

A vibrant field of sunflowers under a soft, pastel sky. The sunflowers have bright yellow petals and dark brown centers. The background is a blurred field of similar flowers, creating a sense of depth. A semi-transparent green rectangle is overlaid on the right side of the image, serving as a backdrop for the text.

Youth / Young Adult Study Guide

Joy of Eating



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JOY OF EATING



Welcome

Welcome to this week's study on "The Joy of Eating." We are so happy that you are exploring this subject with us! My name is Tiffany Bartell and I will be your host for this week's lesson. My own relationship with food and eating has been a journey. I grew up in a family that struggled to have healthy attitudes towards food. After a seven-year battle with an eating disorder, I had a conversion experience in my spiritual life and Jesus also completely changed my attitude and experience with food. When we focus on health and wellness, we can sometimes forget to fully experience the joy of flavor combinations, trying new foods and sharing that joy with others. They are definitely not mutually exclusive!

One of my greatest joys now is to prepare delicious, nutritious meals for my family and our friends. I have a special tradition, when preparing a meal to share with others. I imagine their first bite as they experience what I have made for them. As I picture their faces, it makes me so happy to contribute to their enjoyment. Sharing food is one of the ways I show love to those who are important to me. I love to prepare special breads, desserts, comforting soups and sauces and bright and flavor-layered salads! This week, we invite you to think about what Jesus wants food and eating to be in your life, ways that you can connect with others through sharing meals and your own relationship to eating.

Let's go!

Tiffany's Note

Bryan Arvelo begins this week's conversation on the "Joy of Eating." I invite you to enjoy hearing his experience with joyful eating, as well as his dive into what the Bible has to say about Jesus' desire to connect with us through food.

The Dinner Party

Have you ever attended a dinner party? When I turned 17 my family helped throw one. We invited all of my friends to our house, and asked them to dress formally. We took tons of pictures, played games, and most importantly, ate well. There is surely something special about eating with other people. Shared meals bring opportunity to showcase common interests and initiate fellowship. In the Bible, Jesus invites all of His followers to a dinner party. What's the occasion? Not a birthday, but an eternal victory.

Read Revelation 19:6-9

Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we have an invitation to celebrate in heaven. There is no better place to be. Interestingly, Revelation 19 is just one of the few times that John (writer of Revelation) references dining with the Lord (see Rev 2:7, Rev 3:20, Rev 22:17).

It is clear that God desires to dine and dwell with all of His creation.

Biblical Prompt

As you read some of what the Bible describes about eating and enjoying food, what do you notice? What do these verses tell you about the role God intended food to play in our lives?

Revelation 2:7 "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God."

Revelation 3:20 "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."

Revelation 22:17 "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' Let anyone who hears this say, 'Come.' Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life."

Personal Reflection

What kinds of attitudes toward food did you grow up with? How are these similar to or different from those you identified in the previous prompt?



Tiffany's Note

*Today we are looking at memorable meals in the Bible and how God uses food to not only show His power, but also His great love for us. So many of our favorite Bible stories involve meals that were either special in meaning or involved miracles in the provision of the food. **Natalie Boonstra** shares a tradition of a special meal in her family and its connection to a memorable meal in the Old Testament. As you are reading her account, notice memorable meals from your own childhood that come to mind or any new traditions that you may want to start.*

Memorable Meals

When my family lived in the suburbs outside of Los Angeles, California, we had the privilege of living close to an authentic Jewish bakery. Every week my mom would bring home Challah bread, a sweet, braided loaf of bread, made with eggs, flour, yeast and salt. We soon learned that our interest in Jewish culture dug deeper than their yummy food. We started adopting their Friday night practice of lighting candles, and reciting Scripture together around the dinner table. Our family began using this ritual as an opportunity to bring the Sabbath in as a family.

Our Jewish friends also celebrate Passover each year, dating back to the Exodus. This is a meal to commemorate when God spared the Israelites while sending plagues on Pharaoh and the Egyptians. During the final plague, God instructs the Israelites to mark their doorposts with blood from a lamb they have sacrificed, signaling for God to pass

over their home. The Passover feast is more than just a meal with delicious food and a time for family to get together. It is a celebration that God protected His people, even in the midst of oppression.

I think back to my Friday night dinners with my family, and how this was the only time in the week when I said more than a quick “thank you” prayer. **It was a time to reflect on how God had brought me through the difficulties of the week.** Each time I pass the bakery section in my local grocery store and I happen to get a whiff of Challah bread, I am overwhelmed with the feeling of love, knowing God is protecting me.

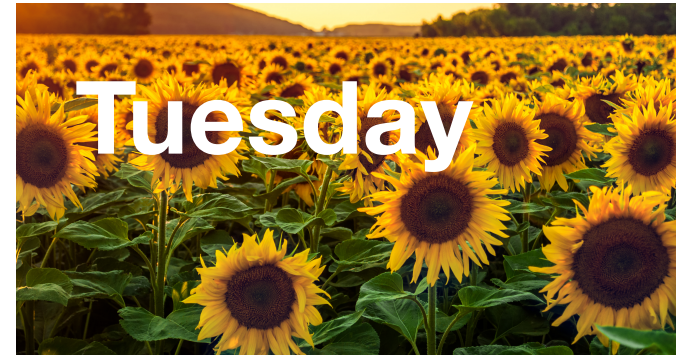
Biblical Prompt

The Bible contains many stories of memorable meals and each is associated with unique and important meaning. **Read Exodus 16:11-18, Mark 6:34-44 and Matthew 26:26-29**

Meals in the Bible are used to show God’s miraculous power and His compassionate love and can be a way of instituting rituals of remembering, such as with Passover and the Last Supper. After reading these stories of memorable meals, which one stands out to you and why?

Personal Reflection

What is the most memorable meal you have personally experienced? What about the food particularly made it such a rich experience?



Tiffany's Note

My friend, **Michael**, is known for connection. When you talk to him, you have his full attention and he listens so intentionally that you feel like you are the only person in the room. Today, Michael shares with us the importance of connecting with others through food and the way in which eating together can remove barriers that might exist.

Everybody Eats

There is something incredibly special that food does in gathering people together that breaks all language barriers because, more times than often, our stomachs speak louder than our mouths. Growing up in a Filipino household, food is a pivotal aspect of our culture. With occasions ranging from a birthday to a funeral, having a plentiful amount of food will always be first on the to-do list. However, what was even more special was that not only my immediate family would eat, but the entire community, even those just passing by would be welcomed in during these occasions to simply eat and *gather*. In the Bible, food is especially evident as a vessel in bringing people together, even enemies.

Read Esther 5:1-8; 6:1-7; 8:16-17

It is fascinating to see how Esther used food as a means to discuss the pardoning of an entire people group! In Esther 8:16-17, the Jews celebrated with “feasting,” a rather full circle moment with Esther preparing a feast for their mutual enemy.

Food broke the barrier that Esther needed to save God's people, but the beautiful trait of food is that it can be eaten with anyone.

Jesus did likewise in many occasions.

Biblical Prompt

What do you notice about how sharing food can be used to create connection? How does God use food and eating together to create closeness?

Psalm 23:5 _____

Matthew 14:18-20 _____

Luke 15:22-24 _____

Personal Reflection

How do you want to use the joy of eating to increase connection in your social community? Are there ways that you can use connection through eating to serve God or create “divine appointments”?



Tiffany's Note

Today, we are shifting to look at barriers that society and our current culture can present that make it hard for many to experience joy in eating. **Alissa Tanguay** is going to share with us what these barriers can look like and how to move past them.

Barriers to Joy in Eating

Peter had been one of Jesus' disciples and had been zealously preaching the gospel message to the Jewish community. He had not yet felt the call to take the gospel to the Gentiles—people outside the Jewish heritage. One night, Peter has a very strange dream in which he sees many “unclean” animals coming down from the sky in a sheet. Then he hears a voice say, “rise, kill and eat” (Acts 10:13). A good Jew like Peter is appalled at such a command that goes in direct opposition of God's law regarding clean and unclean foods, so he responds “Surely not Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean” (Acts 10:14).

As the day's events continued to unfold, Peter soon realized that God was not actually telling him to break the laws regarding unclean foods. God was in the process of breaking down a longstanding barrier between Jews who knew God and Gentiles, who had received some light but were not as familiar with the God of Abraham. This story turned out to be a major turning point for the early church, and has helped spread the joy of Jesus to millions of people throughout the centuries.

Peter was his own biggest barrier to the truth. The societal laws, beliefs, and pressures had influenced his perception of which people groups were able to receive the joy of Jesus and made it easy for him to sort people into groups that were “good” or “bad.” What about you? How are societal beliefs and pressures regarding food affecting your ability to know Jesus and enjoy his gift of food?

It is estimated that about 30 million people in the US will experience an eating disorder at some point in their life! According to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, “eating disorders are among the deadliest mental illnesses, second only to opioid overdose.” So why do people spend so much unhealthy energy obsessing over their weight and body image? One reason is peer and societal pressure from social media. Although males can struggle with body image and not feeling like “enough,” females are especially vulnerable to eating disorders, unhealthy eating patterns or diets, and feeling less than their peers after looking at social media. According to a study published in *Body Image*, “[women] felt worse about their own appearance after looking at social media pages of someone that they perceived to be more attractive than them.” When we focus on the opinions and perceptions that other people (or even ourselves) have of us—instead of the opinion of God—can lead to very unhealthy behaviors.

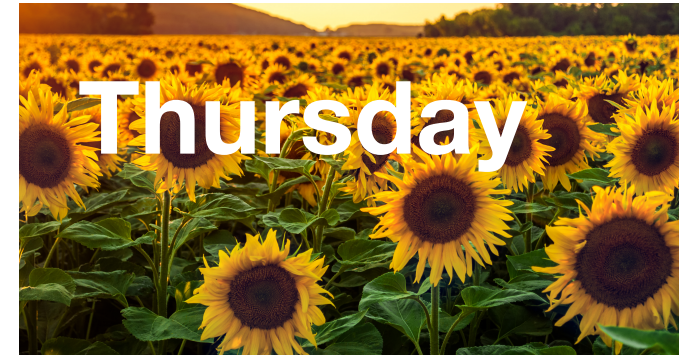
So, back to the sheet with the strange animals. The Jewish society's way of viewing Gentiles brought more barriers than joy to the people, much like our current society at large creates more barriers than joy surrounding the topics of body image and food. **God wants us to experience freedom from these barriers by knowing and living the truth:** He created us with unique body types, personalities, and purposes to best show the world His love. “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Psalm 139:14 NIV).

Discussion Prompt

What barriers have you or someone you know experienced to finding joy in eating? What factors do you think contributed to building this barrier?

Challenge

In what ways can you help minimize barriers for yourself or others? What resources might you need?



Tiffany's Note

*This week, we have dived into God's Word for an understanding of the joy He intends for us to experience in eating and sharing food. We have also looked into our own lives and experiences to examine any barriers we may face to experiencing this joy. Our final day of this week, **Beatrice Ngugi** presents us with a challenge to consider how we can help those in our local and global communities have access to not only adequate resources, but the "Joy of Eating."*

Sharing the Joy of Eating

Food insecurity is an issue that affects individuals and families around the world, but it can also affect those in our own communities. Food insecurity is the "lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life".

The number of individuals, families, and groups of people experiencing food insecurity is staggering. Globally, approximately 690 million people are food insecure; this represents 8.9% of the world's population. In the United States, studies show that prior to the global pandemic 35 million Americans faced food insecurity. Just one year later, that number is up to 42 million.

Narrowing the focus even more, adults and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. One in four people within the ages of 18-26 years of age are without enough food. For college students, the numbers are even higher, with 1 in 3 college

students facing food insecurity across the United States. These numbers alone are enough to show how big of an issue this is, however food insecurity is also linked to multiple other issues including poverty, poor overall and mental health, as well as heightened risk for depression and suicidal ideation.

While these numbers can be discouraging, change is still occurring, and you can be a part of it. I have always loved the book of James because he never sugarcoats anything.

Moreover, he reminds us of the higher calling God has placed on each of us.

Read this challenge and reminder: **James 2:15-17** "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

We are called and challenged to be active members of our church and to help those in need. There are many ways for you to become involved in the fight against food insecurity. Opportunities include researching bills and policies that affect food insecurity and tracking anti-hunger legislation that you can support. If you are a student at a high school or university, you can start a food pantry or be a part of strengthening one that already exists. Whether in a small town or big city, you can look up your local food bank and find volunteer opportunities for sorting and packing donated food. Wherever you are in the world, you can encourage your church to get involved or create a monthly food drive open to the community.

Discussion Prompt

How has food insecurity affected you, your family or your community? How can a lack of resources make it difficult to experience joy in eating?

Challenge

We are called to be active in our faith; what conviction is God placing on your heart to actively engage in serving those experiencing food insecurity?





Think. Ask. Act.

Which topic from this week particularly spoke to you? Why?

How can you find out more information about that issue? Post a question on your social media or to a study group you interact with, or talk with someone who may know more about the topic. What did you learn?

What can you do to implement God's plan for the Joy of Eating in your life?

For More Information

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>

http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/online/ca9692en.html#chapter-1_1

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/facts>

<https://twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/nearly-one-four-young-people-experience-food-insecurity-adolescence-adulthood>

<https://www.swipehunger.org/whycollegehunger/#the-evidence>

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/phn.12708>

<https://www.swipehunger.org/legtracker/>

The new Health Disparities Action Guide provides information on how you can help people who struggle with food insecurity: [NADhealth.org/disparities](https://www.nadhealth.org/disparities).

For help with issues related to food addictions, take a look at the Journey to Wholeness recovery program: [NADhealth.org/recovery](https://www.nadhealth.org/recovery).