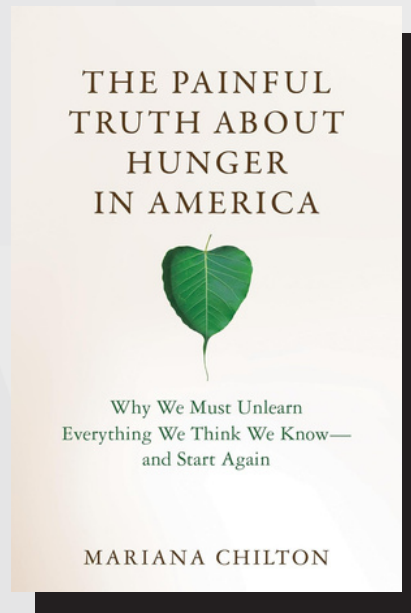


PAGES FOR PROGRESS

Study Guide:

“The Painful Truth about
Hunger in America:
Why We Must Unlearn
Everything We Think
We Know—and
Start Again”

Mariana Chilton



Preface

The fourth cohort of Pages for Progress gathered via Zoom in the summer of 2025 to read *The Painful Truth About Hunger in America* by Mariana Chilton. The timing of this book study closely aligned with the U.S. Congress voting on H.R. 1, “The One Big Beautiful Bill,” which proposes the largest ever cuts to SNAP, and many would lose Medicaid coverage. At the time of writing this preface, we are awaiting the Senate’s vote on this bill.

In the following pages, you'll find an overview of each session along with detailed guidelines. This study guide is designed for use in small groups within your local church, district, annual conference, ecumenical groups, or neighborhood communities. Meetings can be held in person or virtually. Additionally, this guide includes supplementary resources on the topic and practical ways for individuals and groups to take action.

This study guide is the result of the thoughtful discussions from the summer 2025 cohort. A heartfelt thanks to everyone in the cohort!

If you have any feedback or questions on this study guide, please email seminars@umcjustice.org, we’d love to hear from you!

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Structure

This study is structured into three sessions. Each session is approximately 90 minutes long and features a welcome, communication guidelines, theological grounding, book discussion questions, and closing.

Reading Assignments by Session

Session One: Introduction to Chapter 4

Session Two: Chapter 5 to Chapter 8

Session Three: Chapter 9 to Chapter 12

Session Overview

WELCOME (10 minutes)

Begin with prayer.

This is also an opportunity to get to know the group and establish communication guidelines. We recommend the [Communication Guidelines](#) created by The Kaleidoscope Institute.

Respectful Communication Guidelines

R take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

E use EMPATHETIC listening

S be SENSITIVE to differences in communication/cultural styles

P PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

E EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T TOLERATE ambiguity because we are not here to debate. There are no “winners” or “losers”

S STEP UP/STEP BACK If you notice that you are speaking a lot, step back to create space for others to speak. If you notice that you have much to share but not, take courage and speak up so that others can learn from you. (*Not from Eric Law, but from previous study groups.)

(Source: [Eric Law's “Respectful Communication Guidelines”](#))

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (25 minutes)

Each theological ground session is intentionally designed to align with that week's assigned chapters. This alignment serves two key purposes: first, to help us integrate our faith with the realities of the world rather than separating the two; and second, to encourage us to put our faith into practice through meaningful action.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (45 minutes)

Each question is designed to deepen engagement with the assigned readings, exploring the chapter's themes and the social, historical, and political analysis through a faith lens. It is recommended to share the questions in advance, allowing participants time to reflect and develop their responses.

If you have a large group, we recommend breaking up into smaller groups/breakout rooms for the book discussion.

CLOSING (10 minutes)

Close each session by asking the group to share any insight from their small group discussion (if small groups were used) for the good of the larger group. Or provide time for individual reflection through journaling.

Consider visiting Church and Society's "Take Action" page for the latest opportunities to engage with U.S. Congressional members and participate in the "Grace Over Greed Campaign."

End each session with a reminder of the assigned chapters for the following gathering and a benediction.

The cohort ended each session with the benediction given by Bishop Woodie White at the 1996 General Conference in Denver, Colorado. Feel free to close with the benediction by Bishop Woodie White or with another prayer.

Benediction

And now,
May the Lord torment you.

May the Lord keep before you the faces of the hungry, the lonely, the rejected and the despised.

May the Lord afflict you with pain for the hurt, the wounded, the oppressed, the abused, the victims of violence.

May God grace you with agony, a burning thirst for justice and righteousness.

May the Lord give you courage and strength and compassion to make ours a better world, to make your community a better community, to make your church a better church.

And may you do your best to make it so, and after you have done your best, may the Lord grant you peace. Amen.

Sessions

Session One: Introduction to Chapter 4

WELCOME (10 minutes)

Say: Welcome to the first session of Pages for Progress as we read and study, “The Painful Truth About Hunger” by Mariana Chilton. Since this is our first gathering, let’s go around and get to know each other. Please share your name and why you decided to join this study.

Pause for a time of sharing.

Pray: God of Justice. We thank you for the opportunity to gather. We thank you for this opportunity for fellowship, to learn, and to grow. We pray that you will open our eyes, minds, and hearts. We ask that you help us to move and act towards justice. Amen.

Say: Since this is our first meeting. We will spend a few minutes on communication guidelines to create a safe space for everyone to share and discuss.

Create communication guidelines for the group or introduce Kaleidoscope Institute’s Respectful Communication Guidelines.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (25 minutes)

**This theological grounding has been adapted from the “Mercy & Justice” lesson created by Susan Burton from the Youth Lectionary Curriculum.*

Prepare a board to write down participant responses. Draw a line down the middle of the paper/board. On the top left side of the paper/board write the word “RESPONSES.”

Say: When you see someone experiencing poverty or suffering in some way, how do you, your church, your community respond?

Write the responses under “RESPONSES.” Once you have a list, write “CAUSES” on the right side of the paper/board.

Say: What are the causes of poverty?

Write the responses under “CAUSES.” Once you have a list, consider unpacking stereotypes on the list.

Examples to Unpack:

- *Make sure racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, ableism, etc., are named and be prepared with concrete examples.*
- *If not included, suggest war as a cause of poverty. In addition to people experiencing poverty in their homelands because of war, people that fought in war may experience poverty as a result of physical or psychological injury incurred while fighting.*
- *Suggest natural disasters and man-made disasters that destroy lives and livelihoods.*

Say: How many of these “RESPONSES” on the left address the “CAUSES” on the right?

Pause for responses.

Say: Why do you think it is that we spend so much time doing things on the left side that don’t address the things on the right?

Pause for responses.

Say: This exercise isn't meant to discourage us from doing the things we listed under "RESPONSES," which are important acts of charity and mercy. Rather, it's meant to challenge us to also engage in the work of justice. Churches are really good at doing the work of mercy but sometimes fall short when it comes to pursuing justice- the kind of work that leads to lasting systemic change and helps bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth.

The Lord's Prayer is found in Matthew 6:9-13. It is the only prayer that Jesus explicitly teaches us to pray, and one that many of us know well. It begins:

Pray in this way:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial but rescue us from the evil one.

This prayer is often understood in a spiritual sense, but for those who first heard Jesus speak of the Kingdom God, it stood in stark contrast to the reality of life under the rule of King Herod and Caesar. Today, it still speaks to the lived experiences of many. It's a reminder that people are praying for real, tangible needs – like a mother asking God for food to feed her children, or someone crying out for help to pay a past-due bill and escape the burden of debt.

"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." These words remind us that what we imagine heaven to be, perhaps the opposite of the injustices we listed under "CAUSES", is meant to become reality here on earth. As people of faith, we are called to help make that happen. This is the prayer Jesus taught us to pray: a prayer that is not only a petition, but also a reminder and a challenge to do the work of justice.

As we begin this study together, this book will challenge us to reconsider the work we're already doing as acts of mercy/charity and invite us to go deeper, working toward justice and systemic change.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (45 MINUTES)

If you have a large group, break into small groups.

- (Introduction) Chilton states in the Introduction, "To build the courage and resilience necessary requires recognition of the truth underneath hunger. The best way to do this is to acknowledge and understand that we are in a trauma-organized society that allows for hunger to persist. Understanding trauma gives us good grounding for the hard work ahead." Why does Chilton argue that understanding trauma is foundational to alleviating hunger?
- (Chapter 1) Chapter 1 describes Chilton's engagements with Juleen, Celeste, and Joanna. How does internalized shame impact those experiencing hunger?
- (Chapter 2) Chapter two states that there are two types of hunger. "Hunger of the body is when you feel physically weak or have a pain in your stomach and feel faint," and "hunger of the mind." How do these two types of hunger impact those experiencing hunger?
- (Chapter 3) In Chapter 3, Chilton discusses persons who "know hunger" and those who don't. How does this knowledge (or ignorance) shape policy and empathy?
- (Chapter 4) In Chapter 4, Chilton writes, "When organizations are set up to serve or help people, they are also implicated in how interpersonal relationships play out." What are some examples of well-meaning acts of mercy and charity that often retraumatize people looking for support?

If you have a large group, break up into small groups for the Book Discussion.

CLOSING (10 minutes)

Say: I want to thank everyone for the rich discussions we've had today. As we wrap up, let's take a few minutes to hear reflections from today's discussions. Who would like to share any insights or reflections? What stood out to you, and how can that learning be applied to our larger group?

If divided into small groups, bring groups back to the main group.

Pause for a time of sharing. Allow participants to share insights and encourage a brief moment of silence after each contribution to let the ideas sink in.

Say: Consider a food justice ministry that the church or community provides to those who are food insecure. What is one way that trauma-informed care and practice can be introduced to these ministries?

Pause for a time of sharing.

Say: Before we end, a quick reminder: for our next gathering, please make sure to read Chapters 5 through 8. Here are the questions for our next gathering. If you can, please read the questions before our next meeting and begin to reflect on them.

Closing Benediction:

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop Woodie White (located in "Structure") or a prayer of your choosing.

Session Two: Chapters 5 - 8

WELCOME (10 minutes)

Say: Welcome to the second session of Pages for Progress!
Let us start with prayer.

You may ask for a volunteer to lead in prayer or use the prayer below.

Pray: God of abundance and grace, we thank you. We thank you for gathering us again to study and to act. Lord, you welcomed us to your table and yet we made selfish decisions to push people away from the table. We were given the commandment to break bread together, and yet we have created systems that cause many to go without. We ask you to forgive us for the times that we made selfish choices or remain silent in the face of injustice. Guide us and move us to make your Kingdom a reality in our world. Amen.

Remind everyone of the Communication Guidelines created during the first session or the Kaleidoscope Institute's Respectful Communication Guidelines.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (25 minutes)

Say: Lectio Divina is a contemplative way of reading the Bible. It's a way of praying the scriptures that allows us to sit deeply with the word of God. In a practice of Lectio Divina, we are going to hear Luke 6 in its entirety first and then we will hear it again in smaller sections and collectively discern what the passage is trying to tell us.

Invite participants to take turns reading.

Read: Luke 6:20 - 26 (NRSV)

Ask: What do you notice in these verses?

Pause for responses.

Note: A few points to mention, if not mentioned by the participants.

- Most of the content of this passage is found in Jesus' sermon on the mount, which we know as the Beatitudes.
- The texts make mention of the Kingdom of God, which has distinct qualities within Wesleyan theology:
 - The Kingdom of God is God's reign and rule in our present reality on earth and future reality in eternity
 - In its present reality, which is a mere glimpse of the fulfillment of God's work in the eternal, the Kingdom lives among and is demonstrated through the people of God.
 - While the Kingdom of God is continually present, we, as the Church, are called to be the place where initial signs of God's Kingdom are brought forth in the world.[1]
 - To speak of the future reality of God's Kingdom is to speak of a new heaven and earth as found in Revelation. In this realm, God will make all things new.
- In this passage, priority appears to be given to those who hunger, and they are promised a solution to their hunger.

Read: Luke 6:20 – 26 (NRSV)

Ask: Is there anything else that stood out to you while reading this passage for the second time?

Pause for responses.

[1] The United Methodist Church, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 50

Ask: It seems counterintuitive for Jesus to say that those who hunger are blessed. How might this passage be explained to someone experiencing hunger? What is the theological imperative in this passage?

Pause for discussion.

Ask: We see that the Kingdom of God is explicitly mentioned in verse 20. Where else is the Kingdom of God present in this passage?

Pause for discussion.

Ask: How might your interpretation of this text apply to your current reality of seeking just solutions to hunger?

Song Recommendation – Beatitudes by Sweet Honey in the Rock

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (45 minutes)

- (Chapter 5) In Chapter 5, Chilton argues that public assistance programs cause harm. What are some ways that these programs have caused harm to individuals and families?
- (Chapter 6) Chilton describes public assistance programs as weaponized, financial apartheid, “a form of entrapment constructed by big companies and facilitated by US government policy.” How do you see this as a reality for those in your community?
- (Chapter 7) In Chapter 7, Chilton gives examples of how lived experiences of hunger and poverty are often ignored in policy making by legislators and often

If you have a large group, break up into smaller groups for the Book Discussion.

exploited by corporations. What steps can be taken to disrupt the intersecting systems of oppression?

- (Chapter 8) In Chapter 8, Chilton criticizes the reliance on emergency food systems as an inadequate response to the systemic issue of hunger. Why does she argue that these forms of charity/acts of mercy sometimes reinforce food insecurity? What is a more just and sustainable approach to ending hunger?

CLOSING (15 minutes)

Say: I want to thank everyone for the rich discussions we've had today. As we wrap up, let's take a few minutes to hear reflections from today's discussions. Who would like to share any insights or reflections? What stood out to you, and how can that learning be applied to our larger group?

If divided into small groups, bring the groups back to the main group.

Pause for a time of sharing. Allow participants to share insights and encourage a brief moment of silence after each contribution to let the ideas sink in.

Say: Think about the food justice ministry you shared during last week's gathering at your church. Is there a way to grow that ministry in a way that better reflects the lived experiences of those facing hunger and poverty? Even with the best intentions, could the ministry be unintentionally causing harm? What are some ways to address these concerns and move toward more just and compassionate practices?

Pause for a time of sharing.

Say: Before we end, a quick reminder: for our next gathering, please make sure to read Chapters 9 through 12. Here are the questions for our next gathering. If you can,

please read the questions before our next meeting and begin to reflect on them.

Closing Benediction:

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop Woodie White (located in "Structure") or a prayer of your choosing.

Session Three: Chapters 9 - 12

WELCOME (10 minutes)

Say: Welcome to our last session! Before we begin, let's begin with a word of prayer.

You may ask a participant to lead the group in prayer. If no one volunteers, you may lead the group in your own prayer or open with the prayer below.

Pray: God of Mercy and Justice, we invite your Holy Spirit into this space. We ask that you dwell in this fellowship. We ask that you open our eyes and open our ears so that we may come to know more of who you are. Help us to carry the weight of our complicity and responsibility. Help us to remain steadfast when the road to justice is long. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Remind everyone of the Communication Guidelines created during the first session or the Kaleidoscope Institute's Respectful Communication Guidelines.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (25 minutes)

Prepare a board to write down participant responses. Divide the paper/board into 4 sections: Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John.

Say: The passage that we will be looking at today is recorded in all four Gospels and is famously known as the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. We are going to read each account, compare and contrast them, and invite the Spirit to help us discern what she is trying to reveal to us.

Invite participants to take turns reading.

Read: Matthew 14:13-31

Ask: What do you notice in these verses?

Write the responses under “Matthew.”

Read: Mark 6:30-44

Ask: What do you notice in these verses?

Write the responses under “Mark.”

Read: Luke 9:10-17

Ask: What do you notice in these verses?

Write the responses under “Luke.”

Read: John 6:1-14

Ask: What do you notice in these verses?

Write the responses under “John.”

Ask: What are some key differences between these passages?

Note: A few points to mention, if not mentioned by the participants.

- John is the only passage that mentions a little boy with the five fishes and loaves
- Mark is the longest account of this story

Ask: As we consider the whole passage, what societal issues do you see at play in this passage? (class, gender, health care, economic, ...)

Pause for discussion.

Recommended: Listen to “Fishes and Loaves” by Josiah Queen

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (45minutes)

- (Chapter 9) In Chapter 9, Chilton highlights how hunger is not just about food but is deeply intertwined with sexism and racism. How does she illustrate the ways these systems of oppression intersect to disproportionately harm women? In what ways does understanding hunger through an intersectional lens change how we think about solutions and justice? In what ways are hunger, sexism, and racism intersectional?
- (Chapter 10) In Chapter 10, Chilton emphasizes the deep roots of hunger in generational, historical, and systemic oppression and harm. How does Chilton argue that these forces have shaped the ongoing cycle of poverty and food insecurity? What forms of “repair” or systemic transformation does she propose?
- (Chapter 11) In Chapter 11, Chilton explores the connection between environmental justice and human nourishment, emphasizing how access to clean air, water, land, and food are shared human rights. What does this chapter reveal about our collective responsibility to protect the environment to ensure the nourishment and dignity of all people?
- (Chapter 12) In Chapter 12, Chilton draws on the words of bell hooks and Audre Lorde to highlight the power of love, collective resistance, and truth-telling. In what ways can love, as described by hooks and Lorde, serve as tools for dismantling systemic oppression of hunger and poverty?

If you have a large group, break up into smaller groups for the Book Discussion.

CLOSING (approximately 5 minutes)

Say: I want to thank everyone for the rich discussions we've had today. As we wrap up, let's take a few minutes to hear reflections from today's discussions. Who would like to share any insights or reflections? What stood out to you, and how can that learning be applied to our larger group?

If divided into small groups, bring the groups back to the main group.

Pause for a time of sharing. Allow participants to share insights and encourage a brief moment of silence after each contribution to let the ideas sink in.

Say: Church and Society has a campaign called “Grace over Greed” that advocates for the prioritization of grace over greed when Congress considers the budget reconciliation package. On the Take Action page, you’ll find a list of action alerts connected to this effort. Explore the campaign and the accompanying alerts, especially those focused on protecting the hungry and vulnerable. Then, send a letter to your Congressional representatives from the Take Action page and share the link with others to encourage broader participation.

Pause for a time of looking up the website and sharing ideas.

Closing Benediction:

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop Woodie White (located in “Structure”) or a prayer of your choosing.

Additional Resources

United Methodist Resources:

- Social Principles 161. Economic Challenges B
- Social Principles 160. Stewardship of Creation C
- Book of Resolutions, #2100 “The United Methodist Church, Food, Justice, and World Hunger”
- Book of Resolutions, #2111 “Call for Just Tax Structures”
- “God’s Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action” by the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church

Grace Over Greed Campaign:

- [Action Alert: Prioritize Grace Over Greed in Budget Reconciliation](#)

Legislative Resources:

- [Learn more about the Thrifty Food Plan](#)
- [Farm Bill](#)
- [The House Committee on Agriculture](#)
- [Link to the Senate Committee on Agriculture](#)

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