

I'm God's Kid!

Living in His Image



A Four-Step Bible Study to Help You Live
Healthy and in a Closer Relationship With God.

Small Group Session 1

You Were Made for Better

Opening Activity

Fresh fruit and Vegetable Snack

Have an assortment of fresh fruits and vegetables out for the youth to get a plate and have a snack as they enter. Try to avoid any sugary or heavy dipping sauces or dressings.

Scripture

⁷then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground,⁸ and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

-Genesis 2: 7-8

Onramp

Have you ever been on or known someone who is dieting? People diet for a lot of different reasons. Some people want to lose weight while others do it because they want to feel better physically. Dieting is an interesting concept. When asked “What are you dieting from?” most people will tell you that they are trying to not eat junk food, fast food, sweets and processed food. It is rare if ever that you hear someone say that they are trying to cut back on celery or that they are trying to watch their blueberry intake for this month.

You never hear this because foods that are healthy for you are not designed to be addictive, ones that are not healthy for you have been designed, by people, to make you want more and more! Have you ever had a craving for French fries? I know I have. There is a reason why that is. French fries are a perfect combination, a lethal combination, of grease, salt and carbohydrates. When you I talk about it like that, it

probably does not sound to appetizing but your brain has sensors that are connected to your tongue and when hot grease, salt and carbohydrates hit your mouth your brain has a chemical reaction and fireworks start going off in your head. Have you ever ridden a rollercoaster, held a crush's hand or did really well in a sporting event or competition? The same chemicals that are released in your body when you do those things also release when you eat food like French fries. These chemicals create a sense of excitement, pleasure and euphoria.

And you just thought it happened because they taste good!

The folks who design fast food and processed food know this, and their job is to create this sensation for you so that you will want to buy more and more of their product.

French fries are so addictive because they were designed to be!

When you think about it that way it feels pretty gross, huh?

*Have you ever wanted some junk food really bad and then binged on it? What happened?

*Have you ever struggled with craving food that you know is not good for you, how did it make you feel to have such strong wants for something you know is not good for you?

Diving Deep

There is another reality that exists around us, another reality that we also have the opportunity to participate in. This a reality where food has also been designed. The difference is that in this reality the food was designed, not for addiction but for benefit. In this reality the food was designed for moderation not for excess. In this reality the purpose is not for profit but for growth and health.

When we dive into the original story, the story of our creation and the creation of the universe, we see a very different plan.

In Genesis 2:7-8 we see the creation of humankind as we have learned it from the time we were children. What is also there, in plain sight, is something that we probably have not noticed before. Immediately after the text says that God breathed breath into the nostrils of humanity, God's very next act is to plant a garden. Isn't that cool? First humans, next the Garden of Eden! From day 1 there was an intimate connection between humans and our food. The idea here is that from the beginning God provided exactly what we needed. Fruits and vegetables, nuts and grains were a part of God's original plan. It is so interesting that when people talk about dieting and getting away from those harmful foods, they are really, whether they know it or not, are trying to get back to what God originally intended for us. What they are realizing and what I hope we realize through this study is that We Are Made For Better than what we put into our bodies. Earlier we discussed how things like French fries give our bodies a jolt of chemicals that gives us a euphoric feeling. The problem is that this feeling is temporary and needs more and more of the stimulant (French fries in this case) to recreate it. Fruits and vegetables, as God originally intended, works in just the opposite way. They create a long term sense and feeling of health and well-being. It is not a sudden jolt but it also does not go away leaving you in a deficit. What a beautiful picture in Genesis, we were made for the garden and the garden was made for us. It was made not just for enjoyment or to fill our stomachs, but to grow us mentally, physically and even spiritually.

*Have you ever thought about what you eat as a spiritual practice? What do you think about it now?

*How do you think your eating habits and nutritional habits affect your relationship with God and others?

Hands On

People live in all sorts of situations. From apartments in the city, to farms in the country and everything in between, we have a multitude of ways in which we form a home. Not all of these places have a front yard or even dirt in which to reconnect with God through

the idea of garden and eating from the garden. The activity below is a very simple way to create a space not only to grow fresh fruit, vegetables and herbs but it is also a way to participate in God's original plan of humanity being intimately connected with the food they eat! It is also a way for people who do not have access to fresh fruit and vegetables to be able to grow their own!

<http://houseofjoyfulnoise.com/strawberry-planting-in-rain-gutters/>

The link above is to several design for "gutter gardens" as a project for this group for the next month or so, we encourage you to purchase a section of gutter, some plants, soil and the necessary elements and create a group garden together during the small group time. Make sure to plant enough so that each person in the small group will have one at the end of the small group series. Each week have the group check in and see how their garden is growing and make sure to always connect it back to the idea that gardening is a spiritual act of reconnecting with God's original plan. You can use this part of Session 1 to either use the materials and plant the gutter garden together or you can have a discussion about what all plants the group wants to try to grow and plant them next time together.

Closing Prayer

Pray this aloud as a blessing of encouragement to and for the small group.

"God who created us for so much more, we pray that our eyes and hearts will be open to your plans to benefit us and to grow us. We pray that we will not settle for the quick and easy way but that we will strive for the best way, the way that you call us to. God we pray for those who do not have food, those who do not have access to healthy food and those who do not have clean water. We pray that they will know your goodness by receiving these things and we pray that you will use us to be an answer to our own prayer wherever we go. Thank you for your gifts and let us never take them for granted. Amen."

Small Group Session 2

The Great Temptation

Opening Activity

If This... Then That...

In our last session we talked about making not only healthy choices for our food but those choices were also God choices. One of the things we know is that the healthiest choice is not always the easiest or cheapest choice, especially if we are in a hurry. In this opening activity we are going to create a tool for youth to be able to use to help them make healthier choices even when they are busy.

Have the youth make a list of all of their biggest food cravings. This can be a list of things like chocolate and French fries to, fast food restaurants to things their parents buy at the store. If you have a white board list these on the left side of the board under the column heading "If This..." After you have a pretty good list then tell the youth that we are creating an "If This...Then That" list where we will take the things we crave and give healthy alternatives so that we feel like we have a real choice and do not have to just settle for the quickest easiest fix for the things we crave. Have the students brainstorm for each item listed on the left side of the board and then on the right side of the board they will write the alternative foods that directly correlate to the cravings under the heading "Then That..."

Here are a few examples to get them started:

Chocolate----- Dark chocolate in moderation

Mountain Dew----- Fresh squeezed OJ or Orange LaCroix

Chips-----Kale Chips or Apple Chips

It is also a good idea for the leader to have a laptop or smart phone to google search “healthy alternatives for _____” The youth should also be encouraged to use their phones to help search for some of the more difficult ones.

After the alternative list has been created the leader should type it up and make copies for the youth to take home or keep with them, they can also take pictures with their smart phones for easy access.

Scripture

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.³The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” -Matthew 4:1-4

“Give us this day our daily bread.” -Matthew 6:11

Onramp

I do not know about you but when I am the busiest is when I make the worst choices with how I eat and take care of myself. In school when there is are finals or a big project due many students resort to bad sleeping (or no sleeping at all) and unhealthy eating habits. Many students will eat lots of snack food as they study or work and do so really late. The classic image is of college students staying up all night eating greasy pizza and drinking loads of caffeine before the big test. Not only is this bad for you but it is prove to not be an effective way to study! Don’t worry, adults are just as bad. Often times when adults are stressed, have deadlines or are overworking themselves they will do much of the same things. They will eat poorly as well as stress eat. Some will also consume too much caffeine or alcohol in order to deal with the stress. This coupled with anxiety and poor sleeping patters results in a life that is that is unhealthy mentally, physically and spiritually.

The reason why we tend to eat more poorly and more often when we are stressed is because it is way or coping with our stress but on a practical level it is just more convenient. As an adult, after a long hard day at work, it is definitely much easier to just drop by a fast food place on the way home and grab something that is high in calories, salt and low on nutritional value, instead of coming home and spending the next hour preparing a healthy meal. So much of our poor choices in food are tied directly to our business, stress and convenience. There is a direct correlation for most people in the level of their stress and poor choices in diet. Think about it, hard day at school, loads of homework, very little time? Easy choice, grab a candy bar and a soda for a quick boost of energy and comfort. But remember the quick fix is not the best solution.

*What are some times where you have been tempted to use a quick fix or take a short cut solution to a difficult choice?

Diving Deep

So there is the scene: Jesus has been in the wilderness (read desert here: hot, dry and alone). He has been fasting and praying and thinking about what God is calling him to do in the world (heavy stuff) so he is all alone and hungry. He is at the end of his fast, the final day, and all of the sudden temptation arises. The book of Matthew says that he is tempted to take a stone and turn it into a loaf of bread. Lets take a time out here. If you have never been to the Middle East I want to help you understand this scripture a little better. EVERYWHERE you look there are tons of round loaf shaped stones. Can you imagine Jesus walking around for 40 days all alone and all he sees around him are rocks that look like bread? It is like those old cartoons where the characters are stranded on an island together and when they look at each other they do not see a person but begin to see a ham or a turkey!

Here is where the temptation becomes even stronger: No one would have known and rationally he was on the last day of his fast anyways, right? The truth of the matter is that by turning the stone into bread, Jesus would have taken the easy way out. It was convenient, quick and would have definitely satisfied a very real hunger that he had. Did he do it?

Nope.

Jesus responded to the temptation of quickness and convenience correctly. His words can be interpreted a lot of different ways of course but one of the ways we can read them is that he, no matter his situation, was refusing to accept the quick fix to his situation. I believe Jesus knew there were consequences to choosing the easy way out and led by example for each of us. This example can be understood in many areas of life like not cheating on a test because you forgot to study or lying to get out of consequences. It can be just as easily applied to taking unhealthy short cuts in our eating and nutritional habits as well.

*What do you think would have happened if Jesus would have decided to turn the stone into bread?

*What are times and places in your life where it is most difficult to eat well? What are some steps you can take to have other alternatives instead of feeling like the quick fix is the only choice you have?

Hands On

Tend to the Gutter Garden and Make a Fruit Smoothie

Take some time during this part of the small group to let the students get up and go outside to tend to their “gutter gardens.” Help them note the places where the plants are growing and where they are not. Also take time to pull out any weeds and to make sure that the soil is moist and watered. This is also a great time to see if there is a section of the gutter is not getting enough sun light and if adjustments need to be made to its positioning.

Once you have finished getting your hands dirty in the “gutter garden” have the students come in and chose from one of the recipes listed to make small smoothie snacks! This is to reinforce and remind them that a good healthy snack is just a blender away!

https://www.buzzfeed.com/jesseinfeld/8-easy-3-ingredient-smoothies?utm_term=.qbrXgw62d#.bprk0wyzK

The site above has fun and tasty 3 ingredient smoothies. You can either chose a few of these to have enough ingredients for or you can go ahead and make the “smoothie ingredient packets” and have a couple of blenders set up to make them quickly for the students!

Closing Prayer

Pray this aloud as a blessing of encouragement to and for the small group.

“Good Creator, we thank you for giving us what we need, our daily bread. We pray that we will not be such busy people that we neglect your good gifts of health, life and nutrition. We pray that we will take control of our business, anxiety and schedules so that we can honor you with, not only our achievements and work but also with our choices and bodies. We thank you that you provide a way to do this, now give us the courage and resolve to follow that good way. Amen”

Small Group Session 3
Dinner is a Justice Issue

Opening Activity

Sugar Weight Scales

This is a fun opening game with serious consequences. Most people do not realize what all they are putting into their body when they eat processed foods. A way that is very effective is to show exactly what is going into their bodies in physical form. In order to do this in a way that does not feel heavy handed or guilt ridden we have created a matching game.

Begin the game by stating the average person is only supposed to have 25-35 grams of sugar a day, which is also translated as 6-9 teaspoons. Have a zip loc bag on the table with 30 grams of sugar in it for reference.

Then place these 8 items on the table: Donut, small bag of chips, can of Mountain Dew, Snicker Bar, cup of yogurt with fruit already in it, Packaged blueberry muffin, Bowl of Frosted Flakes, small pack of single serve salad dressing. Then have 8 zip loc bags of sugar, each with the amount of sugar listed in the nutritional information for each food item you have listed on the table. Each bag should have the amount, in grams, of sugar written in marker on the outside of the bag. Do not couple the bags with their corresponding food items. Divide the students into teams and give them a sheet of paper and pen. They will then write each food in the left column and as a team decide which sugar zip-loc belongs with each item. Give them 5 minutes as a team to do this and then have them swap papers to grade as you reveal, by placing the correct bag in front of each food item, the true amounts for each. Let the winning team have first choice of a fruit snack.

*What surprised you about this game?

*Did you have any clue that there was this much sugar in foods that you probably eat every day?

*How much do you think you consume in a normal day based on what you learned from this game?

Scripture

“But they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.” -Micah 4:4

Onramp

Have you ever been on a mission trip or service project where you and your youth group or school group’s primary job is to help feed homeless or hungry people? It is a very exciting and rewarding experience to know that the food you are preparing or distributing is going to help feed those who are unable to feed themselves. This is a good and important practice that you should continue to do! While the hungry of the world are a clear and important group that we must take care of and provide for, there is also another group of people who are hungry in a different way and we may never notice.

Over 23 million people live in what is known as a “food desert.” “Food deserts” are geographic areas where access to affordable, healthy food options (aka fresh fruits and veggies) is limited or nonexistent because grocery stores are too far away. When people do not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables they have to resort to buying processed, canned or genetically modified food that is most often high in sugars, sodium, preservatives and other chemical additives that are detrimental to a person’s health. This lack of access to food that is both fresh and healthy for a person leads to long term health problems like obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and a multitude of other preventable diseases. For most of us the idea of not having a grocery store close by that has fresh fruits, vegetables and other healthy choices is a reality that we will never experience. For almost 5% of Americans this is an everyday reality. This

coupled with the problem of food for the poor and hungry is a major issue considering we are the wealthiest and most prosperous country in the world.

*Have you ever heard of a “food desert”?

*Now that you have how does it change how you see the need to help those who not only do not have food, but also not healthy food?

Diving Deep

It is easy to think about things like hunger and food deserts as something that exists separate from our faith but nothing could be further from the truth. Throughout the Bible there is a continued emphasis on making sure that the poor are taken care of and that people have their “daily bread.” In the passage above the Old Testament prophet Micah is outlining God’s ideal world, a world that we as followers of God are called to hope for and help make happen. Earlier in the passage he talks about their weapons of war being destroyed and turned into tools for.... You guessed it farming! Then the prophet Micah continues talking about gardens saying that every person, in God’s ideal world “will have their own vines and their own fig trees and no one will make the afraid.” This incredibly profound statement by Micah is all about food and food security. If every person has their own vine and own fig tree, i.e. they have enough food, the world will be a place where weapons are not needed. It will also be a place where people do not have to be afraid of each other or afraid of having to go to bed yet another night without food to eat.

An interesting thing that many people misunderstand about prophets is their role in the Bible. A lot of people think that the prophets were fortune or future tellers. If we look closely this was not their role at all. Their primary role was to redirect God’s people back to the path in which God was calling them along. Micah was talking to a people who had who had strayed from the path where they remembered that God wants everyone to have what they need and no one to be afraid or to be hungry. The book of Micah was written almost 3,000 years ago but its message still rings true today: God is

concerned about humans having healthy food and enough food to eat and to not have to live life in fear. If God has been concerned with that for the past 3000 years shouldn't it be a major concern of ours as well?

In one of Jesus most famous teaching moments he tells those who did not follow him, "When I was hungry you did not feed me." They asked him "Lord, when did we see you hungry and not feed you?" He answered them "Whatever you did for the least of these you also did for me." There are a lot of people who are hungry, food insecure and also living in food deserts, what happens at our dinner table and at theirs is a very serious and a very spiritual matter.

Hands On

Tend to the Gutter Garden

Take some time during this part of the small group to let the students get up and go outside to tend to their "gutter gardens." Help them note the places where the plants are growing and where they are not. Also take time to pull out any weeds and to make sure that the soil is moist and watered. This is also a great time to see if there is a section of the gutter is not getting enough sun light and if adjustments need to be made to its positioning.

*How do you think something like a "gutter garden" might help people who live in food deserts?

*What can you do as an individual or as a group to help eliminate food deserts in our country?

Closing Prayer

Pray this aloud as a blessing of encouragement to and for the small group.

“Sustainer God, we know and believe that dinner is a very important social justice issue for you. We also know that you call us, your people, to partner with you to love and meet the needs of the world. God, open our eyes to the injustices that we are blind to. Give us energy and conviction to help make your “kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven” where everyone has what they need and no one is afraid. When we do this we will do it in your good, good name. Amen.”

Small Group Session 4
It is Time to Start Really Living

Opening Activity

SAD Diet Pie Graph Competition

The SAD (Standard American Diet) is a pie graph that shows, by percentage, the food an average American consumes in a given year. The findings of the SAD pie graph are pretty disturbing. In order to help the students understand how skewed our practices are as opposed to the “My Plate” health recommendations. For the opening activity print enough copies of the SAD pie chart for each team and cut the pieces out. You will also cut the labels out for the teams to place on the pie chart. Make sure that the teams do not know which label goes with each piece. The competition will be for each team to have 3 minutes to figure out which piece goes where, the team that finishes first with the correct pie wins. Next you will do the exact same competition with the “My Plate” chart also provided. When both competitions are finished ask the teams to contrast and compare the recommended plan for eating with the actual dietary trends most Americans subscribe to.

Scripture

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” -John 10:10

Onramp

There was a study that came out several years ago that said most people walk through their day with very little thought or intentionality. The study talked about how the majority of the decisions we make on a daily basis we do so without thought or reason. It concluded that most people just walk through life aimless and with very little awareness of the world that is going on all around them. Think about it for a minute.... How intentional are you in how you live your life? Do you take every decision, every choice as an opportunity, or do you do the same things over and over again, making the same thoughtless choices and decisions?

The study also talked about how, if we decide to change and become aware of the world that is around us, our lives will not only have greater meaning but we will be of greater significance to the world around us. This awareness of our world means being intentional about the conversations we have, the endeavors we spend our energy on and even the things we eat! Can you imagine what your life could be like if you stopped going through the motions, welcomed every experience as an opportunity to grow, learn and be better and started living a full and rich life? The possibilities are incredible!

*What are some times when you felt like you were really living, really experiencing a full life?

*Where are some places in your life where you feel like you just go through the motions? How do think you can fix that?

Diving Deep

In John 10, Jesus is talking with his disciples about who he is, the relationship he wants to have with them and the opportunities for how they can live their lives. In one part of the talk he speaks about the snares and traps of life and then quickly turns to say the type of life he came to bring and that we can have. He says that he came to give us life, but not just breathing, but life more abundant. The idea here is that Jesus is telling us that we have to opportunity, calling even, not to just walk around breathing and taking up space but to be fully alive, aware and active for good in our world. Jesus wants us to really see the goodness around us, to really breathe in the air, to have real conversations, to intentionally be present and here, wherever we are. This is a revolutionary calling. It is a calling that not only affects how we interact with others, how we walk through our day but also how we think about the things we put into our bodies. To be fully alive and fully aware, it means that we do not settle for the quick and easy solutions of fast food and junk food. It means that we are intentional about the putting goodness into our bodies and taking full advantage of the incredible and beautiful food that God has placed before us. It means that we do not live into the lies of convenience

and scarcity but rather into the promise of the goodness of God's creation.

For so many Christians we have bought into a false understanding of our body and soul. For many of us we bought into the lie that the body and soul are two different things that have nothing to do with each other. Nothing could be further from the truth. What we do to our body affects the rest of our body, and how we nourish our soul has repercussions for what is going on with our bodies. In other words, what and how you eat has real connections to how you practice your faith. Jesus called us to live life and live it more abundantly. That is a call on our whole life, our whole body and our whole person.

Hands On

Tend to the Gutter Garden

Take some time during this part of the small group to let the students get up and go outside to tend to their "gutter gardens." Help them note the places where the plants are growing and where they are not. Also take time to pull out any weeds and to make sure that the soil is moist and watered. This is also a great time to see if there is a section of the gutter is not getting enough sun light and if adjustments need to be made to its positioning.

Since this is the final session you can decide to do a couple of things with your gutter garden. You can decide for each person to get their plant and take it home with them to take care of. If this is the case you will want to make sure to have some pots to replant them in as well as having some extra potting soil on hand to fill in the sides of the planters. You might decide to keep the plants in the gutter garden and this small group continue to meet and take care of them together. A third option might be to think of some one in the community who might not have as much and take it to them as a gift of food and life.

If there are a lot of people in the area you live who could benefit from a gutter garden you

might think about taking this small group as an opportunity to construct several gutter gardens or stacked gutter gardens and give them to people in your area.

Closing Prayer

Pray this aloud as a blessing of encouragement to and for the small group.

“Life Giver, we thank you that you breathed breath into us and gave us life. God we pray that we will not take that gift for granted by living ordinary lives where we simply go through the motions. Give us the awareness to see the world around us, to breathe in deeply and really live the life you have called us to. Help us to encourage others to wake up from going through the motions and see the possibilities that surround each of us every day. We thank you for life, we promise to really live it. Amen.”