

KOINONIA

— P R A C T I C E —

RECLAIMING THE TABLE



Re-claiming the Table Week I

Welcome

Key Theme: Reclaiming the Table

In the early church, the table was an important symbol of unity in Christ at which followers of Jesus transcended their differences (see Acts 2:42). The table is about more than food; it's about how we are with one another. It's both the place where differences are reconciled and a place at which we can "take off our masks." In this way, it is a place of koinonia (authentic community).

Koinonia Practice: Holding Sacred Space

As a practice of authentic community, seek to hold the table as a sacred space, by blessing God (see below) and by blessing one another (e.g., sharing your 'Highs and Lows,' as outlined below).

Prayer of Gratitude on the Breaking of Bread:

Note: The early church probably took their cue from Jewish liturgy and did not bless their food so much as give thanks for their food, blessing God in the process. The Jewish blessing over food is centered around the phrase, "Blessed are You, Lord God, King of the universe, who brings forth good things from the earth."

Blessed are You Lord God, King of the universe, who has extended to us mercy upon mercy. Thank you for this food, full of creativity, a vehicle to delight, a reflection of Your heart of generosity and love. Thank You for a table around which to gather, a sign of being included with You in Your feast, both now and in the age to come, we who have been adopted by the Father of Light. Fill our bodies now with life and our spirits with power as we gather and are refreshed, that we may love well in Your Good Name. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Questions at the Table:

1. What has been your highest high and your lowest low so far this year (or week or month)?
2. What do you think Jesus is speaking to you in the midst of it?
3. Where in your life has Jesus called you to take off a mask?

Benediction:

Dear brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit (Galatians 6:18). Let us go in the joy of being included by God at His banqueting table, and may we learn to love as He does, by His power and grace. Amen.

Re-claiming the Table Week II

Welcome

Theme of the Week: Practicing Hospitality

We are the hospitality of God to one another and to a world desperate to know His loving embrace. We get to follow the Spirit of Jesus, by the grace of God, into being a community of koinonia—of authentic fellowship.

Koinonia Practice: The 1 and 1 Challenge

Each month of this year, share table fellowship with someone from our community, being especially mindful of newcomers and visitors, and also with a neighbor or person of peace.

Prayer of Gratitude:

Blessed are You Lord God, King of the universe, who has extended to us mercy upon mercy. Thank you for this food, full of creativity, a vehicle to delight, a reflection of Your heart of generosity and love. Thank You for a table around which to gather, a sign of being included with You in Your feast, both now and in the age to come, we who have been adopted by the Father of Light. Fill our bodies now with life and our spirits with power as we gather and are refreshed, that we may love well in Your Good Name. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Questions at the Table:

As you think on journeying in Christian community:

1. *What are you celebrating?*
2. *How is Jesus calling you to participate in community? Are there new ways he is calling you to participate?*
3. *What is Jesus inviting you to imagine, with hope and faith?*

Benediction:

Dear brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit (Galatians 6:18). Let us go in the joy of being included by God at His banqueting table, and may we learn to love as He does, by His power and grace. Amen.

Re-claiming the Table Week III

Welcome

Theme of the Week: Our Work is to Believe

Justification—our being brought into right relationship with God—happens because of the faithfulness of Jesus, not because of our own faithfulness! We partake in what God has done. This should humble us, as ultimately all we can do is say “yes” to what God has done on our behalf. This humility, in fact, is what makes community possible as we orient ourselves around a new reality: we move away from community based on how clever or talented or wealthy we are, and into community based on “the faithfulness of Jesus.” We accept that we aren’t “in” based on what we’ve accomplished, but rather on the love of God. This will mean, for all of us, laying down the systems of “Law” (see Galatians 2:15-21) we have adopted to try to earn God’s acceptance through our own means.

Koinonia Practice: “How Can You Be So Good?”

Part of discipleship in community together is learning to live and awe and wonder, with gratitude. Where in your life can you say, “God, how can You be so good?” (...to pursue me when I was stubborn, to adopt me in when I was—and am—so unsorted, and so forth.) As you sit at the table, consider sharing a point of specific gratitude, from your life, with each other.

Prayer of Gratitude:

Blessed are You Lord God, King of the universe, who has extended to us mercy upon mercy. Thank you for this food, full of creativity, a vehicle to delight, a reflection of Your heart of generosity and love. Thank You for a table around which to gather, a sign of being included with You in Your feast, both now and in the age to come, we who have been adopted by the Father of Light. Fill our bodies now with life and our spirits with power as we gather and are refreshed, that we may love well in Your Good Name. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Questions at the Table:

As you think on journeying in Christian community:

1. *Where in your life have you most tried to make yourself accepted or “in” based on something other than the grace of God? Good grades? Success? Some talent or cleverness?*
2. *Where have you experienced a transformative God encounter?*
3. *In your life, what does it look like to say “yes” to the grace of God?*

Benediction:

Dear brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit (Galatians 6:18). Let us go in the joy of being included by God at his banqueting table, and may we learn to love as He does, by His power and grace. Amen.

Re-claiming the Table Week IV

Theme of the Week: Your Story is My Story

Jesus came to create one family, and the only way to live as one family is to transcend judgment, replacing it with awe at what God has done, in love and mercy, for us. This week, we explore what it means to live in faith and that faith always entails learning from the stories of those who have experienced the grace of God in different and diverse ways. And we seek to learn to say, to each other, "Your story is my story."

Koinonia Practice: Interrupting Judgment

Interrupt assumptions and judgment with curiosity, questions, and empathetic listening.

Prayer of Gratitude:

Blessed are You Lord God, King of the universe, who has extended to us mercy upon mercy. Thank you for this food, full of creativity, a vehicle to delight, a reflection of Your heart of generosity and love. Thank You for a table around which to gather, a sign of being included with You in Your feast, both now and in the age to come, we who have been adopted by the Father of Light. Fill our bodies now with life and our spirits with power as we gather and are refreshed, that we may love well in Your Good Name. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Questions at the Table:

As you think on journeying in Christian community:

- 1. Judgment undermines community. What is, in your opinion, the difference between judgment and discernment? (Note: Perhaps judgment is an attitude in which humility is impossible?)*
- 2. Where in your life has judgment kept you from connection? And what it look like, right now, specifically, in your life to interrupt judgment with curiosity and questions which humanize another person?*
- 3. Where in your life has God called you to transcend judgment and certainty so that you could move into a new thing He was doing? (For example, forgiving someone even though it was hard to do.)*
- 4. From whose journey of faith in Christ have you learned (or might you learn) about the character and faithfulness of God, strengthening you in your own journey?*

Benediction:

Dear brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit (Galatians 6:18). Let us go in the joy of being included by God at His banqueting table, and may we learn to love as He does, by His power and grace. Amen.

Re-claiming the Table Week V

Welcome

Theme of the Week: Selah

Discipleship requires not only hearing God in Scripture and in any way that He speaks, but also creating space to reflect, receive, and respond to what we hear, in community. It's similar to the Selah interludes in the Psalms, which are spaces for the reader to pause and consider what has been said. Thus, we must often pause to ask what it means to "be not hearers only, but doers" of the Word (James 1:22). Such a practice helps us ground ourselves and community in a vibrant and fruitful wrestling with the Spirit of God.

Koinonia Practice: Pause and Reflect

Pause to put to words what you believe Jesus is speaking to you.

Prayer of Gratitude:

Blessed are You Lord God, King of the universe, who has extended to us mercy upon mercy. Thank you for this food, full of creativity, a vehicle to delight, a reflection of Your heart of generosity and love. Thank You for a table around which to gather, a sign of being included with You in Your feast, both now and in the age to come, we who have been adopted by the Father of Light. Fill our bodies now with life and our spirits with power as we gather and are refreshed, that we may love well in Your Good Name. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Questions at the Table:

As you think on journeying in Christian community:

1. *Do you find yourself more focused on your faithfulness to Christ or on Christ's faithfulness to you?*
2. *What significant are you facing and how do you sense Jesus leading you to respond to it?*
3. *What "Selah points" do you currently have set up in your life? What would it look like to set up new ones, as part of The Slow Life of a disciple?*

Benediction:

Dear brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit (Galatians 6:18). Let us go in the joy of being included by God at His banqueting table, and may we learn to love as He does, by His power and grace. Amen.

Re-claiming the Table Week VI

Welcome

Theme of the Week: Safe-Guarding Freedom

It is for freedom that Christ set us free. We have to walk in the balance between both hedonism (numbing out) and moralism (trying to perform perfectly), and we must not allow ourselves to be placed under the yoke of spiritual abuse—when well-intentioned people try to place a law or burden on us which can undermine our freedom in Jesus.

Koinonia Practice: Casting Down Idols

Ask God to reveal false images of Him that would keep us from our freedom in Christ Jesus.

Prayer of Gratitude:

Blessed are You Lord God, King of the universe, who has extended to us mercy upon mercy. Thank you for this food, full of creativity, a vehicle to delight, a reflection of Your heart of generosity and love. Thank You for a table around which to gather, a sign of being included with You in Your feast, both now and in the age to come, we who have been adopted by the Father of Light. Fill our bodies now with life and our spirits with power as we gather and are refreshed, that we may love well in Your Good Name. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Questions at the Table:

Questions for Reflection:

1. *Have you—and if so, where have you—experienced spiritual abuse (when well-intentioned people try to place a law or burden on us which can undermine our freedom in Jesus)?*
2. *Are you more likely to surrender your freedom in Christ to hedonism or moralism?*
3. *What false images of God is Jesus currently uprooting and replacing in your life?*

Benediction:

Dear brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit (Galatians 6:18). Let us go in the joy of being included by God at His banqueting table, and may we learn to love as He does, by His power and grace. Amen.

Re-claiming the Table Week VII

Welcome

Theme of the Week: The Path of Freedom

It is for freedom that Jesus sets us free. However, our freedom must be safe-guarded. If we veer left or right, there are gutters to either side. If we go too far to the left, in hedonism (the dogged pursuit of pleasures to satisfy us), we end up off the path. But if we live in moralism (life trying to “get everything right”), we are no better off. The narrow path between these extremes is the path revealed by Jesus. It is the path of the Spirit, where we come to know God has Father. It is the path of both maturity and freedom.

Koinonia Practice: Confess Weakness

Receive the love of God by confessing weakness and repenting of moralism and hedonism.

Prayer of Gratitude:

Blessed are You Lord God, King of the universe, who has extended to us mercy upon mercy. Thank you for this food, full of creativity, a vehicle to delight, a reflection of Your heart of generosity and love. Thank You for a table around which to gather, a sign of being included with You in Your feast, both now and in the age to come, we who have been adopted by the Father of Light. Fill our bodies now with life and our spirits with power as we gather and are refreshed, that we may love well in Your Good Name. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Questions at the Table:

- 1. What continues to shock you about The Gospel of Jesus Christ?*
- 2. What makes it most difficult for you to receive the Holy Spirit and live as a child of God? What gets in your way of receiving this reality, given to you in Jesus?*
- 3. Are you more likely to surrender your freedom in Christ to hedonism or moralism? (This is a repeat question from last week but apropos for this week's theme.)*

Benediction:

Dear brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit (Galatians 6:18). Let us go in the joy of being included by God at His banqueting table, and may we learn to love as He does, by His power and grace. Amen.

Re-claiming the Table Week VIII

Welcome

Theme of the Week: Willingness to Suffer

The path of Jesus is a path to freedom, but it *will* require suffering. How do we respond when faced with pains and trials? We can veer left into the path of hedonism, trying to use pleasures to numb our anxiety. Or we can veer right, into moralism and self-righteousness, hiding in a sense of certainty to escape discomfort. But our path, as Paul says, means suffering to see Christ “fully formed” in us and in others (Galatians 4:19)!

Koinonia Practice: Seek and See the Suffering

Seek to be clothed in compassion as you seek to love others who are stuck in moralism or hedonism. Seek out the suffering of the person in front of you.

Prayer of Gratitude:

Blessed are You Lord God, King of the universe, who has extended to us mercy upon mercy. Thank you for this food, full of creativity, a vehicle to delight, a reflection of Your heart of generosity and love. Thank You for a table around which to gather, a sign of being included with You in Your feast, both now and in the age to come, we who have been adopted by the Father of Light. Fill our bodies now with life and our spirits with power as we gather and are refreshed, that we may love well in Your Good Name. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Questions at the Table:

- 1. Where in your life right now might suffering be a path of becoming open to God?*
- 2. Is there someone in your life stuck in hedonism or moralism? Do you have a sense of the suffering they are seeking to numb out? And what would compassion to them, in Jesus' name, look like?*
- 3. Who else is suffering in your life or around you, and how can you see and be with them in the midst of it?*

Benediction:

Dear brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit (Galatians 6:18). Let us go in the joy of being included by God at his banqueting table, and may we learn to love as He does, by His power and grace. Amen.

Re-claiming the Table Week IX

Welcome

Theme of the Week: Waiting Well

Life is a long series of seasons in which we waiting and longing for the fulfillment of our hopes and dreams. So how do we wait and hope well as we follow Jesus? This week, we explore how to wait well by focusing on loving others rather than having all of our many questions answers or immediately resolved. It is actually this kind of waiting, by faith and by God's Spirit, that transforms us and reveals to us that God is already *with* us in our waiting!

Koinonia Practice: Embrace the Tension of Waiting

Interrupt the need for instant resolution to all of life's waiting with a commitment to live in love. To that end, here's a simple prayer of waiting: "Jesus, clothe me in your compassion today, that I may focus on loving as you love, by your Spirit and by your grace."

Prayer of Gratitude:

Blessed are You Lord God, King of the universe, who has extended to us mercy upon mercy. Thank you for this food, full of creativity, a vehicle to delight, a reflection of Your heart of generosity and love. Thank You for a table around which to gather, a sign of being included with You in Your feast, both now and in the age to come, we who have been adopted by the Father of Light. Fill our bodies now with life and our spirits with power as we gather and are refreshed, that we may love well in Your Good Name. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Questions at the Table:

1. *Have you experienced the calm that comes when you focus not on having answers but on living in God's compassion? When?*
2. *Where in your life are you having to learn to wait well, in hope and faith?*
3. *How do you most often seek to "take the edge off" the tension of waiting, in ways that actually may take you a step backward?*
4. *What does "faith expressing itself in love" look like right now in your life?*

Possible exercise: Have the group members lay hands on each other and pray for each other, even silently. Have them notice the change in their hearts and minds that is released simply by focusing on and blessing another person!

Benediction:

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