



HOSPITALITY

Table Welcome



CENTRAL
PENINSULA
CHURCH

SESSION 1: EATING AND DRINKING

Main Text:

Luke 7:34

Luke 19:1-10

Take Home Exercise:

Prayer Walk



OPENING EXERCISE (10 Minutes)

Spend a moment in prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together, and then lead your group through the following exercise.

Gather together as a community group in a comfortable setting—around a table, on a couch, on a living room floor, etc. Invite someone in your group to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

Slowly read through **Psalm 23** aloud. As you listen, take note of the imagery of God as shepherd and host. Spend a few moments in the quiet, responding to God's gracious care and provision in your life.

STUDY THIS TOGETHER (20 Minutes)

Lead the study and discussion below for your group. Feel free to read it in its entirety or put it in your own words.

The story of the church is centered around the table. For centuries, this is where followers of Jesus gathered. The gospel was passed from one table to another, moving from house to house, sharing not just meals but also their very lives.

The table is strikingly ordinary. So commonplace and familiar that its significance can easily be missed. Yet, when we set a table and share a meal, we create a space for people to be valued and listened to; a space where the presence of God can work. The act of eating and drinking around a table is at the very heart of the Kingdom of God. Jesus dined with those close to God and he dined with those far from God. All of it an extension of the heart of God for the other.

Table welcome is the rhythm of sharing in God's love and generosity by eating and drinking with those who are near and far from God.

Revisit Luke 7:34. What stands out to you from this verse? What does this reveal about Jesus and the method of his ministry?

Why are meals, whether with family, friends, or even strangers, so important to creating community? How have you experienced this to be true in your own life?

Table welcome is both a practice and a posture. It is the practice of welcoming others around a table to those both near and far to God. It is also a posture of extending the welcome of God to all. When we practice table welcome, we reflect on the very inner life of the trinity: welcome, invitation, warm affection, generosity, provision, safety, community, comfort, the meeting of needs, delight, and sheer joy.

In Jesus' day, and even in our own day, meals were considered boundary markers. Much more than just sharing food, they are ways of expressing who is in and who is out of the community. No wonder eating and drinking with others was central to the life of Jesus. One commentator notes that in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was either going to a meal, at a meal or leaving a meal. Table welcome was the method of Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost.

Invite someone to read **Luke 19:1-10** aloud for the group.

What do you notice about the difference between the reaction of Zaccheus to Jesus' invitation and the reaction of the crowd? Why do you think this is significant?

How do we see Jesus as both guest and host in this passage? What does this reveal about Jesus, and how does this deepen (or challenge) our understanding of hospitality?

Revisit Luke 19:10. How does this passage illustrate Jesus' mission? What stands out to you from Jesus' interaction with Zaccheus? What encourages you, and what challenges you?

We, like Zaccheus, were once far from God, but have been brought near through Christ (Ephesians 2:13). How have you personally experienced the welcome and love of God and his pursuit of you?

How might Jesus be inviting us, as apprentices of Jesus, to break down barriers (social, racial, economic, religious) in our practice of hospitality? Are there particular people we may be overlooking when it comes to inviting others to the table?

DISCUSSION (20 Minutes)

Spend a few moments debriefing the sermon from this week together and discuss the following questions as a group.

What significance does the table have in your own life? How has eating and drinking with others impacted your relationships with others? If possible, share about a meal that was particularly memorable or meaningful to you.

How do you think eating and drinking with others in our church body would impact our relationships with one another? What might it look like for us to intentionally do this more regularly?

Why is it important for us to also share meals with those who are far from Christ? How might inviting others who don't know Jesus into our ordinary rhythms of eating and drinking be an opportunity for us to experience and demonstrate God's love and welcome?

What fears, questions, or concerns do you have about hosting others or about the habit of table welcome in general? How might this group support and encourage you to overcome internal or external obstacles to offering hospitality?



Depending on your living situation or stage of life, it can be difficult to host others by having them over to your home. What are some other creative ways, outside of the home, to take on the role of host by welcoming others and inviting them to share life around a table? Where else could you hold space to gather with others (i.e. coffee shops, parks, etc.)?

TAKE-HOME EXERCISE

Read through the exercise below that each individual will do before your next gathering. Talk through any questions people may have about what they are to do. Again, it is about practice, not perfection. Give yourselves grace.

The goal of this take-home exercise is to encourage your group to take small, practical steps toward cultivating a posture and practice of hospitality. Over the next few weeks, we will consider ways that we can gradually incorporate the habit of table welcome into our regular rhythms—inviting both those we know and those we do not know to share life over coffee/tea, dessert, or a meal.

We acknowledge that inviting someone over a meal, especially those who you do not know as well, can initially seem intimidating. The hope with the following exercise is that you begin to find small ways over the next few weeks to pray for and be more present and intentional with your neighbors, coworkers, and others the Lord may be placing on your heart.

Part 1: Go on a prayer walk in your neighborhood. If possible, pray for your neighbors by name. Ask God to give you his eyes and heart for the place where you live and the neighbors around you. Pray for opportunities to develop closer relationships with your neighbors. Pray for the wisdom, compassion, and boldness to love, serve, and care for your neighbors in practical ways.

Part 2: As a group, Brainstorm ideas about small, intentional steps you can take to get to know your neighbors and coworkers better. Pick one, and try it out before the next group meeting. Below are a few suggestions as you begin to brainstorm:

- Intentionally spend more time outside in your neighborhood. This is one way to be more available and attentive to your neighbors. Sit out on the driveway or front patio/yard (or, if you're in an apartment complex, spend more time in communal spaces), invite a neighbor to join you for a walk, or offer to help a neighbor with simple tasks like yard work, carrying in packages, rolling in trash bins, etc.
- Bring a meal to someone (a sick neighbor, a neighbor, or a coworker with a newborn)
- Sign up to volunteer in your neighborhood/community
- Send an encouraging note to a neighbor or coworker
- Offer to help clean up a shared workspace
- Grab lunch or coffee with a coworker

CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 minutes)

Close your time together with the following prayer from the Book of Common Worship. Then, take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other during the upcoming week.

Generous and welcoming God, we pray that we would experience your welcome so deeply that we would be motivated and empowered to extend that welcome to others. Help us pray for your guidance, and help us hear and follow that guidance so that we would know when and how to offer hospitality and where and how to grow in the skills related to hospitality. Open our ears to hear your voice calling us “Beloved” so that we can let go of our shortcomings in the area of hospitality and communicate to others that they are Beloved, too. and all people together give you glory. Amen.

SESSION 2: FELLOWSHIP AT THE TABLE

Main Text:

Acts 2:42-47
Luke 14:15-24
Luke 5:27-32

Take Home Exercise:

Share a meal with someone



OPENING EXERCISE (10 Minutes)

Spend a moment in prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together, and then lead your group through the following exercise.

Gather together as a community group in a comfortable setting—around a table, on a couch, on a living room floor, etc. Invite someone in your group to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

Together as a group, brainstorm a list of fun and simple get-to-know-you questions or conversation starters that you could use at a meal with others. Think through questions that would help people easily connect and feel welcomed and known. After you come up with a list, pick one of them to use as an icebreaker for the gathering today.

STUDY THIS TOGETHER (20 Minutes)

Lead the study and discussion below for your group. Feel free to read it in its entirety or put it in your own words.

Table welcome with fellow followers of Jesus, as a family, is central to life in God's kingdom. While it may seem like a simple concept, it is one we've sadly lost touch with over the centuries. Gathering around the table with other believers is not just a concept but a practice we must restore.

In Acts 2, we see that the church's gatherings revolved around a shared meal. The scripture doesn't mention eating before or after the service; instead, it emphasizes that the meal itself was the primary focus. In offering table welcome to fellow apprentices of Jesus, we are reviving a long tradition of receiving and giving the welcome of God to our brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Invite someone to read **Acts 2:42-47** aloud.

How does this passage give us a glimpse into the practice of hospitality in the early church? What stands out to you about their posture and practice of hospitality? What does this passage reveal about the significance of the table in the life of the early church?

How might sharing meals together help foster unity and growth together among believers? In what ways can meals shape and transform a community?

If possible, split up into two groups. Have one group read and discuss Luke 14:15-24 and have the other group read and discuss Luke 5:27-32. Spend 5-7 minutes making observations about the role of the table as a place of welcome and grace in these passages. Then, come back together as one group to discuss the following questions:

Briefly summarize each passage and share any key observations from your time in small groups. Who is extending the invitation in each passage? Who are the guests? Is there anything surprising, confusing, or challenging about either passage?

Why might Jesus' invitations in these passages be seen as countercultural? What does this reveal about God's heart? What does this reveal about the kingdom of God and radically ordinary hospitality?

How might you identify with the people in Luke 14:15-24 who made excuses for not accepting the invitation to the banquet? How might you identify with the "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" and those who were out on the "the roads and country lanes"? How do these passages encourage you? How do they challenge you?

DISCUSSION (20 Minutes)

Spend a few moments debriefing the sermon from this week together and discuss the following questions as a group.

With every passing year, our society becomes more and more post-Christian. Opposition to the way of Jesus can subtly develop a suspicion of Jesus followers. However, this isn't a new challenge, Jesus himself encountered hostility and opposition in his time. Story after story shows Jesus dining with those who were lost. In doing so, he established the practice of hospitality through table welcome and extended the very welcome of God the Father to everyone through concrete acts of kindness. Ultimately, we offer welcome to others because we were first welcomed into the loving relationship with God. Our welcome is an extension of God's welcome to both those near and far to God.

The Table With Those Near to God

Do you regularly share a meal with other followers of Jesus? If so, what does this look like for you, and how has this habit encouraged you? If not, what do you think has prevented you from doing so? How might we, as believers, benefit from making a habit of eating and drinking with others in the family of God?

It might feel daunting to invite someone over for a meal as a first point of connection. What is one small step you can take to initiate connection and begin to get to know others in the church? How can this community group support you in that?

The Table With Those Far from God

Do you regularly share a meal with those who may be far from Christ? If so, what does this look like for you? If not, what might be holding you back from doing so?

How does true hospitality conflict with and combat a desire to be repaid for our generosity and care? What might it look like for you to extend an invitation to the table to those who cannot repay you?

Hospitality toward others is a posture and a practice, but it is not a project. Why is this distinction significant as we seek to welcome and hold space for those who may be far from Christ?



How might God be specifically challenging or inviting you to extend radically ordinary hospitality to someone who is far from Christ? What are some small steps you can take to intentionally initiate connection with that person?

TAKE-HOME EXERCISE

Read through the exercise below that each individual will do before your next gathering. Talk through any questions people may have about what they are to do. Again, it is about practice, not perfection. Give yourselves grace.

The take-home exercise for this week is simply to share a meal with someone.

Pray

Pray about who God might want you to invite, thinking through your current community and sphere of influence (neighborhood, sports teams, workplace, church community). Perhaps you could start by inviting someone you may know already but have been wanting to get to know better. After you invite them, as you prepare to host, pray for your guests and for wisdom about small and simple ways that you can express God's love, welcome, and care toward them.

Prepare

Consider whether you will invite them into your home or apartment, or if that doesn't work, if you will invite them into another space (a restaurant, coffee shop, etc.). Keep in mind that the goal is not to have a perfectly put-together home or to serve an extravagant meal—this is an opportunity to simply enjoy getting to know someone better and bless them with the ministry of presence.

If you live with roommates or family members, let them know about your plans, and consider how you might invite and include them in the preparation, the meal, and the conversation. Remember that hospitality is something that is a blessing and encouragement to all ages. If you have young kids, consider simple ways to invite them, too, into the preparation. It is encouraging for them to know that they also have the opportunity to welcome and bless others.

Be Present

Allow the conversation to flow naturally and easily, just focusing on being present with them and listening to them. If you find it helpful, think through a few simple get-to-know-you questions that you can ask throughout your time together. Remember that the meal itself is not the most important thing—the meal is simply a reason or opportunity to hold space for someone and to lovingly demonstrate that they are seen and cared for. More often than not, people don't want elaborate meals—they just want authentic connection!

CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 minutes)

Close your time together with the following prayer from the Book of Common Worship. Then, take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other during the upcoming week.

Father God, help us to grow in hospitality so that we may show your love to others. Make us aware of people around us who want a friend or have a need we can meet. Give us a desire to open our homes and let all worldly comparison fall away. Forgive us for the times we have let details take over. Our homes are YOUR home, and we choose this day to be obedient in response to the leading of your Holy Spirit. Help us invite and welcome people, new and old, into our houses, or challenge us to host elsewhere. It is inspiring to read about the early church and the importance of having a place to meet, eat, and pray. Help us see Kingdom value in the ministry of hospitality to all ages. Grow in us a spirit of eagerness to practice hospitality and destroy all the lies of the enemy telling us that we are not talented enough, or that our homes are not trendy, tidy, or big enough. Open our hearts and direct us this week to one way we can begin to serve and welcome others. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

