

Food & Faith

A Journey from Soil to the Last Supper

During Lent, it is easy to feel the pressure to 'give up' certain foods. 'Giving something up' in the Lenten season is supposed to remind us that everything in our lives comes from God, but it can quickly turn into a harmful relationship with food. If you want to give up chocolate for Lent, then that's completely okay! But the focus should be on strengthening your relationship with God. For Lent this year, we are inviting you into the practice of noticing how food is connected to many things.

Together,

We will celebrate the gift of food that God has provided.

We will consider how food is closely tied with our cultures and identities.

We will interrogate how food is connected with injustice and inequity.

We will ask what changes we can make to have a more just society.

We will examine what a healthy relationship with food and community looks like.

We will walk with Jesus during Holy Week through the meals he has.

This resource is an invitation. Nothing here is required of you. There is no ask to count calories. There is no demand that you give up food. All we ask is that you reflect on how closely connected food is with the life of faith and the work of justice so that we all might have a better relationship with God, one another, and what we eat.

Part One: Grounding Ourselves

February 18 **Read:** Genesis 2:4-7

Do: Lent begins by reminding us that we came from and will return to the ground. Perhaps the most obvious thing that comes from the ground is our food. Try going outside and touching some dirt. Remind yourself it holds worlds of teeny tiny living organisms. Even a small speck of soil is teeming with life. This is how beautifully detailed God's world is! Sit with the dirt for a moment. What does it feel like? What does it smell like?

Learn more about why soil is so important for the Earth in this video:

https://youtu.be/OiLITHMVcRw?si=EPK_QujadtQdx79x

February 19 **Read:** Genesis 2:8-9

Do: How often do you think about where your food comes from? What would it mean for you to honor the soil that your food is grown in?

Reconnecting with our food systems starts when we take its origin seriously. As Christians, prayer helps us do this. Before your next meal, try praying for where that food came from. Include a blessing for the soil it was grown in, the animals that contributed to it, and the human labor that made it possible.

February 20 **Read:** Genesis 2:15

Do: We are called to take good care of the earth. Try learning about what plants and animals are local to your area, and find out if any are endangered. How can you participate in protecting these species in your corner of the world?

February 21 **Read:** Genesis 2:19

Do: God invites us to be active participants with creation. What practices help you connect with creation? How might you become more attentive to creation in your day-to-day life?

This doesn't mean you have to "add" a practice to your life every day. You already engage with creation in so many ways! Being in touch with the earth can be as simple as appreciating the flowers that grow through the cracks in the sidewalk in your neighborhood, or listening carefully to the birds singing outside when you go for a walk. It is all about *noticing*.

February 22 **Read:** Psalm 104:14

Do: When you think of plants growing, do you think of God? The Psalmist reminds us that all things grow because God made it possible. It is our responsibility to take care of the plants God made to grow upon the earth.

When you eat your next meal today, think about what plants went into it. What is the bread made of? Is there tomato? Rice? How many ingredient sources can you identify? Thank God for each of the plants that made your meal possible.

February 23 **Read:** Psalm 104:27-28

Do: Food is a gift from God! It is something worth celebrating. It is easy to take for granted the food we eat, but each bite is important.

Take some time today to write about your favorite foods. What do they remind you of? Was it a recipe someone once made for you? Was it a meal you shared with your best friend? Does it remind you of a cozy winter evening or a hot summer day? God delights when we pay attention to all the gifts in our lives, and the joy of food is one of these many gifts.

Part Two: Reconnecting with Food Cultures

February 24 **Read:** Exodus 16:13-15

Do: When you think of where your food comes from, do you ever think about the globe? In our society, food is a *global* experience. For centuries, trading spices and cuisines has been fundamental to the human experience.

Take a little bit of time today to look at the interactive maps below. Part of reconnecting with our food systems involves placing ourselves in a global exchange. Food isn't just about what's on your plate or the store you got it from, but it is an active part of the global relationships between all of God's people.

<https://blog.ciat.cgiar.org/origin-of-crops/>

February 25 **Read:** Genesis 8:13-19

Do: As we started to think about yesterday, food is part of community networks. What kinds of foods are local to your area? Is there a specific cuisine that defines where you live? Find some recipes that use food that's local to your area and try one of them out!

February 26 **Read:** Leviticus 25:1-7

Do: Eating local foods is one way to reconnect with your community's culture *and* live more sustainably. Watch this short interview with Michael Pollan about the benefits of eating local.

https://youtu.be/DhaG_Zi6izU?si=0DnINMjS_7yL6lCv

This doesn't mean every single meal you eat must be locally sourced, but it is a helpful way to think about your community's food systems.

February 27 **Read:** Numbers 11:4-6

Do: Try learning about someone else's food culture today. For us to have communities across the boundaries that typically keep us apart, it is important for us to understand and appreciate other people's cultures. Food is *central* to how we relate to our culture.

Pick three types of food from a culture you are unfamiliar with using this list of culinary traditions from UNESCO. How do they shape your understanding of that piece of the world? Are there places in your area that you can go and try these foods?

<https://wander-lush.org/food-culture-unesco/#30-examples-of-food-culture-culinary-traditions-recognised-by-unesco>

February 28 **Read:** Exodus 13:3-6

Do: As you continue to think about how food creates our culture, spend some time recalling what food makes **you** who you are. Choose one of the following creative options to reflect:

1. Flip through some old magazines and find pictures that remind you of the food that makes up your culture. They don't need to be pictures of food! Sometimes, a picture of friends laughing together reminds us of a good meal just as much as the food does. Use these photos to make a collage about your food culture.
2. Write a poem about the food that makes you who you are. Start with the phrase "I am from..." and let your words flow from there. There is no right way to reflect. Just try to highlight what's important to you.

February 29 **Read:** Luke 2:41-50

Do: Have you ever heard the term "third culture kid" before? Watch this six-minute TEDx Talk from Eric Pak, a Korean American teenager

living in Bangkok. He helps us think through how food helps us find a sense of identity no matter where we are in the world:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJlVqrqfZjU>

Food makes us who we are. It's important to respect other people's cuisines as an integral part of what makes them who they are.

March 1 **Read:** Galatians 3:26-28

Do: As we've already discussed, food plays an important role in cross-cultural connections. One of the ways this happens is through fusion food – when two cultures collide and create a new type of food. In the article below, read about how much joy can come from new food fusions, as well as how long they've been around:

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/kitchen-notes/the-joy-of-cooking-blasphemous-fusion-food>

God constantly calls us to break the barriers that exist between societies. Knowing our food culture and revering the food culture of others is *incredibly* important, but fusion food is also one way in which we can experience the breaking of cultural boundaries. Both things are true all at once!

March 2 **Read:** Isaiah 61:4-5

Do: Much of American food culture, especially in the South, has roots in the labor of enslaved Africans. Watch this short video from PBS NewsHour about the historical food practices of enslaved peoples in the US and how that shaped the South's food culture.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6l8jRF-eGA&t=71s>

Part Three: Accessing Food

March 3 **Read:** Deuteronomy 15:10-11

Do: As of 2021, there were 33,844,000 people facing food insecurity in the United States, per Feeding America. Use this map to learn more about what food insecurity is like in your area. Click on your state to

find out what hunger is like near you. What people are most at risk?
What resources exist in your area to help?

<https://map.feedingamerica.org/>

March 4

Read: Ruth 1:1

Do: Have you heard of the term “food desert” before? A food desert is an area without access to affordable and healthy foods. Watch this short video to learn about what a food desert is.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAu8Noo8CxA>

March 5

Read: Genesis 47:13

Do: More places in the United States are food deserts than you might think. Try finding where you live using the interactive map below. Is the area you live in a food desert? Are there areas nearby that are?

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

March 6

Read: Genesis 47:14-17

Do: In the United States, there is a program in place to support people who do not have a stable enough income to afford food. This program is called SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

However, SNAP benefits only provide a very small allowance for daily food. In 2024, a family of four would receive about \$5.94 for each person in the family.

Try keeping track of how much your food cost today. Look up the average price for each thing you ate, and add up the cost. Is \$5.94 enough to feed you for a full day?

For many people in need, SNAP benefits are not enough to buy healthy and affordable foods. Visit the website below to learn more about SNAP and participate in the SNAP challenge:

<https://frac.org/programs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/take-fracs-snap-challenge>

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-quick-guide-to-snap-eligibility-and-benefits>

March 7

Read: Song of Songs 1:5

Do: Food access in the United States highlights injustices in our society. According to Feeding America, the Native American population in 2021 represented 1.9% of the US population but had a food insecurity rate of **20%**.

There are many factors that go into food insecurity, but racist hierarchies of resources make people of color more at risk than white people. When advocating for better access to food, it is important to consider how the sin of racism drives inequality in the United States.

Explore more statistics about race and hunger using either of the interactive maps on this page:

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/race-food-insecurity>

March 8

Read: James 2:15-17

Do: Take some time today to learn about the local food banks in your area. What kind of work is already going on in your community? What work still needs to be done?

At Youth Mission Co, we partner with many different organizations related to food. Visit the organization websites below to see some of the work going on at our different sites:

Asheville: www.mannafoodbank.org

Raleigh: www.farmchurch.org

Memphis: www.mifa.org

Charleston: <https://neighborstogether.org/>

Dallas: www.thestewpot.org

March 9

Read: Matthew 25:35

Do: Now that you've learned some different things about food insecurity around the US and in your area, write up a draft of how you

would talk to your congregation about addressing food insecurity. How would you motivate people to get them involved?

March 10 **Read:** Luke 6:20-21

Do: The next time you pray today, remember to pray for all those experiencing food insecurity in the world. Pray that your prayers will also be followed by actions to address what's at stake in your community.

Food is a basic resource that all people deserve access to. It is central to who we are and how we survive. Pray that all people might realize this and join you in making sure nobody in your community goes hungry.

Part Four: Food Waste

March 11 **Read:** Isaiah 5:8-10

Do: Nearly 40% of all food in the United States gets wasted, according to Feeding America.

Food is both a necessity and a gift from God. Our actions must reflect this reality. Visit the link below to learn about some of the troubling ways food goes to waste in the US.

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/reduce-food-waste>

March 12 **Read:** John 6:1-6

Do: There are many different ways to reduce food waste, but the EPA outlines which practices are most healthy and helpful. Explore some of those options, but notice how many of them are not about personal actions. Most food waste does not come from individual people!

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/wasted-food-scale>

March 13 **Read:** John 6:7-13

Do: At our Asheville Mission Immersion location, we partner with 12 Baskets Café, a ministry of the Asheville Poverty Initiative. Watch the TEDx Talk below from 12 Baskets Café founder Rev. Dr. Shannon

Spencer on the connection between wasting food and addressing the problem of hunger.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TguNg_58qeY&t=531s

March 14

Read: Isaiah 55:1-2

Do: As Shannon Spencer noted in yesterday's TEDx Talk, food waste is also a social justice issue. In reality, there is an abundance of resources. Read more today about what makes food waste a justice issue:

<https://umaine.edu/foodrescuemaine/2022/12/13/food-waste-is-a-social-justice-issue/>

March 15

Read: Psalm 12:5-8

Do: Learning about the realities of hunger and waste can take a heavy toll on us. The reality of people being hungry while food gets wasted is *devastating*.

The Bible offers us models for lamenting and grieving when things go wrong. Try writing a statement of lament or grief that deals with your emotions about the reality of food going to waste while people are hungry.

March 16

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:19-20

Do: At the beginning of Lent, we remembered that everything comes from the ground and later returns to it. Composting is one daily practice that can remind us of this, and it is a great way for individuals and groups to deal with their food waste. Click the link below to learn about the process of composting:

<https://www.nrdc.org/stories/composting-101#types>

What might it look like for you to compost at home? Or at your church? How would you talk to your congregation about using compost to reduce food waste?

March 17

Read: Genesis 2:4-7

Do: When you think of compost, do you think of Jesus? We learned a little bit about compost as a way to reduce food waste yesterday, but

compost is a helpful way to think about how God has designed creation. Read this short essay from Jacqui Mignault to learn a little bit more about what compost can offer our faith.

<https://www.christiancourier.ca/jesus-of-the-compost-pile/>

Part Five: Faith in the Making

March 18

Read: Deuteronomy 14:21

Do: This verse from Deuteronomy might feel like an odd one to read. What does it even mean? In truth, the Bible tells us that how we handle our food is sometimes an *ethical* issue. This verse tells us a little bit about how important it is to handle our food justly. At the time it was written, cooking a baby goat in milk that came from its mother was considered an act of cruelty.

What would it look like for us to think about how we make food as a part of our justice work? Are there certain practices that are more harmful than others – for laborers, for our bodies, for animals, for the land?

To learn more about what is being done to make food production more ethical, consider watching this short documentary:

https://youtu.be/3Ezkg7Cteys?si=QyizEWZJ_Qqa9YRZ*

**Note – some scenes are difficult to watch.*

March 19

Read: Psalm 75:1

Do: God gives us the freedom to create and to play. For some people, cooking is one of these acts of creation. Do you like to cook? Why or why not? How might cooking – even just once a week – help you reconnect with everything that goes into your food?

Consider cooking a meal this week and thanking God for each ingredient as you do so. Gratitude is a wonderful way to maintain a healthy relationship with God and with the food God has made.

March 20

Read: Matthew 9:10-13

Do: Have you ever cooked a meal for somebody? Has somebody ever cooked a meal for you? What was that experience like? Food is one of

the many ways that we cultivate relationships. If you can cook for someone, you can show them some of your love. If you can eat with someone, you can get to know them in profound ways.

Consider sharing a meal with someone you might not normally eat with. What would this be like? What might you gain? What might be challenging? You don't have to cook if you don't want to, but make an effort to eat alongside someone outside of your normal circle. You might be surprised by how much you will connect.

- March 21 **Read:** Psalm 104:14-16
Do: Eating with other people makes us happier, according to research from the University of Oxford! Read some statistics about why eating together makes us happier, and go and share a meal with people you love!
- <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2017-03-16-social-eating-connects-communities>
- March 22 **Read:** Philippians 4:4
Do: By now it might go without saying, but eating is deeply emotional. If food is really related to all the things we've covered this Lenten season – the anger of injustice, the grief of waste, and the joy of sharing – then we should take the emotional part of eating and cooking *seriously*. Health coach Melissa Goode offers three reasons that food makes us feel things here:
- <https://in.nau.edu/ucan/the-joy-of-eating/>
- March 23 **Read:** Ecclesiastes 3:12-14
Do: Write a prayer of joy for the food you had today and offer it up to God.
- March 24 **Read:** Psalm 36:5-11
Do: We are beginning to enter the last days of Jesus' life before the Crucifixion. During those days, you're invited to spend more time with scripture. Use today to get into the rhythm. Highlight, underline, or circle words in the Psalm that stand out to you. What claims is the Psalm making about God and food?

Part Six: At Table with Jesus

Today begins Holy Week – the final days leading up to the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Now that we have spent the majority of Lent reflecting on the intersections of food with the life of faith, I invite you to consider how food shows up in the stories of Holy Week. This week, each of the scripture readings is a bit longer. I invite you to read the text each day and sit with the following questions:

1. How is food used in the text? How is Jesus using or existing with food?
2. Does the text raise economic concerns, justice issues, or other things associated with food? What might food tell us about these concerns?
3. Are there rituals involving food in the text? What are these rituals accomplishing? How are these rituals of food connected to the identity of the person practicing them? How do they color in the behaviors of people in the text?
 - a. Note that Passover is a festival revolving around food that is fundamental to Jewish identity. Jesus is in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover during several of these readings.
4. What is God inviting you to do in response to the text? What questions come up for you?
5. Say a prayer each day in response to reading the text.

These are only starting points. Holy Week invites us into a time of feeling alongside Jesus and the disciples in the final days. There are many emotions that come up – from triumph to fear. Sit with your feelings as you read each text. Notice where you feel them in your body.

As we've read about food and faith throughout Lent, we've been cultivating skills for noticing God's call. We've learned that food is connected to our identities and cultures. We've noticed how food is involved in a number of justice issues. We've considered how food is essential for community and is fundamentally social and emotional. Use these skills and thoughts as you approach Scripture during Holy Week.

March 25	Read: John 12:1-11
March 26	Read: John 13:21-32
March 27	Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
March 28	Read: Exodus 12:1-14
March 29	Read: John 19:23-30
March 30	Read: Job 14:1-14
March 31	Read: Luke 24:36b-48



About Youth Mission Co

Youth Mission Co is where mission, creativity, and transformation are happening with young people.

We understand **mission** as God's call in the lives of all people to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly in faith.

We see **creativity** as a tool of understanding and growth because it gets us outside of ourselves and in connection with the Spirit.

We know **transformation** to be a lasting change– in a person, a group, a community, a world. It's what God provides when we are open to new possibilities.

Visit www.youthmissionco.org, like us on Facebook, and follow us on Instagram @YouthMissionCo for regular updates about our work.