

## Session 4

# The Children Beg for Food (Lamentations 4:4)

### Focus

To confront the impact of hunger on the children of the world, that is, on our own children.

### Preparation

**Go over** the list of suggestions and reminders under this heading in the previous session.

**Consider** how you might enhance the atmosphere of the room for this session. You might ask people to bring a picture of a child or grandchild to post on the wall, and take home at the end of the session. You could obtain a variety of pictures of children from around the world. A majority of the pictures should be of healthy and happy children. We're not trying to create pity but hope, and all children are a gift of God, including those who are suffering. You will need pins, tape, "sticky stuff" or other means of fastening the photos to the wall, or to newsprint, without damaging either the wall or the photos. Put up the photos or pictures you brought before the session begins.

For an alternative activity with children's pictures, see "Connecting Statistics with the Lives of Real Children" at [www.hungernomore.org](http://www.hungernomore.org).

**Bring paper** and pencils.

**Gather information** on your denomination's advocacy and other efforts on behalf of children.

Do some **web research** on the effects of armed conflict on children. Start with the links listed in the handout for this session.

**Review** the "Hunger Basics" section, as well as the "how to get involved" section of the Bread website at [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org).

**Prepare a brief summary** of the group's past experiences and the topics for future sessions.

### Welcome

As you welcome participants, bring them up to speed on where the group has been. Ask if anyone has pictures of children to put up. If so, have them do it quickly and then invite them to be seated and to center in God.



## Opening Prayer

The leader (or a previously designated participant) begins the prayer:

**(L)** Let us place ourselves in the presence of God who is the author of all, the Word become flesh in Jesus Christ and the Spirit sustaining all life. **(All)** Amen.

Then, ask the participants to **turn to each other**, introduce themselves with just their name, and wish each other grace and peace.

**(L)** We are graced by the presence of God and each other. In that grace and the peace it brings, let us now pray together:

Loving God, you came to us as a vulnerable child, entrusted to a mother denied shelter and rest. Although you are the sovereign of the world, you come again and again to us in the children of this world, and because they are your own, you make them our own. Attune our hearts to know the depth of this mystery and this gift, and make us one with them and with you. We ask this in the name of the One who became our flesh and dwelt among us, and now dwells and reigns again united with you in the love of your Holy Spirit, always and forever. **(All)** Amen.



## God's Story

Begin by sharing the following brief introduction to the scripture, in these or similar words:

The Book of Lamentations was written in the aftermath of a devastating war that crushed the City of Jerusalem, left destruction and famine in its wake and saw the leadership of the nation largely sent into exile. Given what we know of the effects of war and conflict on the most vulnerable in society, we shouldn't be surprised to find that the prophet uses the images of women and children to bring home the plight of the whole people.

The destruction makes the people desperate. This desperation is physical – death in battle had been the fate of many of the men, and slow death by hunger and malnutrition was the worse fate of the children. The mothers who saw them starving could do nothing but die with them. Their desperation was also spiritual. Had God abandoned the people, forsaken the covenant? Were the fathers, mothers and children of so little value that not even God cared anymore? The prophet shares their story with us. As we listen, let us join our hands and hearts with the mothers of the fallen city, Jerusalem.



**Then read** (or have a designated person read) the passage from Lamentations in the handout.

After a short **time of silence** to let the words sink in, ask the participants to name a **word, phrase or image** that stood out in their mind during the reading, and why it stood out. **List** the images on newsprint.

- What contemporary examples of such devastation come to mind?
- What spiritual dimensions, similar to those in the biblical account, are present in contemporary situations?
- Why are children, and the women, the greatest losers in any armed conflict?
- This Scripture selection is a very personal account told by the prophet, but the section title is not “the prophet’s story” but “God’s story.” Why do you think that was done?

## Personal Stories

Ask **three persons** to read the personal stories in the handout and instruct them to wait for you or someone else to read “facts” in “The Children’s Story” before the next reader begins. Use the same reader for each of the facts. Begin a **discussion** with questions like these:

- The Lamentations story was written sometime after the sixth century B.C.E. How is it reflected in any of the stories we just heard?
- What do you think the causes of the stories we heard are? Why are the facts we listened to so bleak, despite the tremendous wealth and resources that we know exist? (In leading this portion of the discussion you can make reference to, or distribute relevant portions of material from “Hunger Basics” which you reviewed in preparation for the session.)
- What systemic issues cause these situations? We can probably see how individuals and governments should get involved in resolving these issues, but why and how should the church get involved?



## Our Story

**Distribute pencils** and small pieces of paper.

Refer the group to “**The Children’s Story**” in the handout. Just as the prophet’s story was God’s story, we can say that “The Children’s Story” is also our story. Ask the group “how” and “why” this is so. Then ask each participant to take a moment to think prayerfully about how “The Children’s Story” might become part of their life stories. Ask them to write down one way in which they can concretely make this joining of stories begin to happen before the next session.

Check [www.hungernomore.org](http://www.hungernomore.org) or with your church office to get a summary of, or a web link to, your denomination’s hunger resources. Suggest that each family share a simple meal of soup and bread (not too fancy) in the next week and discuss the ways in which their family can respond to those denominational commitments.



## Reflection and Closing Prayer

Ask the group to be **quiet and centered** in God for the closing reflection and prayer. Pass out pieces of paper each of which has one of the facts in “The Children’s Story.” After a moment begin,

**(L)** The Lord be with you.

**(All)** And also with you.

**(L)** Our help is in the name of the Lord.

**(All)** Who is making the heavens and the earth.

**(L)** God is one: Loving, Bearing, Upholding.

**(All)** In God, we become as one, to love, to bear with and to uphold each other.

**(L)** (in these or similar words)

I invite each of you who has received a “fact,” a piece of the story of the children of the world, to come forward, read it out loud, and then take down one of the pictures of the children we brought here tonight, and place both the picture and fact here on the table before us. After each fact is read, we will all respond by saying together: “in God, we become as one, to love, to bear with and to uphold each other.”

After the facts are read and the pictures gathered, the leader **prays** and all may join hands or stretch out their hands toward the table:

**(L)** Gracious God, lover of all whom you have made, we place before you this night the hopes and dreams of each of these children we love and cherish – those we know and those we do not. Those we can name, and those whose names are unknown to us. We promise you this night, that in the grace of your own child, who lived and died for us, to keep each and all of them in our hearts, prayers and actions until the day that no child again shall beg for food, weep for water or cry out for a loving touch. We ask the grace we know you freely offer to empower this promise until you come again in glory and in everlasting peace.

**(All)** Amen.

