiah 22:13-16

36 Pray for people who work in relief and development, especially in war-torn places.

Luke 10:29-37

40 Hunger seems like such an insurmountable problem that it is tempting to turn away and simply not think about it. You and I can't do everything, but we can do some things. Write down a SHORT list of the things on this calendar that appeal to you or that you think you might be able to do well and consistently. Place the list somewhere where you'll see it daily. Pledge to do what little you can. Everything—EVERYTHING—you do will make a difference.

—Katie Cook, editor, *Seeds of Hope*

Zechariah 7:8-12

21 Make a point to eat at local restaurants and shop at local grocery stores that participate in food rescue programs, giving their surplus wholesome food to feeding programs. If your favorite restaurant does not currently participate in a food donation program, help organize one. For more information, visit www.fooddonationconnection.com

Matthew 6:19-24

25 Remember: prayer is a very powerful weapon against poverty and hunger!

Galatians 6: 7-10

29 How much television does your family watch? If you have cable or satellite, consider downgrading to a basic package (or shutting the service off altogether) and give the money you save to your church's benevolence fund.

Romans 12:9-21

33 After natural disasters hit, volunteer to help with rebuilding or relief efforts wherever possible. Most denominations have disaster assistance or relief offices that can connect you to volunteer opportunities. Visit www.mcc.org for more ways you can help.

Amos 8:4-7

37 Shop for your clothes at a resale shop.

Micah 6:6-8