



Week 1 Small Group: Who's Invited?

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear God, we come to this time together looking for ways to connect – with you, with each other and with our neighbors. Allow us to be open to your spirit that welcomes all to the table. Free us from the ways of the world, and instead help us to be focused on being humble and gracious. Amen.

Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance. Verna Myers

BREAKING THE ICE:

What emotions are stirred up when someone invites you to share a meal with them?

Think about the last time you went to a big party or a wedding. Why were you invited? Did you feel welcomed? Where did you sit? Were there those in attendance who might have felt excluded?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Luke 14:7-14

- What is the equivalent of “picking the place of honor at the table” in your own life? We might quickly dismiss “picking the place of honor” as something we would never do; yet we might have taken liberties to get someone’s attention? How are both in contrast to the kingdom of God?
- What societal problems could begin to be healed simply by sharing meals with people different than us?
- How do you freely give? Do these scriptures change your perspective about generosity, and if so, how?

NEXT STEPS:

In order to serve others and give generously, we must start with a spirit of humility. Challenge: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal your desire to be liked, accepted and even admired. Confess where you have allowed these desires that distracted you to meeting the needs of others. Commit yourself to serving even if others don’t notice you.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Gracious God, we are thankful for the conversation that has taken place, for the people around this table. Help us to keep our eyes open throughout this week to include others. Amen.



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Week 2 Small Group: There is Enough

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear God, we come to you today to offer ourselves and our lives to you in prayer. We confess that we can become distracted and anxious. Alert our hearts and minds when we become sidetracked and stray. Help us honor you by doing all we do in a way that reflects your love. In Jesus name, Amen.

Self-preservation is the first law of nature, but self-sacrifice is the highest rule of grace.

BREAKING THE ICE:

Describe a time when you exhausted all your options or when it seemed you reached the end of your rope. What did you do?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

READ 1 Kings 17: 8-16 (The Widow of Zarephath)

- Both Elijah and this widow are powerless to fix their circumstances. How has Elijah's relationship with God given him the ability to have hope – even in an otherwise hopeless situation?
- How do you feel when Elijah asks the starving mother to give up the food intended for her child?
- God tells Elijah that he will be fed by ravens, then God points to the widow who will feed Elijah. How does this pattern influence Elijah's faith and actions?

NEXT STEPS:

- After the brook dried up, God instructed Elijah to move to Zarephath. Is there a "dry brook" in your life? Are you being directed to move on?
- Have you ever been asked to give when you felt you had nothing to offer? What is the difference when you give out of your excess as opposed to other times, when you had nothing to offer?
- How has the Lord been able to use you despite your circumstances?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear God, we thank you today for all that have faithfully served you. Empower them to continue to do good in your name. Help them and us to see the hurt and the need in our neighborhoods. Give us hands to serve and hearts to love. In Jesus name, Amen.



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Week 3 Small Group: Table of Forgiveness

OPENING PRAYER

Merciful God, you welcome us, you forgive our debts and give us a seat at your table. We have come here to learn to be open and grace-filled to one another.

Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a constant attitude. Martin Luther King Jr.

BREAKING THE ICE:

Have you ever been the uncomfortable witness to an argument, or someone being chastised?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Luke 7: 36-50

- Have you ever been misjudged for something you did?
- To what extent should our love for the Lord be emotional? Are feelings important? How do they relate to faith?

NEXT STEPS:

- Think of a time when you made a mistake and hurt someone close to you? What did it feel like? What was your response?
- Now think of a time when you were forgiven for something. What did it feel like to know you were forgiven? How did it change your relationship with that person?
- How is the scripture inviting us to engage in forgiveness this week? From whom do you need to seek forgiveness and who might you need to forgive? (God, other people) If you are not ready to forgive or ask for forgiveness, think about what next step you can take towards healing.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Loving God, we are grateful for your love and grace. Help us to seek forgiveness and reconciliation when we have caused harm. Today I have gained a better understanding of forgiving others and with your help we will forgive those who have wronged us. May your mercies be upon us all. Amen.



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Week 4 Small Group: Feasting and Celebrating

OPENING PRAYER:

Gracious Lord, we come before you today with eyes wide open to the new possibilities in life. Help us to consider new ways to share the good news with those who are troubled and hopeless. Take away our fear of failure and the unknown and replace it with excitement. Give us the faith to follow your lead and take a risk. Amen.

Small cheer and great welcome makes a merry feast. William Shakespeare

BREAKING THE ICE:

What is the craziest thing you have ever eaten? When you are really hungry, what is your go-to food?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Luke 15: 11-31

- When the son asks for his inheritance, he essentially disowns his family. Yet, when he was in a crisis, he did feel like he could return to his father's home. Did you find this encouraging or discouraging?
- The father saw the son returning while he was still a long way off - do you think that this was by chance? How often do we make it a requirement of others... to come all the way back to us instead of us going out to meet their need?
- When the older brother complained about the feast prepared for the younger brother, the father assures him that all the father has is his because he is always with the father. In our lives, who are the people who are always with us and who are those who need "a special feast"? How do we value and show welcome to both types of people?

NEXT STEPS:

- What do you learn about the heart of God from this parable?
- Imagine yourself in the position of the older brother, who resented the celebration the younger brother received on his return and did not join the table celebration. How would the older brother's coming back to the table have changed the situation? Are we being asked to sit at the table with those we resent, are angry with, who have offended us? How have we responded?
- The father asks the servants to prepare the meal etc. How might God be asking you to take part in welcoming someone home?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Let us celebrate the promise of new life for our souls. Let us rejoice in the return to our families and friends. Revive our joy in the lost being found, the dead being brought to life. Help us bring restoration and hope to our homes, our church, our neighborhoods and the world. Amen.



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