

Climate Change Leads to Feelings of Doom and Hope

The Wired Word for the Week of April 2, 2023

In the News

"The climate time-bomb is ticking," said António Guterres, secretary-general of the United Nations, in a recent statement. "Humanity is on thin ice -- and that ice is melting fast." According to *CNN*, the U.N. report is based on the findings of hundreds of scientists and gives an assessment of how the climate crisis is affecting the Earth.

"This report is the most dire and troubling assessment yet of the spiraling climate impacts we all face if systemic changes are not made now," says Sara Shaw, program coordinator at Friends of the Earth International. According to the report, the impacts of pollution are more severe than expected, moving us toward dangerous and irreversible consequences. Concentrations of carbon pollution in the atmosphere are at their highest level in the past two million years, and the rate of temperature rise over the past 50 years is the highest in the past 2,000 years.

While many more scientists believe humans play a role in climate change than don't, there is no universal consensus about the cause, even in the scientific community. Some believe that it is a natural phenomenon, not the product of human activity or the burning of fossil fuels. But few people deny that climate change is happening, with an impact that is being felt everywhere. The debates are on *how* climates are changing, *why* they are changing, and the *significance* (or *impact*) of the changes.

"Our planet is already reeling from severe climate impacts," said Ani Dasgupta of World Resources Institute, "from scorching heat waves and destructive storms to severe droughts and water shortages." Arati Prabhakar, the director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, said that the new U.N. report "underscores the urgent need for leaders in every sector and every country to step up and take bold climate action."

The fight against pollution is an effort that unites people who want to care for God's creation. Many are concerned when governments around the world continue to approve oil, gas and coal projects. In the United States, approval has been given to the Willow oil drilling project in Alaska, which is projected to produce enough oil to release 9.2 million metric tons of carbon a year. China has recently granted permits for coal production across 82 sites, expanding the use of a resource that is considered to be the dirtiest of fossil fuels.

The pollution of our planet and its atmosphere has frightened many people, including some who are consumed by feelings of doom. According to *The Washington Post*, a man named Sean Youra started watching documentaries about climate change when he was 26 years old and working as an engineer. He was horrified by what he learned about melting ice and rising extreme weather.

Youra started spending hours on YouTube, watching videos made by scientists who warned that the world was on the edge of societal collapse. He became a climate "doomer," and started telling his friends and family that he was convinced that the end of humanity was near. "It all

compounded and just led me down a very dark path," he said. "I became very detached and felt like giving up on everything."

Such a grim view of the planet's future is not unusual. It can be driven by religious texts as well as by scientific reports. "For much of my life, I treated the Book of Revelation like foul-tasting medicine," writes professor Dean Flemming in *Christianity Today*. "I knew it was probably good for me, but if you gave me the chance, I'd avoid it."

As a teenager, Flemming's youth group watched a movie that pictured the horrors of being left behind on Earth after Christians were taken to heaven. It scared him. Later, he read prophecy books that tried to make connections between current events and the Bible's script for the end of the world. They confused him. So he gave up trying to understand Revelation.

But now, Flemming has found a new lens. Instead of looking at the book through a *prediction* lens, he has begun to look at it through a *missional* lens. Using this lens, he sees that Revelation "concerns what God is doing in the world to bring about salvation and healing at every level and how God's people participate in that sweeping purpose." The book "shows us the ultimate goal of God's loving purpose for the world, which is 'making all things new' (Revelation 21:5)."

This work of God includes many aspects of life, but at least one dimension is care for creation, often defined as stewardship of the natural world. According to *The Washington Post*, the problem with climate "doom" is that it can cause paralysis that leads to a failure to act in a helpful way. Some amount of hope, combined with a belief that personal actions can make a difference, can keep people engaged in activities that care for God's creation. When faced with a frightening future, Christians can look through a missional lens and take positive actions. They can find hope by participating, as Flemming says, in God's "sweeping purpose."

The recent U.N. report was not all doom and gloom -- it also set out hopeful pathways that could keep the world on track to reduce pollution. The report is "a sound blueprint for a much safer and more equitable world," said Dasgupta of World Resources Institute. The report called for moving away from fossil fuels and investing in renewable energy, in an effort to limit warming to within 1.5 degrees.

In addition, the report suggested investing in areas that would build resilience to climate impacts, and increasing support for people in vulnerable countries struggling with climate-related losses. One innovative suggestion was to remove carbon from the air through technology such as "direct air capture," and then possibly injecting it underground. In the most dire circumstances, doom is not the only choice.

People can choose to be hopeful and work together to care for creation.

More on this story can be found at these links:

['The Climate Time-Bomb Is Ticking': The World Is Running Out of Time to Avoid Catastrophe, New U.N. Report Warns. *CNN*](#)

[Why Climate 'Doomers' Are Replacing Climate 'Deniers.' *The Washington Post*](#)
[Revelation Is Good News for Today, Not a Game Plan for the Future. *Christianity Today*](#)

Applying the News Story

Yes, the end may be near. But Christians can take action to help create the end that God desires: one in which there is harmony between humans and the natural world. Together, faithful people can participate in God's sweeping purpose: the renewal of all things.

The Big Questions

1. "For much of my life, I treated the Book of Revelation like foul-tasting medicine," writes professor Dean Flemming. "I knew it was probably good for me, but if you gave me the chance, I'd avoid it." Does this reflect your experience with biblical prophecies of the end times? Why or why not?
2. When the future looks bleak, where do you turn for help? How can the church do a better job of providing resources and being a source of support to its members?
3. What causes you to feel despair as you look toward the time to come? What would enable you to face the future with a missional mindset? What actions are you willing to take to improve the world around you?
4. With so many people feeling doom and despair, how can you introduce a note of hope into conversations with others? Where do you find biblical or theological foundations for such an approach?
5. Care for God's creation is one area in which Christians can have a positive impact on the world. What other missions should the church and its members undertake?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Jeremiah 29:11

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. (For context, read [Jeremiah 29:4-11](#).)

Jeremiah had the longest career of any of the biblical prophets, lasting about 40 years. Over that period, he challenged the people of Judah to live by faith, practice social justice, and trust in God.

After Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and many of the people of Judah were taken into exile, Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiles in Babylon. In it, he encouraged them with the words, "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce" (v. 5). Instead of cursing the Babylonians, he said, "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to

the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (v. 7). Speaking through Jeremiah, God ends this passage by promising the people "a future with hope."

Questions: In a bleak time, where do you see evidence that God has plans for your welfare?

How are you willing to cooperate with this divine work, along the lines of the exiles building houses and planting gardens?

What gives you reason to believe in "a future with hope"?

Ezekiel 47:12

On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing. (For context, read [Ezekiel 47:1-12](#).)

Like Jeremiah, the prophet Ezekiel spoke God's word during the time of the exile in Babylon. After speaking a message of judgment and doom, he shifted to hope and salvation.

Near the end of the book, God gave Ezekiel a vision of a new temple, and near the entrance of the temple there was "water ... flowing from below the entryway of the temple" (v. 1). God predicted that a sea of stagnant water "will become fresh" (v. 8), and "every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish" (v. 9). God said that on the banks of the river "there will grow all kinds of trees for food," and their "fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing."

Questions: What does this prophetic vision say to you about the relationship between God's temple and the natural world?

How can you support God's desire for fresh water and fruitful trees? Be specific.

Matthew 28:10

Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me." (For context, read [Matthew 28:1-10](#).)

The last chapter of the gospel according to Matthew contains the story of the Resurrection, in which two women visited the tomb and saw an angel of the Lord who said, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised" (vv. 5-6). They left the tomb to tell the disciples, only to be met by Jesus, who said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The command "Do not be afraid," along with the closely related phrase "Have no fear," is the most commonly repeated phrase in the whole Bible, appearing approximately 80 times in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Questions: At what times do you find it hard to obey the command, "Do not be afraid"? What, if anything, does God do to ease your fear?

What gives you confidence to believe that Jesus is in the future, waiting for you, as he was in Galilee for the first followers of Christ?

Revelation 22:1-2

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (For context, read [Revelation 22:1-6.](#))

The book of Revelation is filled with frightening images: a great red dragon, beasts from the sea and land, the bowls of God's wrath, a great whore, an apocalyptic battle and the final judgment. When the seventh trumpet blows, we learn of God's plan "for destroying those who destroy the earth" (11:18).

But destruction, doom and damnation are not the final word in Revelation. Instead, the book ends with a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, and the restoration of the Garden of Eden. The promise of the last two chapters of Revelation is a new relationship with God, one that is both intimate and eternal, in which people live in harmony with God and with all that God has made.

This bond is a restoration of the original Creation in Genesis, and an echo of the vision of the temple and the river in Ezekiel. It contains the best of numerous biblical images -- a new heaven and earth, a city, and a garden.

Questions: What impresses you about the vision of the future in Revelation 22?

Where do you see people destroying the Earth today, and where do you see them restoring it?

What hope do you find in this passage? What role do you feel called to play in restoring the Earth, if any?

For Further Discussion

1. In the novel *Windows of the Heavens*, written by TWW team member Henry Brinton, a Methodist pastor named Harley Camden preaches a sermon based on the 22nd chapter of the book of Revelation. He begins by reading the scripture about the "river of the water of life" in "the middle of the street of the city." Next, he quotes management guru Steven Covey, who said that "one of the keys to successful and effective efforts is to 'begin with the end in mind.'"

Then, Harley connects the two quotations by saying, "Today's Scripture is the end of the story. It is the goal to which God is moving, from the first day of creation to the end of time. God wants there to be harmony between water and cities, and between plant life and human developments." Harley pauses to let that message sink in. With regard to care for God's creation, what does it mean to "Begin with the end in mind"?

2. TWW team member Mary Sells, writes that everyone "has experienced times of despair whereby they have to dig into their faith for the solid foundation of hope: losing a spouse/child/parent/sibling; suffering illness and [facing] end of life for self or close family/friends; enduring losses from floods/hurricanes/tornadoes/wildfires and other natural disasters; etc. While faith is no magic wand to make the bad things disappear, we can find strength in knowing God accompanies us with love in our dark days, wrapping his arms around us." How has this been true for you? In what ways has it not been true?

3. In Roberto Benigni's film ["La Vita é Bella \(Life is Beautiful\)."](#) a Jewish man named Guido is taken to a concentration camp along with his son. "Once there, Guido wants his son to be spared of the awful truth of the camps by making the whole thing into a game with very strict rules. They have to work hard to win the game and everyone must participate. Really everyone. That gives a bitter, cruel and at the same time courageous and human tone to the film."

TWW team member Ako Cromwell says that this film raises questions of what it means to face peril with a facade of peace and acceptance. Is such a stance designed to help ourselves or to give peace to others? Also, should we allow pain, doubts, or fears to be known?

4. Discuss this: Christian author Stephen W. Hiemstra believes that discussion of end times can be helpful. In his book [Image and Illumination](#), he writes, "The question posed by scripture when we witness sin and societal decay is: Are we in the community of faith going to pray for sinners like Abraham witnessing Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18) or run away from our prophetic duty like the prophet Jonah (Jonah 1)? Like Abraham and Jonah, we have been told in the book of Revelation (Revelation 20) that the destruction of sinners is coming. How will we respond? Knowing that we are blessed to be a blessing (Genesis 12) and serve a merciful God (Exodus 34:6), we can face the future without fear."

5. For a minority view from the science community, consider this, by a TWW consultant, who is a computational physicist: "I'm old enough to remember when climate hysteria revolved around the oncoming ice age (1970: predicted ice age by 2000), pollution (1970: oceans will be dead by 1980), and lack of food and water (1970: water rationing in the United States by 1974 and food rationing by 1980). Then in the 1980s there was a shift to 'global warming' (rebranded in the 2000s as 'climate change'), with predictions that the oceans would rise one to six feet in the 1990s, submerging island nations like the Maldives before 2020, as well as predictions about the Arctic Ocean being ice-free in the summer by 2016 or 2018 (it is far from that), and the like. The predictions of future warming are based on computer models that have severely overpredicted warming (warming is expected as the Earth continues to come out of the ice age that peaked about 22,000 years ago). From my background as a computational physicist, I think there is something significantly wrong with those models as science.

"However, predictions of catastrophe are very useful for political and monetary gain. A scared population is much more easy to manipulate and control. Predictions of catastrophe in ten to 30 years can be very useful in leading people to 'doing something now!' Children and young adults are most affected, given their lack of life experience, as are people who are highly trusting of 'experts' and authorities. While the gospel message of salvation and God's love is the ultimate solace, I think we should also avoid and debunk the false catastrophism of those preaching fear and demanding to be put in control of people."

Responding to the News

Think of one step you can take to better care for God's creation, in your home, community or church. Act on it, and see if that action changes your attitude about the future.

Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for creating this amazing world and for placing us in it. In the face of dire predictions about the future, help us to take actions that advance your purposes. May we find hope in lives of faithful service. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Other News This Week

European Trials Test Theory of Food Social Security to Address Hunger

The Wired Word for the Week of April 2, 2023

Editor's Note: *Our primary source article uses the phrase "food insecurity," which may be a relatively new term for some of our readers, as it was for some of us. [The Philippine Institute for Development Studies](#), which acknowledges that the phrase functions as a "buzzword," explains food security as the financial and physical accessibility of safe and nutritious food to everyone at all times, so food insecurity would be the opposite of that. Their website identifies some factors that affect food security: "poor transport infrastructure that contributes to high food prices, insufficient agricultural production that cannot keep up with local demand, and poor diet quality (i.e., high in starch, low in fruits and vegetables)." For purposes of this discussion guide, we are using Merriam-Webster's definition of food insecurity as "the inability to consistently access or afford adequate food."*

In the News

Two 12-month trials testing the viability and efficacy of public policy based on the provision of a kind of "food social security" were launched earlier this year in Montpellier, France, and last year in Brussels, Belgium. Aimed at addressing rising food prices and declining access to affordable healthy nutrition for an increasing number of people, the experiments are based on "the idea that quality, nutritious and organic food should be accessible to everyone -- regardless of income," according to Kira Walker, reporting for the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Walker wrote: "Enough food is produced to feed 10 billion people, yet much of the world's population is inadequately nourished and, globally, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition are on the rise. Even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which sent global food prices skyrocketing, 3.1 billion people already could not afford a healthy diet."

According to [a recent editorial in *The Kansas City Star*](#), "The most recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Agriculture show that just over 10% of U.S. households (30-plus million people) suffer from 'food insecurity.'"

Jonathan Peuch, advocacy officer on the right to food and nutrition at Fian Belgium, says that emergency food assistance (such as that provided by school meal programs and food banks), while essential in the short term, does not solve systemic economic problems that contribute to food insecurity. "Food aid is not the right to food," he says. "It only provides limited quantity, and [when it comes to] quality, people cannot really choose."

Researchers are exploring whether principles that inspired universal health-care systems can be successfully applied to food production and distribution. The idea is that every person in the trial would contribute to a common fund on a sliding scale, depending on their income level, and receive a basic monthly stipend for the purchase of nutritious food.

"Eating healthy and having access to quality food is expensive and only a minority of the population can afford to do so," says Margherita Via, project manager at BEES Coop supermarket, a participant in the trials.

Agronomist Mathieu Dalmais, who works with ISF-AgriSTA, one of 11 French organizations involved in the trial, says we need to move away from the idea that food is a commodity, and instead base our food production and distribution system on the concept that everyone has the right to healthy nutrition.

Researchers acknowledge that to provide scaled-up food social security, sources of funding beyond contributions from participants in such programs might be needed. Some possible sources might come from taxes on profits of multinational food companies or on increased taxes on unhealthy products, such as alcohol or tobacco.

"Politically, some people say [the idea] is utopic," says Peuch. "I don't think it's utopic, it's just a choice for society to say we're going to increase our contribution, and we want to put that money here."

Peuch says people need to understand that food social security benefits everyone. If we improve affordability and accessibility of nutritious food for all, studies show that we should expect to see better health for people of all ages, particularly for children, which would also lower costs for health care.

On their webpage telling [the story of World Central Kitchen](#), Chef José Andrés, Founder, wrote: "Food relief is not just a meal that keeps hunger away. It's a plate of hope. It tells you in your darkest hour that someone, somewhere, cares about you."

"This is the real meaning of comfort food," the philanthropic chef continued. "It's why we make the effort to cook in a crisis. We don't just deliver raw ingredients and expect people to fend for themselves. And we don't just dump free food into a disaster zone: we source and hire locally wherever we can, to jump-start economic recovery through food."

"After a disaster," Andrés added, "Food is the fastest way to rebuild our sense of community. We can put people back to work preparing it, and we can put lives back together by fighting hunger."

Cooking and eating together is what makes us human. ... Food is not a luxury reserved for the lucky few. It's a universal human right to live free from hunger."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Europe's Unique Trials in Food 'Social Security'. *BBC*](#)

[World Central Kitchen. *Wck.org*](#)

[Kansas and Missouri Have a Major Stake in the 2023 U.S. Farm Bill. It's Our Food Future. *The Kansas City Star*](#)

Applying the News Story

Jesus pointed to the seemingly implacable problem of poverty when he said, "you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish" (Mark 14:7). Solving poverty and hunger will not be a "one and done" exercise, but will require sustained effort over the long haul, "everything, everywhere, all at once."

That said, the Bible provides substantial support for us to do *something*, not just to throw up our hands because "we're never going to solve this thing!" We can start by finding ways to "show kindness" to the poor whenever we wish, on a one-to-one basis, and in the development of cultural practices and government policies that are more compassionate for those in greatest need.

The Big Questions

1. What would it take to structure a compassionate society based not on "the survival of the fittest" but on everyone carrying a share of burdens?
2. Insofar as you are comfortable sharing, what has been your personal and family experience with hunger or "food insecurity"?
3. If you have served in any capacity in a food pantry, hunger relief program, or in advocacy for food security, what obstacles have you encountered? Where have you seen progress in addressing the needs of hungry people?
4. What should the church do to address the needs of the hungry?
5. Whose responsibility is it to feed the hungry? What does our sacred text say about that?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Exodus 16:15-18, 35

When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. This is what

the LORD has commanded: Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer per person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents."

The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. ...

The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a habitable land; they ate manna, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. (For context, read [Exodus 16:11-36](#).)

When God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, during which time God provided bread, meat and water to sustain them until they reached the Promised Land. Through the daily provision of bread from heaven, God said the people would come to know that he was the Lord their God (vv. 11-12).

The people called the substance that appeared on the ground in the morning when the dew lifted "manna," from the Hebrew word meaning "What is it?" It was unfamiliar food to them, "a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground" (v. 14), "like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey" (v. 31).

Nineteenth-century English Baptist preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon, wrote in [Lessons from the Manna](#) that the gift of manna taught the Israelites about God's great love for every one of them, his greatness in providing enough food for them all every morning for 40 years, seemingly out of thin air and his generosity in not requiring payment for his largess.

"Think of the care that God had over them, over each one of them, for each man had his own omer of manna. No woman, no child, was forgotten. Every morning, there was the sufficient quantity for [everyone]," Spurgeon wrote.

"And this care was shown every day," Spurgeon continued. "If he had sent one great rain of liberalities to refresh his inheritance, and had bidden them gather up the vast store, and carry it with them in all their journeyings, they could not so well have learned his care as when he sent it fresh every morning.

"[Through manna, God] ... teaches us that our supplies depend upon him. ... But [also] ... that our supplies will have to be gathered and prepared by ourselves," the preacher added. "God sent the manna from heaven; but the people had to go out every morning, and get it in; and when they had gathered it, we read that they used to beat it in mortars, or grind it in mills, and bake it in pans, and make it into cakes. God is not the patron of idleness. He will have his people work; and his rule is, 'If any man will not work, neither shall he eat' ([2 Thessalonians 3:10](#))."

Questions: What was God's role in addressing the food security needs of the people? What responsibility did individuals have for meeting their need for food? Who was responsible to provide meals for children, the infirm and incapacitated?

Why did the supply of manna end after the Israelites entered the land of Canaan? What principles, if any, can we take away from this manner of addressing hunger that might apply to us in our own place and time?

Ruth 2:14-16, 23

At mealtime Boaz said to [Ruth], "Come here and eat some of this bread and dip your morsel in the sour wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, "Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her." ... So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests, and she lived with her mother-in-law. (For context, read [Ruth 2:2-18, 22-23](#).)

Naomi returned to Bethlehem after living abroad for many years. Her husband and two sons all died in Moab, and she had no other kinfolk there, save her two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. At Naomi's urging, Orpah returned to her family, but Ruth insisted on staying with Naomi, intent on caring for her to the best of her ability.

As widows, with no close male relatives to support them, the two women were reduced to poverty. While we don't know how Naomi spent her days after she returned to Bethlehem, Ruth volunteered to go glean in the field behind those reaping grain.

The law provided that the poor could eke out a subsistence living by picking up what reapers left behind on the field. That way, the poor could retain their dignity by working for what they needed to survive.

Boaz, the owner of the field where Ruth began to work, took notice of her and asked the foreman who she was. He was told that she was a foreigner, who had accompanied Naomi when she returned to Bethlehem, and that she was a hard, tireless worker (vv. 6-7). From early morn until evening, she gleaned in the field, and then processed the grain to take home to Naomi, along with leftovers from the meal she had enjoyed at the table with the reapers (vv. 14-18).

Questions: Although Naomi and Ruth had similar circumstances, how might their capacity for work and self-support have differed? Why do you think Naomi didn't accompany Ruth into the field to glean grain alongside her daughter-in-law? Whose responsibility was it to provide food security for the two women? Who took responsibility, whether there was a legal obligation to do so or not?

Matthew 14:15-16, 18-20

15 When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ... 18 And he said, "Bring them here to me." 19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 And all ate

and were filled, and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. (For context, read [Matthew 14:14-21](#).)

In this incident, Jesus was moved by compassion to heal the sick and feed the hungry (vv. 14, 20). The disciples saw the crowds as an insoluble problem: The time and place were inconvenient (the hour was late, and the place was deserted) (v. 15); their supplies were miniscule (they had nothing but five loaves and two fish, so they thought) (v. 17); the need was astronomical (5,000 hungry men, plus women and children) (v. 21).

Jesus had other ideas.

Questions: Who did the disciples think was responsible to feed the hungry (v. 15)? Who did Jesus suggest should take on that responsibility (v. 16)? Do you think Jesus was serious? Why or why not?

What new strategy did Jesus introduce in vv. 18-19 that made all the difference? How might that strategy work today, when the numbers of food-insecure people far outstrip the 5,000 men, plus women and children, in Jesus' day?

Why didn't Jesus spend all his time feeding the hungry?

Acts 6:1-4

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, brothers and sisters, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." (For context, read [Acts 6:1-7](#).)

In the days of the early church, widows and orphans were among the most vulnerable people in society, often without any means of support or regular income. The disciples were not distributing food to people who had the means and ability to provide for themselves. The daily distribution of food was specifically for those in greatest need.

As the church grew, the disciples didn't always get their ministries right on the first try. In this case, for whatever reason, believing widows who came from Jewish tradition were receiving aid, while those from non-Jewish traditions were being neglected, even though they also had food insecurity. So the 12 apostles held a meeting with the whole community to discuss how to correct the problem. When they arrived at a consensus, they implemented it, and the grievance against the leadership was addressed satisfactorily.

Questions: Where do you think the disciples got the idea for daily distribution of food? How does that fit into other passages, such as [Matthew 10:5-9](#), where Jesus defines their mission as proclamation of the good news, healing the sick, raising the dead, and casting out demons, with

no mention of feeding the hungry, or [Matthew 28:16-20](#), where Jesus commands the disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them?

For Further Discussion

1. Think about this: A proverb of unknown origin reads: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Another version: "Give a man a fish, and he will be hungry again tomorrow; teach him to catch a fish, and he will be richer all his life." The proverb presumes that the person also has access to the ocean, a river, lake or fishing hole.

"People love to say, 'Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he'll eat for a lifetime.' What they don't say is, 'And it would be nice if you gave him a fishing rod.' That's the part of the analogy that's missing," wrote comedian, Trevor Noah, in his memoir, *Born a Crime: Stories From a South African Childhood*.

Is alleviating poverty by facilitating self-sufficiency always an achievable goal? Why or why not?

When would it be appropriate to "give a person a fish" and when would it be appropriate to "teach a person how to fish"? What else might be needed to meet the needs of hungry people?

2. Discuss this, from *The Wired Word* team member, Bill Tammeus: "As someone once said to me, you can't really talk to people about the Bread of Life, as we Christians say, if they don't have enough bread for life."

3. Respond to this, from [a recent editorial](#) in *The Kansas City Star*: "The most costly part of the 2018 Farm Bill was SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, once called food stamps. ... That program has kept millions of Americans from persistent hunger and helped create a reliable market for farm products. But SNAP's very existence is an indictment of aspects of our economic system, which doesn't work for everyone. Children and their parents, after all, aren't malnourished because they want to be, but because adults don't have jobs that pay them enough."

4. In the book, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*, authors Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn describe the experience of starving and children orphaned during World War II. Many ended up in refugee camps, where they had trouble sleeping, afraid of the monster of hunger. Caregivers came up with the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold when it was time for bed. Finally, they could sleep, comforted by the feel and smell of bread, that assured them that when they woke up in the morning, they would have something to eat. What is the relationship between physical bread and emotional security? How does having one's basic physical needs supplied contribute to security within a society?

5. Think about this: In [a satirical piece](#) written for *USA Today*, columnist Rex Huppke asked, "If I can't see hunger, does it really exist? I've pondered that question for years while dutifully avoiding exposure to poor people. Solving hunger is not hard if you believe it's not really a thing. And how do you arrive at that belief? Simple: Just make sure you don't wind up around anyone who can't afford to eat. You know, avoid the riffraff and whatnot."

Huppke's remarks reminded us of the philosophical quandary: "If a tree falls in a forest

and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"

On one of many daily lunchtime walks with fellow physicist Abraham Pais, Albert Einstein suddenly stopped, turned to Pais, and asked: "Do you really believe that the moon only exists if you look at it?"

How does [Psalm 37:25-26](#) square with the way you see this question?

6. Do you agree with those who think the idea of food social security is utopic? Why or why not?

Responding to the News

You may wish to draft a personal or group letter or email to send to local, regional and national media and to your senators and congressional representatives, offering your suggestions about what should be in new legislation concerning food security, meal programs for K-12 school students, hunger relief and farm/agriculture policy. And do assure them of your prayers!

Prayer suggested by [James 1:5, 17](#); [Matthew 6:11](#); [Lamentations 3:22-23](#); [Psalm 89:1](#); [Psalm 92:1-3](#)

O Changeless God, Father of lights, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, thank you for every perfect gift you send us from above. Give us this day our daily bread, and strengthen our hands to collect it, to meet our own needs as well as the needs of others. Renew your mercies like manna to us every morning, and we will declare your faithfulness to all generations. Amen.