

Study Guides for Faith & Science Integration

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## What are the Ethics of Eating? (Participant's Guide)

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Leader's Guide to

# What are the Ethics of Eating?

*A Study of Food Ethics: The Basics*

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Summer 2017

## How to Use This Material?

This study of the ethics involved in what we choose to eat using Ronald Sandler's *Food Ethics: The Basics* consists of 5 modules. Each module contains two sections. The first section presents a set of Reading and Reflection questions that are to be completed before each meeting and are meant to help the participant wrestle with the concepts introduced in that week's chapters. The second section consists of two (or more) Discussion questions, which will be written by the participants and the leader as they read. Both sets of questions are meant to foster discussion, but your group should by no means limit itself to the questions contained in these sections.

This study is intended for **informal, small group** discussion, such as that of a Bible study or small group. The themes presented in each submodule may be unpacked on its own, but it is the hope of the authors that the entire study may be useful to the interested reader (leader and participant alike). The study is also aimed toward **high school students, college students, and post-college adults** with an interest in how science and the Christian faith interact.

As you read, it is our hope that you will come across (and come up with) questions which challenge you, both in understanding your personal faith and in understanding science. In these questions, you will have the opportunity to grow through asking and answering these questions: Why has the church historically believed in *this* answer or *that* answer? How might you be challenged to defend your answer?

## Planning and Preparing for a Session

The material assumes that each session will last for about 30-45minutes. It also assumes that each participant will have read the assigned chapter(s) and considered the Reading and Reflection questions ahead of time.

It must also be noted that the provided discussion questions are intended as a guide for your discussion, but you should by no means restrict your discussion to these questions. Try to keep your group's discussion relevant to the general themes addressed in the module, but be flexible.

## Equipped for Service

This "Leader's Guide" is meant to **equip leaders** of these small group discussions, and thus the following pages are far more detailed and expansive than the average participant may judge necessary for complex discussion. We offer information from other references and suggested answers to questions posed in the text. This has been done in the hope that you, as the leader, may more easily facilitate and moderate discussion amongst your peers in the small group. Your small group may be made up of the generation that initiates change in how the common Christian comes to understand these questions and answer – in the service of your peers, do not underestimate your own significance as a leader or co-leader.

## Who is the author of *Food Ethics: The Basics*?

Ronald Sandler, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion, professor of philosophy, a researcher in the Nanotechnology and Society Research Group, and a research associate in the Environmental Justice Research Collaborative at Northeastern University. He also directs the Ethics Institute at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. His primary areas of research are environmental ethics, ethics and technology, ethical theory, and Spinoza. Sandler has taught courses on subjects ranging from philosophy of religion to ethics after Darwin and from contemporary moral issues to history of philosophy. He has received Northeastern University's Excellence in Teaching Award.

Find out more about Prof. Sandler at <https://www.northeastern.edu/cssh/faculty/ronald-sandler>.

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## Module 1: Intro to Food Systems

Resources and chapters covered: “How Then Shall We Eat?” by Tanya De Roo, and “Introduction” and “Food Systems” from *Food Ethics*

### Reading and Reflection

#### How Then Shall We Eat?”

1. How do you most often prioritize the five dimensions De Roo lists? Why? Which order of these dimensions would you consider to be “most Christian” when it comes to food ethics?
2. Do you make any of the six food ethics-related choices De Roo describes? If so, why? If not, do any of the six sound especially attractive to you? Do you think that these six choices are good choices? Do they reflect a Christian approach to eating?

#### “Introduction”

1. How often do you consider the ethics of what and how you eat? How do you decide what foods to buy? What “food movements” are you aware of?
2. Does God care what and how you eat? What does it look like to eat Christianly? What components must you take into consideration?

## “Food Systems”

3. What “processes, infrastructures, and actors” are involved in the production of a fast food cheeseburger (or any other processes food item you enjoy)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What are some of the benefits of a commodity monoculture? Of a polyculture?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Do you support a global industrial food system? (Do you support the idea? Do you support the system itself with the way you choose to buy groceries?)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What do you think about the concepts of “distributive injustice,” “environmental injustice,” “climate injustice,” “economic injustice,” “food injustice,” etc.? Do you agree with Sandler’s descriptions of “justice” (i.e. those who benefit also shoulder an appropriate amount of the associated burden)? What would justice look like in these situations?



## Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

1.

2.

## Module 2: Food and Social Justice

Chapter covered: "Food Security and the Ethics of Assistance"

### Reading and Reflection

#### "Food Security and the Ethics of Assistance"

1. About how much food waste do you produce each day? Would you estimate that it is more or less than 40%?
2. Do you think that the governmental subsidization of corn a good idea? Why do you think the United States government chose to subsidize corn? Would it be worthwhile to subsidize other crops as well (e.g. potatoes, carrots, apples)?
3. Do you agree with what Sandler says in his discussion of "moral luck"? What is our responsibility in light of "moral luck"? What sort of aid do you think would be most effective?
4. What is the Church's responsibility in the face of food injustice? What does it look like for an individual to act justly in the face of food injustice?

## Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

1.

2.

## Digging Deeper

For another perspective on the subsidizing of crops, read [“Farm bill: Why don’t taxpayers subsidize the foods that are better for us?”](#) by Tamar Haspel from “the Washington Post.”

Is subsidizing speciality crops (e.g. fruits and vegetables) a good idea? What do the vegetable and fruit farmers think? Is the farm bill a good thing?

## Module 3: Eating Animals

Chapter covered: "Should We Eat Animals?"

### Reading and Reflection

#### "Should We Eat Animals?"

1. How concerned should we be with "nonhuman others"? Should we be more concerned about humans or nonhumans? Is it valid to rank the value of living things?
2. What do you think of the idea that "nonhuman animals" are sentient? What rights do animals possess? Would engineering less sentient animals be ethical?
3. What do you think of the "sexual politics of meat" argument? Does it make sense?
4. Do you think that there was animal death in the Garden of Eden? Are carnivores a product of the Fall? If they are, should Christians refrain from eating meat in an effort to emulate God's original created order?

## Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

1.

2.

## Digging Deeper

Read “What if the Whole World Went Vegan” by Sarah De Weerd,

[www.conservationmagazine.org/2016/03/can-vegans-really-save-planet/](http://www.conservationmagazine.org/2016/03/can-vegans-really-save-planet/)

1. Is it plausible to suggest that the whole world go vegan? What barriers would prevent the world’s population from adopting a diet of veganism or vegetarianism?
2. God has given humankind dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28). How should this impact the way we eat? To what lengths should we go to improve the wellbeing of the created world by changing what we eat?
3. What are some alternatives to global veganism that still benefit the natural world?
4. How do the five aspects of ethical eating De Roo outlined (from the first module) play out in your decision to eat vegan or not to eat vegan?

## Module 4: GMOs and Other Bits of Bioengineering

Chapter covered: "Bioengineering"

### Reading and Reflection

#### "Bioengineering"

1. Do you agree that we are "technological animals" (131)? How does this fit with our responsibility to the created world?
2. Is directly altering an organism's genetics using genetic engineering (rather than selective breeding) "playing God"? Do you agree with Sandler's interpretation of what playing God means (132)? Is playing God necessarily a bad thing?
3. Would you prefer all food items containing GMOs be labeled as such? Would GMO labels impact the way you chose which foods to buy?
4. Are you more comfortable with either genetically engineering crops or creatures? Why or why not?

## Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

1.

2.



## Module 5: Food, Health, and Culture

Chapters covered: “Food and Health” and “Food and Culture”

### Reading and Reflection

#### “Food and Health”

1. How comfortable are you with taking risks with your food? How is the way you perceive food safety impacted by the culture you were raised in?
2. Do food labels impact what foods you choose to buy? If so, how? Would more thorough labels about food’s nutrition or origin (e.g. these chemicals were used as pesticides on the wheat which was used to make this bread) change the way you chose which foods to buy? Why or why not?
3. What would ethical advertising for the fast food industry look like? Do you believe the current fast food advertisement campaigns that are aimed at children to be unethical?

#### “Food and Culture”

1. How does the culture you grew up in impact the way you view and consume food? Are any aspects of your culture’s approach to food potentially problematic (e.g. the Makah whale hunt has ecological consequences, though it is culturally important)?

2. In light of the things you have learned from *Food Ethics*, what does it look like for you to eat Christianly? Does this picture of eating Christianly look different from how you currently eat? Have you been inspired to make any dietary changes? (Or, do you feel as though you should make dietary changes but are unsure whether you are motivated enough to actually implement them?)

## Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

- 1.

- 2.

## Bibliography

DeRoo, T. (2016, February 2). How Then Shall We Eat? *In All Things*.

DeWeerd, S. (2016, March 22). What if the Whole World Went Vegan? *Conservation Magazine*.

Sandler, Robert L. *Food Ethics: The Basics*. New York: Routledge, 2015. Print.