I thought it would be interesting to see what would happen if we committed to getting together once a week for a two-month Bible study I was writing on a topic I wasn’t sure of yet. I know. It sounds riveting. Which is why I had to offer dinner as part of the package. Which is also why I had to start learning how to cook, because despite my wonderful upbringing in the church, I just didn’t think I could stand one more potluck or frozen lasagna. I was longing for a home with a couch, cookies, and anything warmer than fluorescent lighting. I wanted to talk about the deeper issues of life in a setting where we felt comfortable. Mostly, I was committed to avoiding pat Christian answers, hopefully diving past the rhetoric and into the life-changing revelation of Scripture.

So I invited everyone over and served a black bean and brown rice recipe I picked up from a friend in New York. She grew up working in her father’s restaurant, not to mention she’s fully Italian, so culinary magic lives up her sleeve. Once while I was visiting she made me the black bean and brown rice dinner, and it was so delectably overwhelming that it’s all I can remember about the night. So I asked my friend for the recipe, and of course, she said the three words that terrify me most, the words that clinch imminent failure: “It’s soooo easy.” I would rather someone tell me how incredibly daunting a task is, so if the whole thing ends up as charcoal I won’t feel so bad. And if I end up wildly succeeding I will have something to prop up my self-esteem at least until the morning.

Once I got over how “easy” all this was going to be, she further mentioned that she really didn’t have a recipe, and I might just have to feel my way through it: A little of this, a little of that, set the oven on three-something-or-other until it looks about done. So I am a non-cook now using a non-recipe for one of my first ever dinner parties. I’m almost sad to say that it turned out great and the evening was seamless—it just doesn’t make for nearly as interesting of a story. The recipe’s at the end of the chapter and to further assist you I want to emphatically state that this is a very tricky meal to make.
After our black bean dinner we moved from the kitchen to my living room, about a 27-inch journey, as I live in a space almost equivalent to a walk-in closet. We made ourselves comfortable and naturally fell into a conversation about life-purpose, body image, media influence, perfectionism, finding identity in marriage and singleness, our desire to live uniquely, measuring up, battling loneliness, wanting something “more” in life. Okay, so it wasn’t light. This was our first time together so it was more of a focus group for me to gather information hoping to find a topic of study that might apply.

The conversation was something like popcorn popping, sporadic yet steady. I think it was Anadara, a talented singer/songwriter, who piped up seemingly out of nowhere, “I refuse to send out Christmas cards this year.” It was July. We were confused. “Anadara, can you clarify a bit?”

“I’m just tired of the same old, same old. Sending out Christmas cards with a picture of my husband and me feels like the epitome of the expected. I feel stuck in a rut of nominal routines. I want to do something different.” Her reluctance to produce mass copies of herself and her smiling husband stamped with peace on earth suddenly made perfect sense.

Alli, the youngest in our group, with wisdom well beyond her years, relayed sympathizing thoughts, “I guess I feel like there’s a mold we’re ‘supposed’ to fit and none of us are making the cut. We don’t feel good enough. We feel bad, guilty. Yet we don’t want to do the same thing as everyone else and lose ourselves in the process.”

Our in-house makeup artist and actress, Lauri, chimed in with a personal story: “I had an evaluation at work the other day and all I could think about was the one negative thing mentioned. I couldn’t even remember all the positive statements my boss had made about me. I could only chew on the small area that was lacking. I totally felt like a failure. I don’t know why I’m so debilitated by criticism.” Carrie, our smart-as-a-whip businesswoman, noted, “I think we put an increased expectation for our accomplishments on ourselves. We let what people think of us affect us.”

I added to Carrie’s statement, “I think so many perceived standards out there bellow from the media and culture, and even the church, about what we are to do, weigh, wear, look like, act like. The constant bombardment of expectations is now so commonplace I’m not sure we’re even aware of the heavy burdens that come with trying to fulfill them. “We touched on these and many more issues. Nothing was out of bounds as we discussed our struggles and questions within a Christian framework.
As expected in a group of church-exposed girls, we had the usual solutions and the anticipated answers: Freedom in Christ, Identity in Christ, Knowing Christ. I think we unanimously identified all three as foundational to dealing with any of the issues. But I’m not sure we know what these things actually look like. All of us were quick to admit that our understanding and implementation of identity and freedom in Christ were mostly confused and rarely experienced.

After the girls left I got into bed and flipped on the TV. I started with a popular sitcom. After five minutes of raunchy innuendo, I then breezed through a terribly explicit sexual something-or-other that I fortunately didn’t have time to make out before landing on a news channel. It was displaying slow motion reruns of people falling from a stadium ledge that had crumbled beneath them. Perhaps the home improvement networks would offer something void of sex and tragedy. So I tuned in to the story of a man who had finally achieved his lifelong dream of having a stainless steel espresso maker built into his wall, because life simply wasn’t full enough unless he could froth his coffee in the morning without having to plug in a freestanding machine. This was a little out of my league. I finally concluded my search on a cooking show warning of new studies showing a possible link between Teflon and cancer. Great. Yet another thing to fear. I am officially going to bed now.

The next morning I brewed myself some green tea to ward off the cancer and made my way to my living room chair with my Bible. I happened to be in 2 Kings, chapter 17, when verse 33 arrested my attention, “They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods.” Verse 41 further compounded the description, “Even while these people were worshiping the LORD, they were serving their idols.” God and gods: the people were living split lives, worshiping the One, while serving the others.

My mind instantly reeled back to the TV programs, representing the gods of money, lust, sex, and inordinate pleasure. I also considered the previous night’s discussion that had been topically dense, full of questions and longings. Suddenly the Scripture sharpened the vagueness of our striving to a point. Could it be that we are serving our own gods, though we sit on the front row of church and serve the fruit tea? Do we claim the Bible as our source of truth while our real counselors come from movie screens and magazines? Perhaps so many of our struggles—lack of freedom, loss of spiritual desire, slavery to image, perfectionism, confusion, and infinitely more possibilities—have much to do with God and gods. The people in 2 Kings were worshiping God, but they were serving their idols.
In both verses it spoke of worship to God, but service to idols. An exquisite distinction divides the uses of the two words. For so much of my life I worshiped God: singing hymns, reading my Bible, confessing my belief in Him. Yet, if you could have witnessed what controlled me, you would see that in many cases it was my idols. Not carved images, but people, career paths, materialism, acceptance, and more. God (on some level) was getting my worship, but my gods were getting my service.

I believe this halfhearted living is possibly one of the reasons why so many of us have been stuck. Basically, we have edged God out. We have left Him with little room in our hearts. Our false gods have taken up our most treasured spaces, leaving little room for God to show Himself strong on our behalf.

After pondering these things further, it seemed that 2 Kings 17:33 was the seed from which our study needed to grow. Clearly this issue of false gods goes deep into each of our hearts. We had much to discover about this issue of idols, like, what do modern-day idols look like? Why are we serving them? How do we make them? How do we destroy them? Which ones are we serving? I’m so glad you’re along on our journey. Let’s get started with Bible study.
False gods. Idols. Does any of this ring a Sunday School bell? I don’t know if you had a background similar to mine, but I grew up in the church. (If you didn’t, no worries, as you might actually have less baggage to sort through.) As with anything human, church always mingles the glorious with the flawed. Being in and out of so many things like church, youth group, and Christian school, one of the flawed elements for me was overexposure to certain words and phrases. Over time, these inherently good concepts either lost meaning through repetition, or became too connected with things like legalistic teachers or an organist with bad hair. (Have I mentioned the frozen lasagna?)

Terms like false gods or idols might have fallen into that kind of a category for you. Or maybe it’s the other way around—you’ve had scarce exposure to those words, so instead of sounding churchy and rote, they may sound strange and cultish and make you want to run for something normal. Either way, I hope we find fresh meaning for old words and possibly new words for old meanings. Because anything taking the place of God in our lives deserves our attention—bad hair aside.

Considering our varied backgrounds and the possible connotations that go along with these terms, it’s good to start by freshly defining them. Ponder this definition by Ken Sande:

Most of us think of an idol as a statue of wood, stone, or metal worshiped by pagan people. … In biblical terms, it is something other than God that we set our heart on (Luke 12:29; 1 Cor. 10:19), that motivates us (1 Cor. 4:5), that masters and rules us (Ps. 119:133; Eph. 5:5), or that we trust, fear, or serve (Isa. 42:17; Matt 6:24; Luke 12:4-5). … An idol can also be referred to as a “false god” or a “functional god.”

What new thoughts does this definition bring to your understanding of a false god or idol?
When I consider what I set my heart on, what motivates me in life, what controls me, and what I serve with my energy and resources, suddenly I am far from graven images and am toe to toe with my lust for attention, my attachment to comfort, my demand for people to meet my needs. These are just a hint of the things I often look to as my personal saviors.

Look back at the definition and notice the term *functional god*. I especially like the use of this phrase because sometimes it’s easier for me to determine what functions for me as a god as opposed to what is false. Also, I particularly like it because it puts an Old Testament concept in a current light. After discussing this concept with the girls, Alli sent us an e-mail that further explains:

*Since I got home I’ve been thinking about what we talked about … Was thinking about that old boyfriend I mentioned, and just wanted to tell you how much it helped me to think about our definition of idols again. I started asking myself, “What about him was functioning as my god?”*

*The answer is that I would have done anything for him. He wasn’t necessarily my motivation for everything, but I would have given up everything for him and done anything he asked. I was really that infatuated. Which by the way, the definition for that word is “an intense but short lived passion or admiration for.” I thought that definition was perfect. God had someone more suited for both of us. It’s amazing how gracious He is with us.*

*Anyway, just wanted to mention how much it helped me put things into perspective to remind myself of an idol as a “functional god.”*

Recently I’ve found myself fearful in relation to world affairs. The threat of terrorism, the reality of war, and the destructive wake of hurricanes have left me feeling vulnerable. Growing up I only saw these things as they related to other countries. Everything bad was “over there” someplace. Now such things float across the air in our backyard. It’s made me realize something on a deeper level: I profess that my safety and security is in God, but the strength of America to protect me has in some ways functioned as my god.

**Explain the difference between a professed god versus a functional god.**
In my understanding, a professed god is who or what we say our god is; a functional god is who or what actually operates as our god.

**Think of a few examples of functional gods in our society. Briefly list them below:**

Take a look at another great definition by Richard Keyes:

An idol is something within creation that is inflated to function as a substitute for God. All sorts of things are potential idols, depending only on our attitudes and actions toward them … Idolatry may not involve explicit denials of God’s existence or character. It may well come in the form of an overattachment to something that is, in itself, perfectly good … An idol can be a physical object, a property, a person, an activity, a role, an institution, a hope, an image, an idea, a pleasure, a hero—anything that can substitute for God.² (emphasis added)

This definition really hits me. Not that I’ve never had affinities for things that were downright wrong or sinful, but most of my false gods have consisted of people or things that were—as Richard Keyes notes—in themselves, perfectly good.

As John Calvin put it, “The evil in our desire typically does not lie in what we want, but that we want it too much.”³ For me, this is far more characteristic of my own struggles with false gods.

**Can you think of anything in your life that is inherently good and right, but that has become detrimental simply because you desire it too much? If so, explain.**
Now that we’ve defined our terms, read Exodus 20:1-6. What word does God use to describe Himself in verse 5?

According to verse 2, do you think there is reason—apart from God’s pure power and sovereignty—for Him to be jealous? If so, explain.

Do you think it’s significant that the very first commandment God gave us is to have no other gods before Him? Explain.

I think the other nine commandments are virtually impossible to uphold if we neglect the first commandment. If God is not God in our lives, doesn’t that make the rest of His commandments somewhat optional? Just a thought.

Finish today by noting any penetrating or new realizations you had. It can be anything—it doesn’t necessarily have to be a verse. Write it below.
Yesterday we discussed some of the foundational elements of false gods: what they actually are and what they look like. Hopefully you already have a better handle on how these elements—that are substituting for God in our lives—might be entangling our souls. Perhaps you’re already aware of something in your own life that has exalted itself to a position it was never meant to hold.

Right now I’m sitting in a room on the top floor of a hotel in Colorado. It’s not exactly your four-star experience, mostly because I’m hearing incessant footsteps run back and forth across the ceiling. Birds, I’m imagining. Somehow they’ve made a nest between the drywall and the roof, racketing and rummaging at all hours. They’re especially active at this moment, cooing and almost purring. I don’t even want to know what’s going on up there. It’s annoying and a little gross really—rooming with birds. I’m actually wondering if they’re here for the Internet access or what. Does the Ritz have birds? At any rate, they’re not supposed to be here. Here on earth is fine, just not in the ceiling. So, as I’m writing about these false gods that aren’t supposed to be housed in our lives I can’t help but make the silly connection.

According to yesterday’s definitions, write in your own words what a false god (functional god or idol) looks like today. Feel free to glance back to yesterday’s study if necessary.

To get a better handle on how our modern-day idols affect us, it helps to look into the past. First Corinthians 10:6-7 says the Old Testament accounts are examples so we will know how to live today. Oftentimes they are physical pictures that reflect spiritual principles. This week we will look at the false gods, captivity, and deliverance of the Israelites, while translating those physical examples onto a spiritual plane. Here’s what I mean.
Read 2 Kings 17:7 and fill in the blank.

“All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the _____________ of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods.”

I have felt under the power of many things in my life. It could be as simple as not being able to pass up another cookie at dinner or as consuming as jealousy. For the Israelites, the controlling force was Pharaoh. Today, it might be alcohol, television, an unhealthy relationship, unforgiveness, or sexual addiction. As we read yesterday, it could also be something incredibly good that has only turned bad by virtue of how much it consumes you.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Reflect on what currently holds power over you. Who or what is your pharaoh? Write it down. Be as detailed and specific as you can. You may have several—me too—but for now, focus on the one with the most power.

Keeping your own “pharaoh” in mind, read about the original Pharaoh and what his power looked like over the Israelites. Read slowly and thoughtfully and look for the specific ways the Israelites were oppressed: Exodus 1:1-22; 2:23; 3:7-10.

Cite a few specific examples of how Pharaoh was oppressive.
Now list a few examples of how you are oppressed by the false god you wrote about above. Here’s one of my personal examples to trigger your thinking: Early on in my career I was consumed by the success—or lack thereof—of my music. My happiness rose and fell on how many records I was selling and whether or not the record company was pushing my product. I missed many opportunities to relax and enjoy other aspects of life while trying to control my career. The deceiving element was that the more I tried to control it, the more it was controlling me. My satisfaction and identity were wrapped up in whether or not I was deemed a success. This was oppressive because it dictated my time, peace, happiness, and where my energies were directed. My career held all the power. It had become a god in my life. Achievement had become my pharaoh and it kept me anxious, self-centered, and generally discontented in life.

Your turn:

Today was mostly a time of personal reflection to identify the things that hold power over us. The false gods we serve hinder and hurt us in many ways, but it all starts with the power they hold. I wanted to go through the exercise of soul searching and describing our false gods because I believe this power can subtly control us without our knowledge. Socrates wisely said, “The unexamined life is not worth living,” which is why I find today’s exercises essential.

End by writing a prayer of acknowledgment. Tell the Lord about what holds you, oppresses you, and burdens you. Name your pharaoh to Him. Then, as stated in 2 Kings 17:7, ask Him to bring you out “from under the power” of whatever is holding you as we go through the next few weeks.

Your prayer:
As I reflect on this week’s topic, I remember the awful feeling of being under the power of someone or something. Lack of inward freedom is one of the most agonizing experiences of human existence. The one redeeming aspect is that blessings can grow out of our exasperating struggles with giants who are stronger than we are. I have been thoroughly changed, mostly for the good, from such bouts with weakness and powerlessness, even though it seemed unimaginable at the time.

If you need to, look back over yesterday’s Scripture reading (Ex. 1:1-22; 2:23; 3:7-10) and answer the following question:

Besides crying out to God, what could the Israelites do about their situation?
- flee
- do nothing
- fight back
- hide

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** Write about a time you felt absolutely powerless in a situation where all you could do was cry out to God.

Does the fact that the Israelites were powerless to free themselves from captivity encourage or discourage you as it relates to your own struggles?

The Apostle Paul faced similarly difficult situations. Check the way he described his hardships in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9.
- far beyond his ability to endure
- difficult, but manageable
- extremely hard, but nothing to be compared to his spiritual will
What reason did Paul give in verse 9 for his sufferings that were far beyond his ability to endure?

Both Paul and the Israelites were faced with situations totally beyond them. Those circumstances ultimately forced them to rely on God and not themselves. This gives me hope because I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve uttered the words I can’t do this or I have no idea what to do. Could this be exactly where God wants us, in order to show Himself strong on our behalf?

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** Are you still relying on yourself to conquer your pharaoh? If so, explain.

If you’re at the point where you have found yourself powerless and desire to rely on God, write it in a prayer below.

I want to close today by encouraging you in this: having freedom from our idols begins by recognizing our own powerlessness against them. Apart from the power of Christ, we are unable to extricate ourselves from their hold. This is good news if we can accept the truth of our own weakness while accepting the gift of His strength. He will do it.
I think the only thing worse than being under the control of something to no fault of my own is to be under the control of something I’ve actually created. It’s pain with extra sides of guilt and regret.

Looking again at Exodus 1:8-11, was it the Israelites’ fault that they found themselves in captivity?  

☐ yes  ☐ no

In this situation I think it’s clear that the Israelites did nothing to deserve the torment they received from Pharaoh. This was not God’s punishment. Disobedience is not mentioned. Their story is a healthy picture of good people who went through tremendous distress to no fault of their own. But this isn’t always the case. Sometimes we set our own traps by creating our own gods. Isaiah 44:1-20 describes this scenario. At a first read this passage may seem archaic and out of touch, but I think the premise is actually quite modern.

Read Isaiah 44:1-20.
What did the people use to make their idols? List as many as you can find.

What three types of people made these idols (vv. 11-13)?

Choose a word below that best describes the craftsmen, blacksmiths, and carpenters, collectively.

☐ tough  ☐ skilled  ☐ smart  ☐ brute

I find it interesting that the people who made these false gods were skilled professionals who used specific resources to make them, not the least of which was their own strength.

Do you think the fact that skilled craftsmen were used to make the people’s idols applies to us today? If so, write your thoughts in the margin. How do we specialize in and use our resources on modern forms of idolatry? List a few examples that are pertinent to you on the next page.
People who are obsessed with body image might excessively work out, spend their time and money on workout equipment, pour over fitness magazines, count every calorie, talk disproportionately about physical image, and become extreme in their pursuit of diets and weight loss.

Of course nothing is wrong with being a carpenter, blacksmith, or craftsman. Nor is anything wrong with being fit and highly knowledgeable about health and muscle fitness. Certainly being skilled and wise are worthy and desirable goals. They become a problem when we use these things to create false gods that we end up serving.

In closing today, read 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (emphasis added).

This verse gives us a litmus test for determining how our skills are being used. We can easily ask ourselves the question, Am I doing this for God’s glory, or for my own glory, pride, comfort, happiness, or other selfish motive?

With this verse in mind, list your skills, talents, resources, passions, and areas of expertise below. After you’ve made your list, write about how each of these things can be used for the glory of God. As you’re writing, mentally note where these things are misdirected or unfocused.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>How they glorify God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Finish up with a moment of reflection before God. Ask Him to reveal to you if there is an area of your life you’ve been using for your own gain. If something comes to mind, write it below. Ask God to help you transform that energy, desire, or skill into what can be used for His glory.
The heart. It is possibly the most central part of our being. It guides, feels, listens, hurts, heals, dreams, loves, lives … It is not surprising that our gods would attach themselves there first. Or vice-versa. The idols in my life that have been the most difficult to root out—by far—have been the ones that I’ve let weave themselves deep into my heart.

Proverbs 4:23 gives wise instruction in this regard.
What does it tell us to do?

Above all else! Above all else. Above *all else* … above all else. Guard your heart. I believe God gives us these words because He created our heart to be the wellspring of life. And He knows that our gods go straight for the heart when looking for a place to erect themselves. When it comes to our theme of false gods, we have to start at the heart.

Enjoy the introspective nature of today, because it’s vital for life change. Remember, we’re walking together toward the goal of eradicating the things from our lives that are false, that lie, that kill, and that steal. But if we stop there, we miss the point: to make room for God to live unrivaled in our hearts, shedding life, light, glory, healing, holiness, miracles, peace, and more things than I could ever write.

*Just for the sake of emphasis, write the words* make room *in the margin. It will be our two-word reminder of what we’re ultimately “after” over the next eight weeks (and hopefully our lives).*

I recently wrote a song that expresses these sentiments. If you want to grab it off the Web site, feel free to listen and make it your own prayer. Or, just read it here if it suits you better.
**FIRST IN MY HEART**

SO THIS IS LOVE, IT FEELS LIKE WAR
TO SLAY MY GODS BY THE SWORD
MAKING ROOM FOR YOU TO DWELL
HERE INSIDE OF ME UNRIVALED
THOUGH IT COSTS ME EVERYTHING
ONLY YOU WILL BE

CHORUS:
FIRST IN MY HEART, FIRST IN MY MIND
AND IN EVERYTHING I LONG FOR IN THIS LIFE
FIRST IN MY DREAMS, FIRST IN MY EYES
BEFORE EVERY OTHER LOVE THAT I DESIRE

SO SETTLE IN AND YOU NEVER MIND
THOSE TREMBLING HANDS, THESE TEARY EYES
CAUSE I NEVER KNEW IT’D HURT SO BAD
TO TURN MY BACK UPON THIS GOLDEN CALF
LET ITS MEMORY FADE AWAY
TILL ONLY YOU REMAIN

CHORUS

TAKE THESE IDOLS A MILLION MILES
FROM THE ALLEGIANCE OF MY SOUL
FILL THIS HUNGER WITH YOUR WONDER
TILL ONLY YOU WILL, ONLY, ONLY, ONLY YOU WILL BE …

CHORUS

Today we’ll look at only a few verses that are dense with soul-searching opportunities for all of us.

First, revisit Ken Sande’s definition of an idol: “Most of us think of an idol as a statue of wood, stone, or metal worshiped by pagan people. … In biblical terms, it is something other than God that we set our heart on (Luke 12:29; 1 Cor. 10:19), that motivates us (1 Cor. 4:5), that masters and rules us (Ps. 119:133; Eph. 5:5), or that we trust, fear, or serve (Isa. 42:17; Matt 6:24; Luke 12:4-5). … An idol can also be referred to as a ‘false god’ or a ‘functional god.’”5

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S E S S I O N 0 1  P E R S O N A L  P H A R A O H S

25
Even though Sande doesn’t use this word, I think we can almost sum up his definition by saying that what we *treasure* apart from God is where we find our idols.

Read Matthew 6:19-21. Where does verse 21 say our heart is?

Read Isaiah 44:9. Fill in the blank. The things they treasured were ____________.

Read 2 Kings 17:15. We become like what we:

- follow  
- reject  
- worship  
- wish for

Read all three verses again and sum up each one with a short sentence next to each reference:

Matthew 6:21

Isaiah 44:9

2 Kings 17:15

BELOW ARE MY OWN:

MATTHEW 6:21  WHAT WE TREASURE IS WHERE OUR HEART IS.

ISAIAH 44:9  IF WE TREASURE IDOLS, WE TREASURE WHAT IS WORTHLESS.

2 KINGS 17:15  WE BECOME LIKE WHAT WE WORSHIP/TREASURE.

As you look at your own life, which of the phrases above most catches your attention and why? Write several paragraphs. Be specific. Don’t edit yourself. Just write.
Although each verse can have a sobering effect as we look at some of the worthless treasures of our lives, I want to consider the positive side as well. If God is our treasure, our heart will be there. If we treasure Him, we treasure what is of infinite value. If we worship Him, we will become like Him.

**Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.**

As I think of being transformed into His likeness, I am reminded of the positive meaning of becoming like what we worship. Looking at your own life again, ponder the ways you practically treasure the Lord and how you think those things have molded you into His image.

**Creative Reflection:** Go back to the verse that struck you as most profound—the one you wrote about before. Over the next few days ponder a song, movie clip, painting, picture, personal experience, example in nature, childhood remembrance, or anything (the sky’s the limit) that best reflects that concept. Bring your thought to dinner next week. It’s totally open ended; there’s no right or wrong way to do it. Be creative.

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5. Sande, 104.
1 box Devil’s food cake mix
10 oz. cola or diet cola
1 egg white
7 oz. sweetened condensed milk
2 T. peanut butter
8 oz. frozen whipped topping (such as Cool Whip), thawed
7 Nestle fun-size Butterfinger candy bars

Combine cake mix, cola, and egg white. Bake according to cake mix instructions in a greased 9x13 pan.

A few minutes before the cake is to be done, combine sweetened condensed milk and peanut butter in a saucepan. Cook and stir on low to make creamy and warm.

When cake is done and still hot, poke holes in top of cake with a knife and pour peanut butter mixture over top of cake. You may have to spread the mixture a little to help it go down into the holes. Sprinkle top with half of the chopped Butterfingers. Cool cake completely.

Cover with Cool Whip and sprinkle remaining Butterfingers over top. Keep in fridge until ready to serve.
This is the meal we had the first time we all got together. It’s my New York friend’s recipe. I hope you enjoy!

4 standard-sized cans of black beans
½ yellow onion
6 cloves garlic
1 bunch cilantro
8 oz. shredded Monterey Jack cheese
2 c. whole grain brown rice
2 avocados
1 jar salsa
1 c. sour cream
1 bag tortilla chips

Heat black beans in a pot over medium-high heat, keeping most of the juice. Chop onion and cilantro, mince garlic, and place all in a saucepan and sauté. After beans have heated for 20 minutes, stir the sautéed ingredients into the black beans. In a separate pot, begin preparing brown rice (follow instructions on bag). Pour black bean concoction into a 13x9 inch pan and add shredded cheese on top, covering extensively. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 30 minutes at 325 degrees. Serve black bean entrée over the brown rice, having a nice spread of chips, slices of avocado, salsa, extra shredded cheese, and sour cream as toppings.