

Feed My Sheep

A 40-Day
Devotional to
Develop
a Heart
for Hunger
Ministry

JESSICA BRODIE



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a Heart for Hunger Ministry

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Jessica Brodie

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Introduction

“When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ Simon replied, ‘Yes, Lord, you know I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ Jesus asked a second time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Simon replied, ‘Yes, Lord, you know I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Take care of my sheep.’ He asked a third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He replied, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep. I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don’t want to go.’ He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, ‘Follow me.’” John 21:15-19 (NIV)

“Do you love me?”

It was a conversation between the disciple Peter and the Son of God. Jesus had just been executed on the cross, then resurrected and was back among His disciples for a season until He ascended to heaven (John 21:15-19).

There, on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, belly full of fresh fish and reclining before a crackling fire with his teacher and friend, Peter must have been feeling pretty bad about himself.

See, in spite of his best intentions, Peter had caved to fear. Three times he’d denied knowing Jesus after his teacher’s arrest—and this after insisting he’d never, ever do

such a thing (John 18:13-27).

But now, Jesus was giving Peter a chance to redeem himself. “Do you love me?” the risen Son asked His special friend, three times in fact, knowing full well Peter did indeed love Him, and knowing full well how awful Peter felt about letting Him down.

“Yes!” Peter insisted three times, each time more and more hurt that his Jesus would even ask. But sometimes it takes a little pain for the message to hit home.

Then feed my lambs, Jesus said. Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep.

I’m certain the Son of God didn’t mean for Peter to start peddling bread and fish all over Judea. Most readers of the Gospel believe He meant that Peter should care for people. Pastor people. Tend to their needs, both physical and spiritual. Feed their souls with the Gospel and teach them that Jesus, not the Law, was the only way to heaven. Go and make disciples for the transformation of the world.

Looking back over the life of Christ, we see Jesus not only consistently met people’s spiritual needs but also their physical needs, often using tangible, practical solutions to daily problems to steer people toward God’s truth. He provided food, healed sickness, and drove out demons. In Matthew 25:35-36, Jesus told His disciples, “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, 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.”

And, the Son of God noted, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (25:40).

Christians do so many different things to help people in their community, whether as a way to love their fellow neighbors as themselves (Mark 12:31), as a way to exhibit their love for Christ (Matthew 25:40), as a way to heed Jesus’s command to feed His sheep (John 21:17), or all three.

Throughout this book, you’ll read examples of churches engaged in some form of hunger ministry, from collecting spare change for a kids’ food ministry to running a soup kitchen to delivering bagged meals to the elderly and infirm. Every one of the stories in this book first appeared in the pages of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate*, the newspaper for South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

And every one of these stories is teamed with verses from God’s Holy Word, all designed to help inspire a deeper heart for hunger ministry in our readers.

Hunger is a problem in America, regardless of the fact that it is one of the richest countries in the world. A report released in late 2018 by the national nonprofit Hunger Free America, “The Red, White, and Blue Hunger Wave: A 2019 United States Hunger Atlas,” shows nearly 10 percent of employed adults in this country

live in a home where they don't get enough to eat. More than 17 percent of children and nearly 8 percent of older Americans (aged 60 and older) live in what is often called "food insecure" households (learn more at HungerFreeAmerica.org).

Hunger affects every state, every community, and every age group—and churches play a big role in helping to combat the problem.

The Rev. Patti Parrish, expressing her thanks in 2013 after her district received 14 hunger relief grants from the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, said hunger ministries are important to Christians because their biblical witness makes feeding the hungry a priority. Each of the four Gospels includes an account of Jesus feeding the multitudes, she said.

"I think United Methodists have learned the stark truth that we grow enough food to feed the world; the flaw is in our distribution of food resources," said Parrish, former Charleston District superintendent. "Therefore, we want to be part of God's solution and share what God has so generously provided with our neighbors and with the world."

We agree. For in "feeding the sheep," we help shine the light of Jesus Christ into what can, for many, be a dark and very difficult world.

How to use this devotional

This devotional is best read when spread across forty days.

First, we invite you to pray that God's Holy Spirit allows you the open heart and mind to understand the Scripture verse of the day and the story shared.

Then, we ask that you read the story and try to see how the Scripture applies.

Finally, we ask that you read the prayer at the end of the devotional and then spend some time in prayer of your own about your thoughts and feelings. Meditate on this throughout the day.

At the end of the forty days, we hope these devotionals will have created in you a new heart for hunger ministry and how to serve Jesus in this way.

—Jessica Brodie, author and editor of the
South Carolina United Methodist Advocate, May 15, 2019

God Will Provide

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”
Matthew 6:33-34

It was an ambitious undertaking, and there were so many logistics to nail down: What kind of food would be delivered? Would anything need to be refrigerated? Would everyone show up to help?

In fall 2014, three churches in the Upstate of South Carolina had a God-sized dream to work together to distribute nine thousand pounds of food to hundreds of

Central, others distribute 9K lbs. food to Spartanburg needy

SPARTANBURG—On Friday and Saturday, Nov. 8/9, Central United Methodist Church—in partnership with TOTAL (Telling Others They Are Loved) Ministries, First African Methodist Church of Spartanburg and the Palmetto Moravian Fellowship—distributed 9,000 pounds of food to 300 needy families in Spartanburg County.

A local ministry that helps the needy, TOTAL Ministries administers the Mobile Food Pantry program. They provide logistical help, while the host church provides a location and the people power to make the program work.

Through Sacred Harvest in Charlotte, TOTAL arranged for 9,000 pounds of food to be brought to Central. Sixty-five volunteers helped to unload and sort the food and get it ready for 300 families, which TOTAL had screened and approved.

On Saturday morning, local law enforcement directed traffic so that the 300 families could drive through the church parking lot and have their food loaded into their cars; 45 volunteers spent the morning doing that.

One of the logistical hurdles that had to be surmounted was that volunteers did not know what would be delivered and some of the food might need to be refrigerated. They were not sure there was enough refrigerator space, so they went looking for a refrigerated trailer. A local Body-ender distributor loaned them a small refrigerated trailer, which came in handy because there were 2,000 pounds of ham in the delivery. The presence of a beer trailer behind the church raised a few eyebrows, but it was an opportunity to tell people what the church was doing.

Organizers said the ministry helped 300 needy families and was an opportunity for Central and the other participating churches to reach out into the community and for the three congregations to work together on an important project.



The ministry helped 300 needy families.

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From “Central, Others Distribute 9K Lbs. Food To Needy,” December 2014 *Advocate*

families in need in Spartanburg County.

The churches—Central United Methodist Church, First African Methodist Church of Spartanburg, and the Palmetto Moravian Fellowship—partnered with TOTAL Ministries (Telling Others They Are Loved Ministries) to offer a mobile food pantry program. TOTAL helped with many of the details, while Central UMC served as the host, providing a location and volunteers to make the program work. Over two days of service, volunteers helped to unload and sort the food and get it ready for the families, which TOTAL had screened and approved. Then the families drove through the church parking lot, where their food was loaded into their cars courtesy of other volunteers.

The volunteers were not sure there was enough refrigerator space, but they trusted things would be OK. In the end, a local Budweiser distributor loaned them a small refrigerated trailer, a stroke of providence because there ended up being two thousand pounds of ham in the delivery.

“The presence of a beer trailer behind the church raised a few eyebrows, but it was an opportunity to tell people what the church was doing,” Central leaders said. “The ministry helped 300 needy families and was an opportunity for Central and the other participating churches to reach out into the community and for the three congregations to work together on an important project.”

Sometimes, we don’t have all the details worked out or the logistics finalized. It can be both frustrating and frightening. But as Jesus commands in today’s Scripture, we are not to worry. As He points out in the verses just prior, “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” (Matthew 6:26-27).

It’s a leap of faith to step into an effort not knowing how some of the puzzle pieces will fit together. But sometimes God calls us to embrace this leap of faith. Our heavenly Father will provide.

Prayer

Lord God, we long for control over even the least significant details of our lives. Please help us have the faith to turn it all over to You and trust that You will work everything out for good. Amen.

Never Too Young

“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” 1 Timothy 4:12

Forget candy—youth at one Florence, South Carolina, church are trick or treating for canned goods.

On Saturdays in October, teens and other young people from Central United Methodist Church in Florence hang bags with explanatory notecards on mailboxes, inviting people to fill the bags with canned goods and place them on their porch for collection the following evening. The next night, adult volunteers cruise their cars through the neighborhoods as the teens hop out to collect the bags, then bring them to the designated ministry they are helping that year.

“I imagine a girl around my age. She has ridden the bus through town and waited in line for the bag of food she now holds in her hands,” says Daevis McMurphy, a member of the youth group at Central UMC, picturing this imaginary girl going home to heat up the canned soup for her little brothers while their mom works a double shift at a restaurant. Maybe the power was cut because their electric bill was unpaid, McMurphy imagines, so the girl heats up the soup on a kerosene cooker. Thanks to a group of teens at this church, this family has a hot meal.

“I think loving God and others is as simple as a can of SpaghettiO’s that is going to warm somebody up and keep them going,” McMurphy said. “People in need realize there is a person behind the can, caring that they had to skip dinner the last couple of days and rooting for them as they pick their feet back up.”

As she noted, a can of food can be a light in someone’s life.

Teens often get flak for being self-absorbed, superficial and entitled. But many young people are quite the opposite. Instead of spending time with family and friends or earning extra cash at a part-time job, they choose instead to volunteer with the youth group to help their neighbors in need.

Today's Scripture reminds us that youth—even the very young—can be an excellent model of what it looks like to live a life rooted in Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul certainly seemed to feel this way about Timothy, who we understand was mentored by Paul. We don't know much about Timothy other than that he is the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. His mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, were said to have "sincere faith" (2 Timothy 1:5). And we know from his letters that Paul thought highly of Timothy, who not only came to him during Paul's incarceration but also voluntarily agreed to be circumcised even though he wasn't required to do so.

Whether young people exhibit their faith by collecting canned goods for people in need or other, bolder efforts, Paul's words remind us not to look down at people just because they appear to be young and inexperienced. Rather, we should understand that many are called to a higher purpose, and can be examples for all through their conduct, love, faith, and purity.

Prayer

Father God, instead of looking for the negative in young people around me, help me instead see the glorious ways they are living in Your light. Help me embrace the fresh example they set of purity, faith, and hope in an often dark and sinful world. Amen.

"I think loving God and others is as simple as a can of Spaghetti O's that is going to warm somebody up and keep them going," Daevis McMurphy



Central UMYF 'Trick or Treat for Canned Goods' helps people in need

By Daevis McMurphy

FLORENCE—Adults drive their cars through the neighborhood at 2 mph, pausing at every house that has its front lights on to let a teenager out. We sit in the back. I am in the trunk, my feet dangling off the edge of the car.

At our next stop I hop off and walk up the brick path to the front porch. On the steps a bag of canned food waits, and I grab it to add to the growing pile in the car. We are "Trick or Treating for Canned Goods."

A few years back, the youth leaders at Central United Methodist Church in Florence decided to have an annual food collection and thought, "Why not include an entire neighborhood?"

On a Saturday morning in October, we hang bags with explanatory notecards on mailboxes, inviting folks to fill and place them on their porch for collection the following evening. This year the items we collected benefited Lighthouse Ministries. Lighthouse sends a bag of food home with everyone who comes to them for help.

The pantry was running low, but thanks to the donations we raised trick-or-treating, they received plenty of food to sort, process and pack.

I imagine a girl around my age. She has ridden the bus through town and waited in line for the bag of food she now holds in her hands. It is a couple weeks after we trick or

treated, a Saturday or Sunday maybe, but the fact that it is a weekend does not make a difference to her. Her mama is working a double shift waitressing, and no matter what, this girl needs to get food in her and her brother's bellies. She walks from the bus stop to the crumbling apartment she calls home. The girl's hand hovers above the light switch for a second before she remembers the power got cut off a couple days ago. As the girl heats soup on the kerosene cooker, her two younger brothers come bounding in, excited at the prospect of a hot meal. They dig in, and she smiles and stops to think: Someone went and bought this food for them. In her heart she sends them a silent thank you.

I think loving God and others is as simple as a can of Spaghetti O's that is going to warm somebody up and keep them going. People in need realize there is a person behind the can, caring that they had to skip dinner the last couple of days and rooting for them as they pick their feet back up. In John 15:12, Jesus commands us to love others as he himself has loved us. I invite you as the church, the hands and feet of Christ, to organize your own food collection or "Trick or Treat for Canned Goods," and you will see how a mere can of food can be a light in someone's life.

Daevis is a 13-year-old member of the youth group at Central UMC, Florence.

From "Central UMYF 'Trick or Treat for Canned Goods' Helps People In Need," April 2019 *Advocate*, by Daevis McMurphy

One Body Together

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 15:5-6

Two churches in Sumter, South Carolina, are teaming up to help homeless people by giving them bagged lunches.

St. John and Dalzell United Methodist churches pack a sandwich, chips, cookie, fruit, and bottle of water into a bag, then deliver the bags to the Mount Pisgah African Methodist Episcopal Church, where they are distributed Sundays after worship.

Because of their commitment to working together as the body of Christ, these churches are helping to alleviate hunger while showing tangible love to their neighbors.

In Romans 15, the Apostle Paul acknowledges that our Christian walk can be difficult sometimes. We face hardship. We might be teased or, in some nations, even persecuted for our beliefs. But God calls us to stand strong in the face of difficulty, to endure, and to encourage others. When we stand together and do His work as one body despite the adversity surrounding us, we glorify our Father (Romans 15:5-6).

Some churches don't like to work together. Instead of teaming up, they compete over whose vacation Bible school attracted more kids or who brought in the most new members in the last year. Some might start a hunger ministry in the community, and a few months later, a neighboring church starts a similar but entirely separate ministry instead of joining forces with the first church.

Others might be perfectly fine working with neighboring churches of their own

denomination but refuse to jump denominational lines—even though we know full well we are all one big church under one Savior (John 17:20-23).

But the example of St. John and Dalzell UMCs working with Mount Pisgah AME shows that when churches work together with “one mind and one voice” (Romans 15:6), God is glorified and people get the help they need.

Prayer

Lord, the world can be such a competitive place. Help me let go of human pettiness to embrace the unity Christ commanded. Help all churches under God to live together as one body doing Your work. Amen.

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Churches speak out from the front lines in hunger relief

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Do you love me? Feed my sheep.

In this 40-day devotional, verses from God's Holy Word are teamed with hunger ministry stories that have appeared in the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* newspaper over the last several years. Not only does this book lift up the work of United Methodists in South Carolina who provide food for people in need, but it glorifies the message Jesus gave His disciples in John 21:15-17 to feed and otherwise care for others.

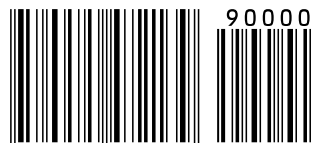


Jessica Brodie is an author and award-winning journalist. She has been the editor of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* since 2010.

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