

# Perceptions of Food, Faith and Health from A Christian Context

*Preliminary Findings*

*For the Center for  
Spirituality, Theology  
and Health Webinar  
Duke University  
September 29, 2020*

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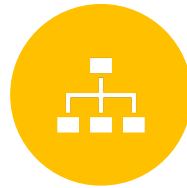
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BACKGROUND



METHODS



RESULTS +  
CONCEPTUAL  
MODEL



TAKE AWAY  
MESSAGE



DISCUSSION

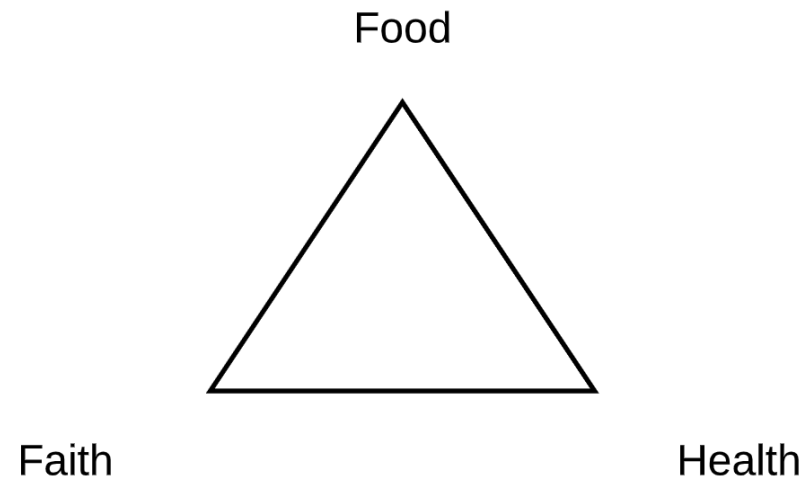
# Overview



# Background

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# Food, Faith and Health Paradigm





# Methods

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# Sample



*Eating Together Faithfully*



North Carolina, USA



26 participants

## Data Collection



April 2019-August 2019



Semi-structured interviews



Face-to-face

# Data Analysis



Analysis conducted as team



Conventional content analysis



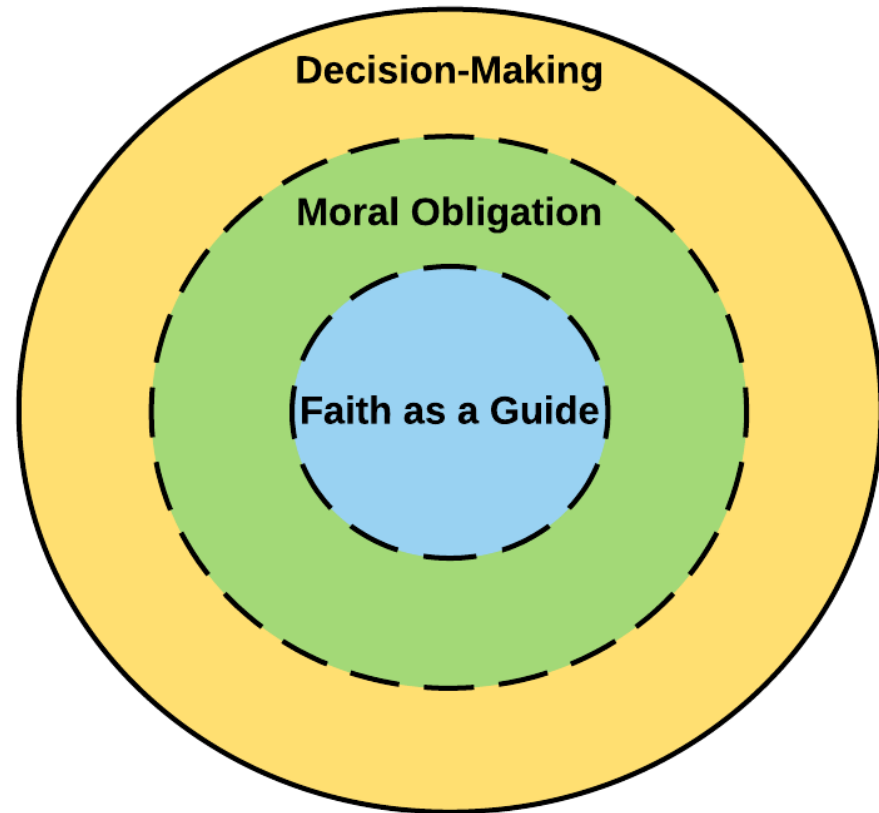
Derive codes, themes, subthemes

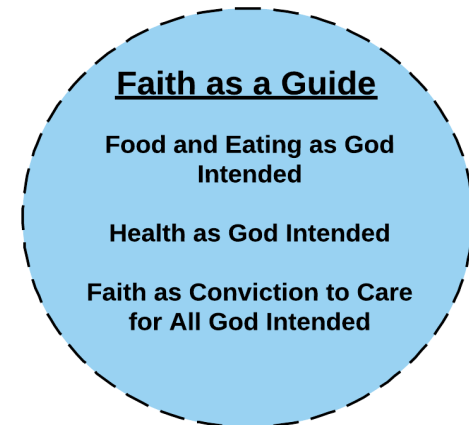
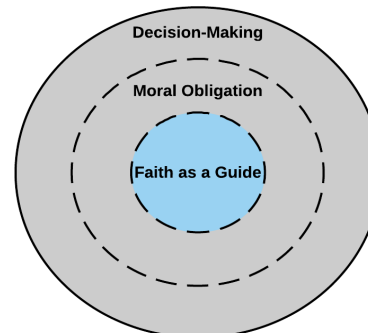
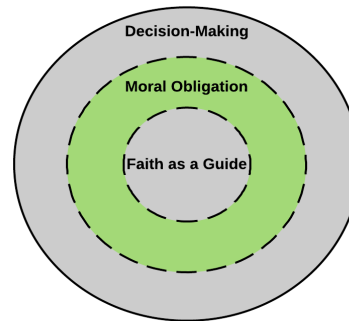
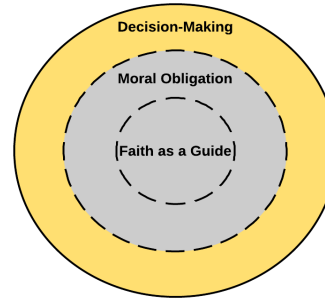
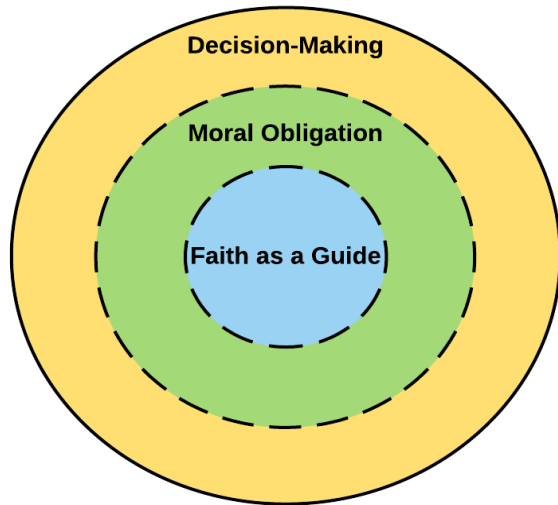




# Results

# Conceptual Model



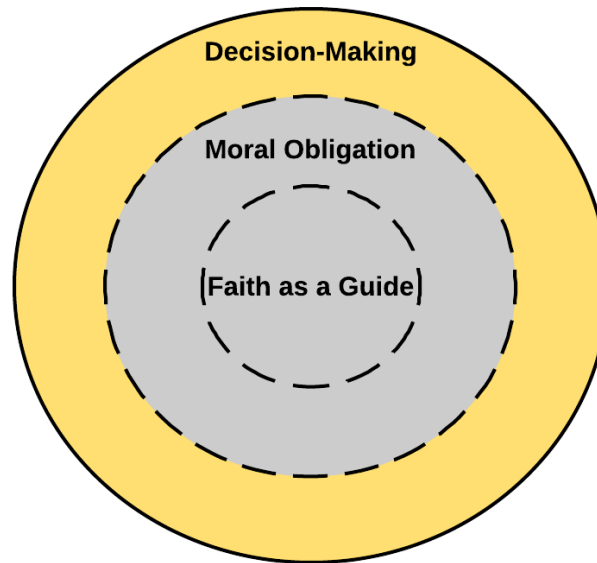


# Theme 1: Decision-Making

## Subthemes:

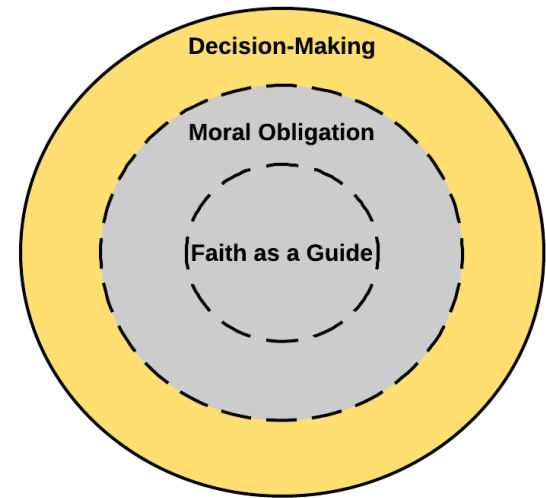
*Purpose of Food*

*Food Choice*



## Decision-Making: *Purpose of Food*

- Food as necessity
  - "[Eating is] a necessity of life...we all must eat"  
(Participant 15)
- Food as function
  - "Not just food to eat for pleasure, but food as fuel"  
(Participant 6)
- Food as convenience
  - "[When you are busy], [you] just grab whatever you can because you just need to eat something"  
(Participant 1)

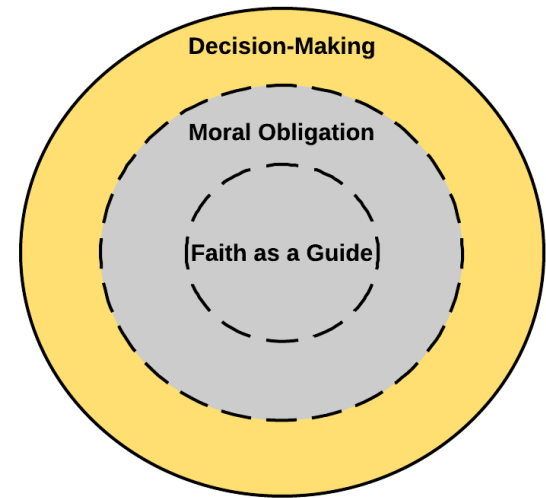


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# Decision-Making: Purpose of Food

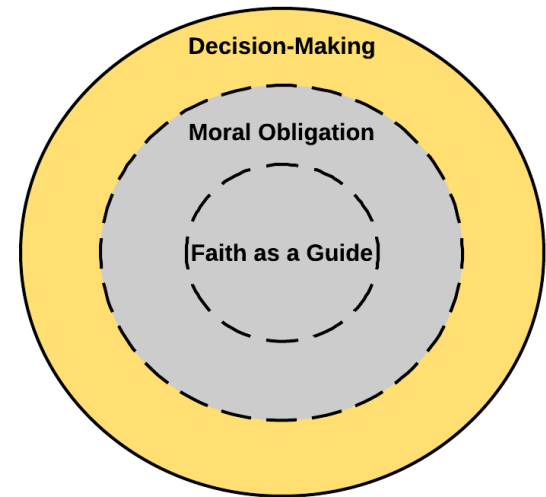
(continued)

- Food as pleasure
  - *"It's okay to eat foods that are not necessarily as healthy to celebrate because in the moment as you're celebrating the people and that's what's available, to enjoy doing that"* (Participant 3)
- Food as comfort
  - *"As Americans, I feel like we are so conditioned to rely on comfort food and food as a crutch"* (Participant 9)
- Food as hospitality
  - *"How do I eat something when somebody's offered me something and I don't like it? Recognizing that it's an important point of hospitality"* (Participant 3)



## Decision-Making: Food Choice

- Choose natural and fresh
  - *"Highly processed things are not food"* (Participant 10)
- Food for physical health
  - *"I don't want to eat foods that are going to give me a heart attack"* (Participant 9)
- Food for mental health
  - *"Guilt can be a big one. You know when there's cookies sitting on a table and they're passing them around and you're one that takes one and nobody else does...you know, it can be a place of shame"* (Participant 3)

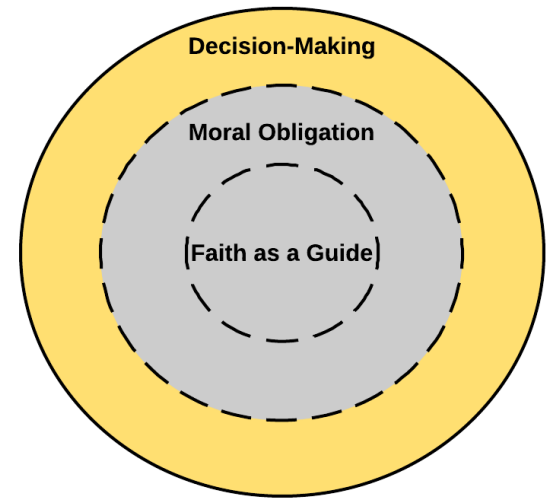


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# Decision-Making: Food Choice

(continued)

- Food and parenthood
  - *"I need to know how many mouths I'm feeding" (Participant 10)*
- Food access barriers
  - *"Organic [is unrealistic] for people who don't have much" (Participant 11)*





# Theme 2: Moral Obligation

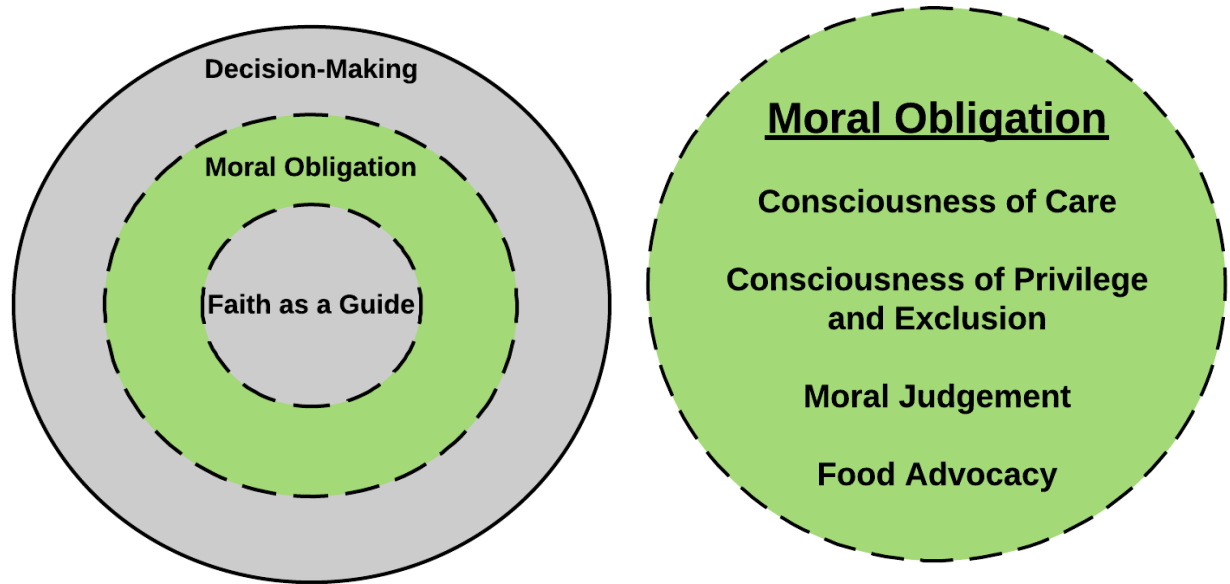
## Subthemes:

*Consciousness of Care*

*Consciousness of Privilege and  
Exclusion*

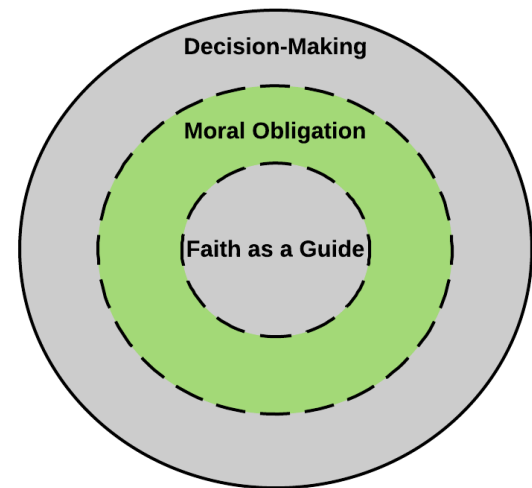
*Moral Judgement*

*Food Advocacy*



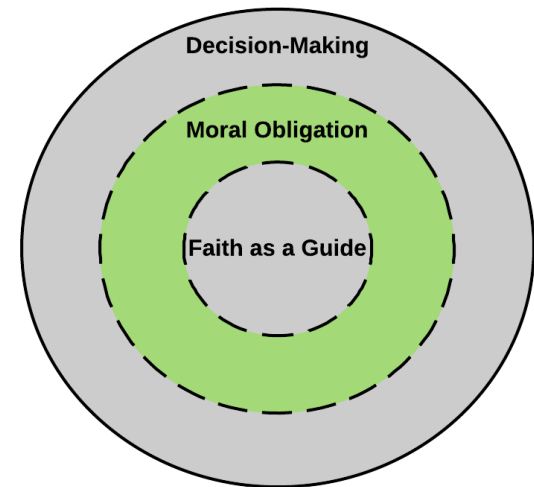
# Moral Obligation: Consciousness of Care

- Care for the environment
  - *"...need and desire for me to be more involved in [the] environment and involved and conscious of what's happening and what people are eating"* (Participant 9)
- Care for the livelihood of others
  - *"Is the way that I eat, and more broadly the way that I live my life, enabling other lives to flourish? Or, is the flourishing of my life coming at the expense or the degradation of another's life?"* (Participant 10)
- Care for animals
  - *"It [mistreatment] is not fair to the animals – that the only reasons we're raising them is to eat them, but we shouldn't treat them like that just because we know they're going to die and we're going to eat them..."* (Participant 7)



# Moral Obligation: Consciousness of Privilege and Exclusion

- Food as power
  - *"The mentality of the existing food pantry was, 'they'll [the guests] eat whatever we give them' – they [the food pantry organizers] didn't care if it was healthy, if it was outdated, if it was stuff people didn't really want, 'if they're hungry, they'll [the guests] eat it.'"*  
(Participant 1)
- Food and economic class
  - *"...recognizing that what people eat shows where they are in the class system. People of poverty are kind of happy to eat, people in the middle class they can pay a little more attention and people who are in the upper class can—they get to the point where it's a total experience and recognizing those kinds of things and what food does to us in those senses"*  
(Participant 3)

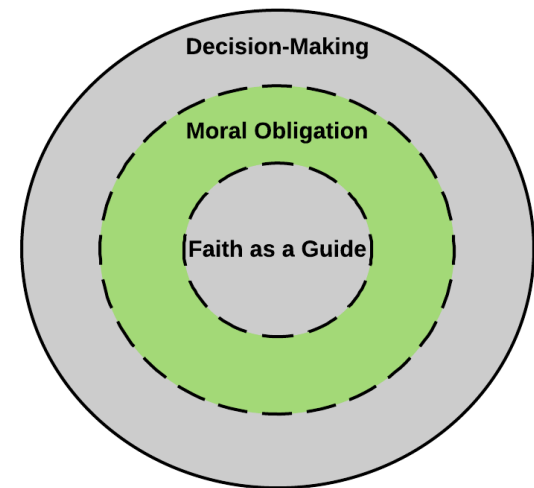


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# Moral Obligation: Consciousness of Privilege and Exclusion

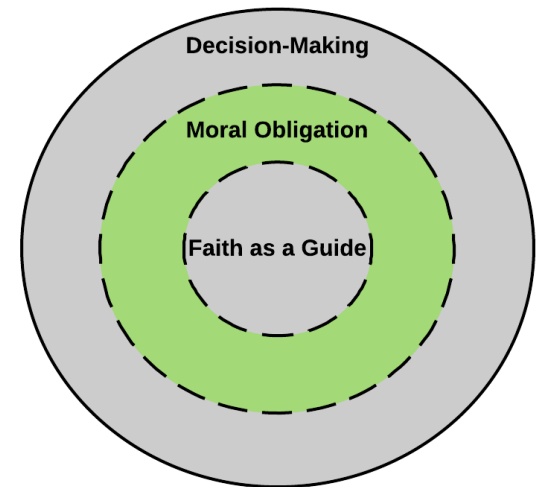
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- Food and race
  - "...food that's at the table and more generally where food comes from, the land...and that there's anger that we're only 100 years out of slavery..." (Participant 2)
- Food and privilege
  - "And because we all eat and as someone who feels very privileged that I have the ability to eat food that LAUGHS [local, affordable, uncomplicated, good, healthy, seasonal] and even grow it, that I also have an obligation to be able to share that with other people and to invite people into this kind of bountiful table – this abundant table – people maybe that would've never been invited" (Participant 14)



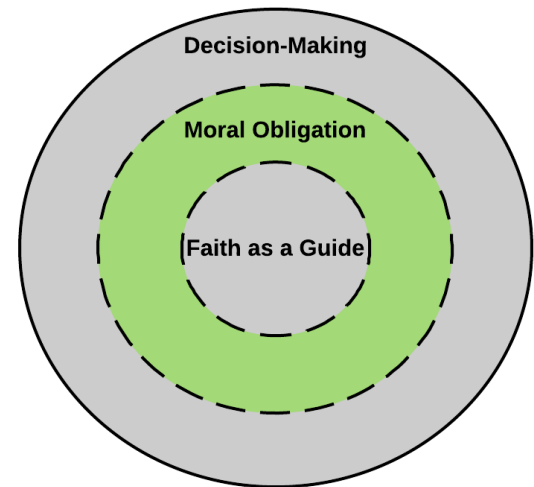
# Moral Obligation: Moral Judgement

- “Good” food v “Bad” food
  - *“It [healthy eating] can seem like it’s about being restrictive and that there’s things that are ‘bad’ for you and things that are ‘good’ for you. I just don’t think that’s helpful for my own mental health and how I think. Assigning a moral judgement to a piece of food seems a little extreme” (Participant 12)*
- Origin of food
  - *“We think a lot about where our food comes from and how we’re shopping for it – which is both great and paralyzing at times” (Participant 11)*
- Withholding judgement up on others
  - *“...even to call myself ‘healthy’ is like making a claim about other people’s bodies as well” (Participant 10)*



# Moral Obligation: Food Advocacy

- Empowering food choice and access (food equality)
  - *"...we worked really hard for a few years to kind of change that and go toward a choice food pantry and talk about the importance of choice and the importance of having fresh vegetables and fruit"*  
(Participant 1)
- Supporting local charities
  - *"...the [church] community's food story is that they're very involved in hunger advocacy with Bread for the World and also they serve a meal and have served a meal at [their city's] Urban Ministries for years, like once every other month"*  
(Participant 12)
- Criticizing the food industry
  - *"...what is the corporate system looking like pushing out small farmers?"*  
(Participant 3)



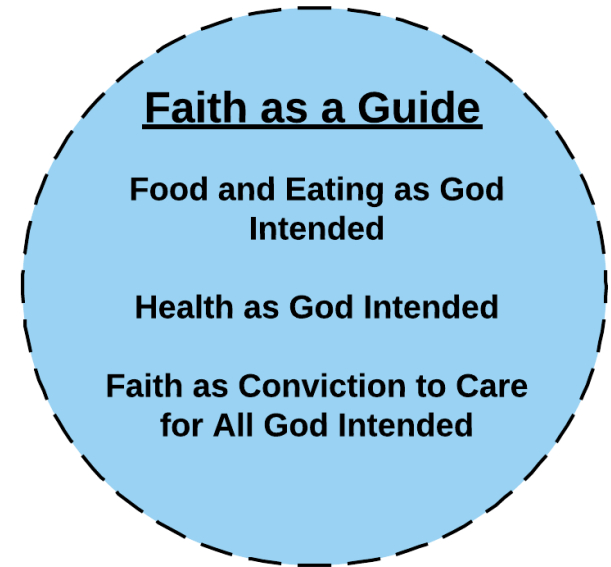
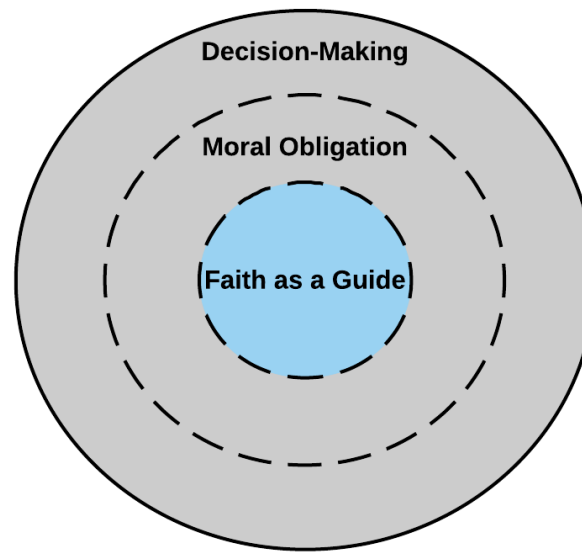
# Theme 3: Faith as a Guide

## Subthemes:

*Food and Eating as God  
Intended*

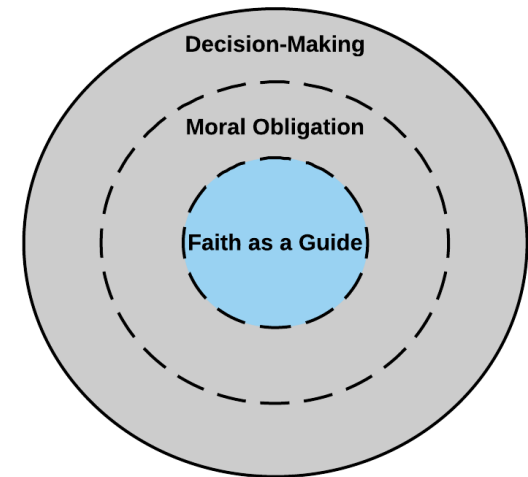
*Health as God Intended*

*Faith as Conviction to Care for  
All God Intended*



# Faith as a Guide: Food and Eating as God Intended

- Food as a gift from God
  - "...food as worship...we are taking something that God gave us that's natural, that He wants us to have and be one with it...and making sure that we're eating what God has given us and not what man has made for us to eat" (Participant 6)
- Dependency upon God the Provider
  - "I think it [the basic human need for food, water, nutrition] teaches us a reliance upon God to provide our daily needs – that there will be plants that we're to tend and grow and care for..." (Participant 8)
- Food as sacred or holy
  - "...going away from the whole calories and elements of food and just getting enough energy to get through the day kind-of-food as a commodity or whatever, to thinking of food more as a delight, a gift, something that we share, and that something holy happens when we do" (Participant 15)

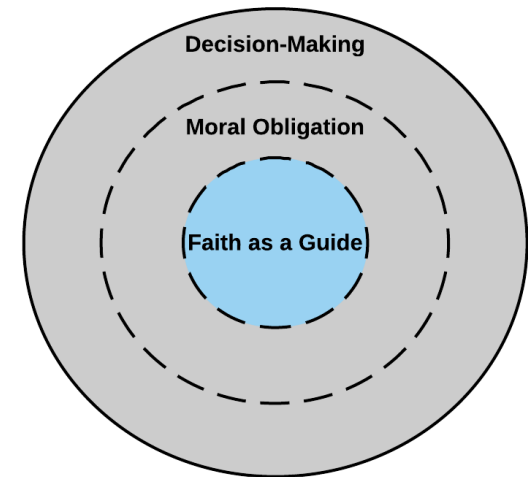


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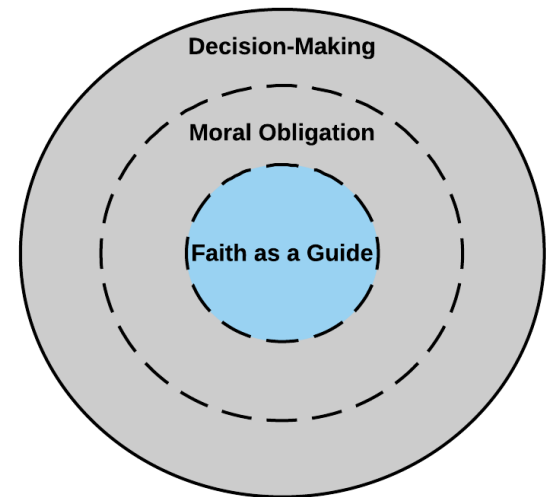
# Faith as a Guide: Food and Eating as God Intended (continued)

- Food in relationship
  - *"All people should be welcomed at the table, and little 't' as in around to have conversation and big 'T' as in Communion and the Body of Christ and how all of that interconnects"*  
(Participant 1)
- Eating to honor God
  - *"A lot of people when they think of food and faith that means you have a worship service and then you go eat potluck. But actually, recognizing that it's desiring God...so eating in a way that shows how much we desire God and recognizing the food He makes available to us and how do we eat and what do we eat and are we eating in a way that honors God"*  
(Participant 3)



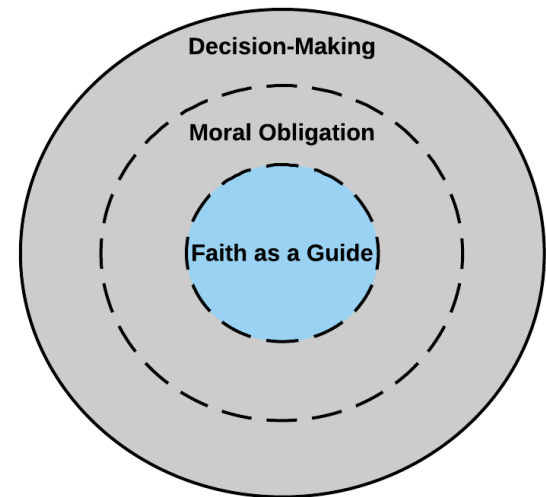
# Faith as a Guide: Health as God Intended

- Body as Temple of the Body of Christ
  - *"I like to think about treating my body...like a sacred temple and to do that I have to think about eating, because eating is a big part of treating your body like it's sacred" (Participant 9)*
- Integration of mind, body, soul/spirit
  - *"Our image is in God's image, so God is triune, we are triune, we're created to be mind, body, soul...created to be one component working all together" (Participant 2)*
- Unselfish (community-oriented) health
  - *"It [health] also means that we're not going to judge one another, but we are going to love one another to the point that that love someday will...we trust the way God works and through the Holy Spirit...that that love will allow me to let someone else care for me and so...that we're a part of a community and that my health is not my own private possession" (Participant 14)*



# Faith as Guide: Faith as Conviction to Care for All God Intended

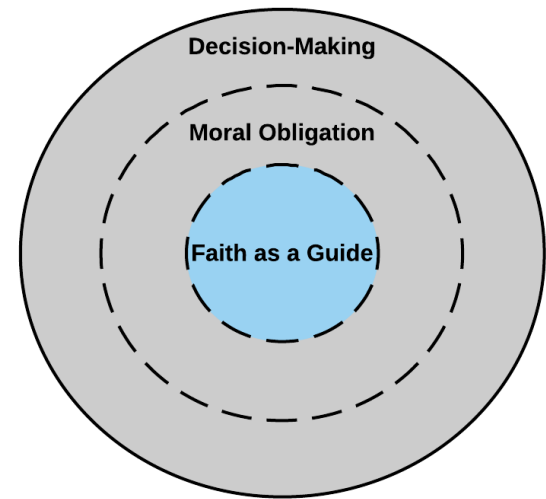
- Conscious choices
  - *"I'm making these choices because yeah I care about the environment or I care about my body and being healthy but it was like no, actually this is as a Christian this feels like a...way to live out my faith...I think being mindful of these things is a way to connect us to God"* (Participant 12)
- Care for God's creation
  - *"I really kind of see Creation...this mentality of you have Creator then Creature and then you have Creation and we all work together to co-create"* (Participant 9)



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# Faith as Guide: Faith as Conviction to Care for All God Intended (continued)

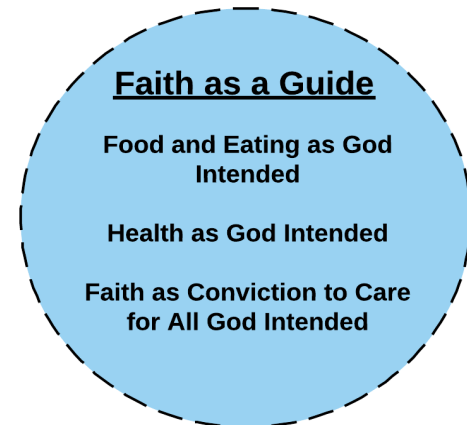
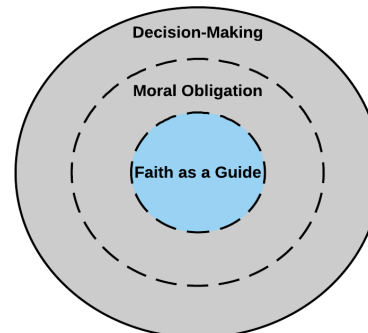
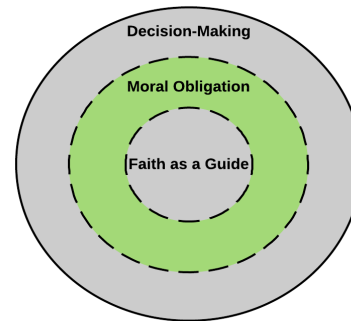
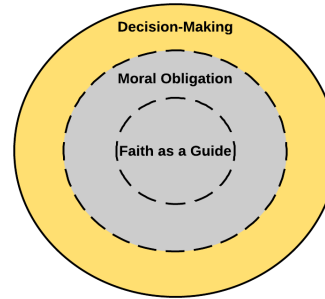
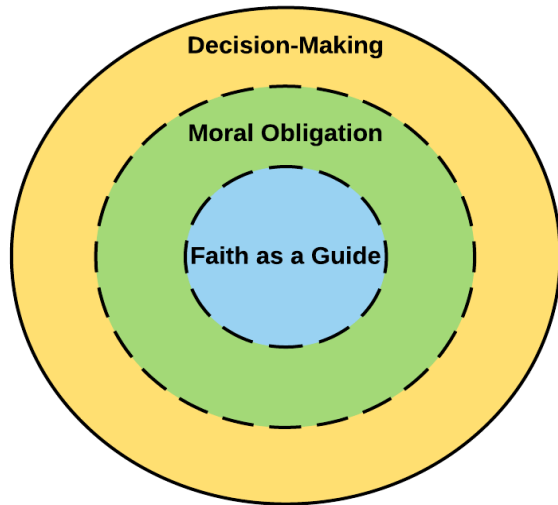
- Care for the flourishing of others
  - "...from the scripture, Jesus saying, 'I've come that you may have life and have it to the fullest'" (Participant 10)
- Church-based food service/charity
  - "'As Christians we should be fighting hunger' – that was a very institutionalized connection in my churches and in my family" (Participant 13)





# Conceptual Model

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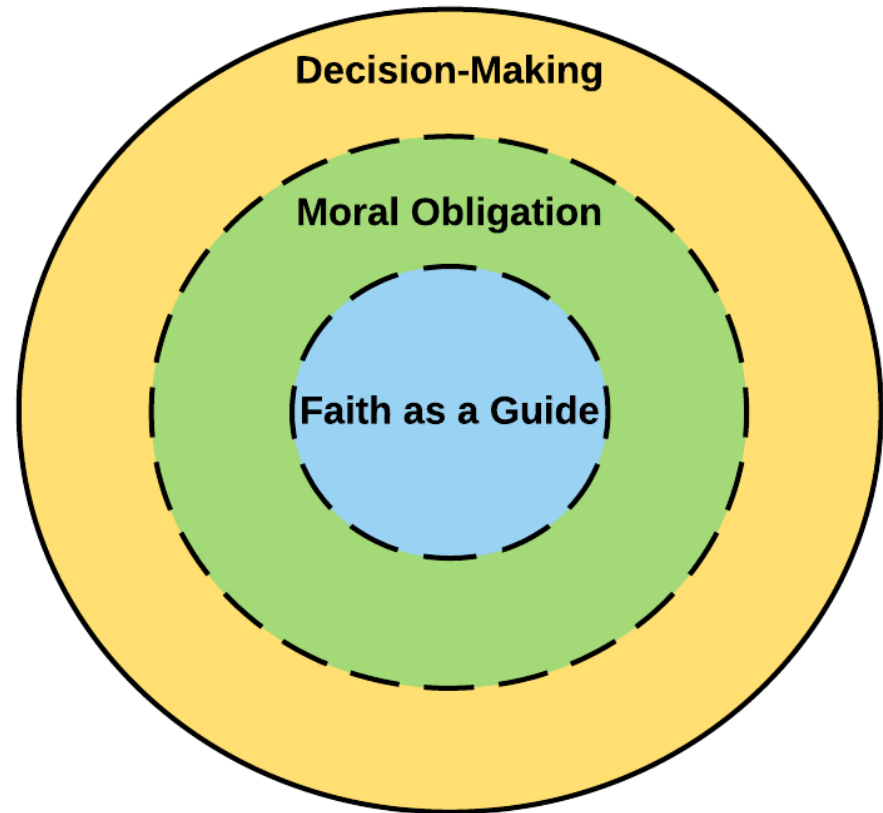




# Take Away Message

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# Faith as a Guide is Central







# Discussion

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# Direction



## **Implications**

Food-related health  
interventions



## **Future Research**

Weight and direction  
Additional factors

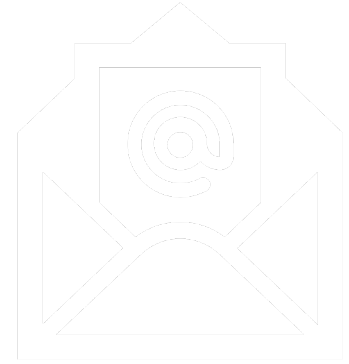


## **Next steps**

Complete analysis  
Disseminate findings

# Questions & Comments

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