

# The Table

## Week 3 | The Lord's Supper

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A new student walks into the cafeteria, lunch tray in hand. His or her eyes dart back and forth across the room searching for a seat. Most everyone averts their eyes. A few stare back in disdain. There's no welcome from any direction, so finally the student finds an empty seat at a mostly empty table and eats alone.

If you've ever watched a teen drama set in a high school, you're probably familiar with this scene. Even if it's become a cliché, it still delivers a gut punch to the audience because it's a fear we all share — rejection. You may have even lived out a scene like that. No one wants to feel isolated and alone because there is no seat offered to them at the table.

Of course, Christians should be the first people to wave a solitary person over to their table and pull out a chair. When we do, we're demonstrating Jesus' welcoming acceptance of all people, because there is always room at the table of God.

We're in Week 3 of our series, The Table, where we are considering how we might live out Christ's call to form loving communities who are continually reaching out to embrace others. In Week 1 we briefly traced the theme of tables through the Bible. In feeding his people and setting a place for them, God offers his presence, provision, and peace. Last week we looked at one special meal that Jesus spent with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. He poured out his love for his disciples while sitting around a table.

This week, we're considering the meal that Christ introduced at the Last Supper, what we call the Lord's Supper or Communion. While we often think of this meal as part of our worship services, it gives us a picture of something that we take with us into everyday life — a table open to all.

### Day 1

After his resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit comes, just as Jesus had promised. The arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost empowered those who were gathered to carry out Christ's mission to share the good news to people in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the outermost parts of the earth.

Because of the harvest festival, Jews from all over the region, from North Africa to Rome to Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) were in Jerusalem. These pilgrims would take what they

learned about the saving power of Jesus Christ back to their homelands. They would tell their friends and families, and the gospel would spread. God was uniting people from different nations and cultures into one kingdom — with Christ as its head. The body of Christ would be multi-ethnic, multi-national, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual. People from every corner of the globe — united as the family of God and filled with his Spirit. From the very start of the Christian movement God’s intention was clear, everyone was welcome.

Communities of believers formed all over the Roman world. Acts 2:42–47 describes what one of these early Christian communities was like.

## Read

### Acts 2:42–47 (NIV)

*<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

- Imagine what it would be like to be a part of one of a community like this one? What would you enjoy about it?

## Reflect

In the passage we read above, Luke describes a community born out of a supernatural event — the arrival of the Holy Spirit. These believers devoted themselves to practices that solidify and grow their community. First of all, they sat under the Apostles’ teaching. Next comes the mention of fellowship. The Greek word *koinonia* (translated here as “fellowship”) means “sharing in common,” and as we see in the verses that follow, that’s precisely what these people did. They were family. They learned and worshipped together, spent time together, and took care of one another.

Fellowship may not a word you hear used much outside of church circles, but it is something people long for. The way people live and work in the modern world can make it challenging for them to form the kind of deep kinship and community bonds that are being described here. So many are lonely, anxious, and trapped in addictions.

Fellowship can happen around tables, where everyone joins together. We all need to be known and loved. These early Christian communities broke bread and prayed. Scholars believe this passage is describing the Lord’s Supper, which was much more of a communal meal than what we often experience in our worship services today. It was a time where people from all walks

of life came together as a family to unite around a table, share a meal, remember the Lord's sacrifice, and experience his presence.

A close-knit family of believers will help fill our need for love, acceptance, and support in good times and bad. And when Christ is at the center of a faith community, it will take on his personality. Power, love, and generosity characterized the life of the Jerusalem congregation. Acts portrays this group as a community where people were happy to share what they had with each other. Obligation isn't implied here, just pure generosity. Imagine living in a community where, if a need arose, you could rely on other believers. As a member of such a group, you would feel a deep sense of security. You could rest easy that come what may, you wouldn't be left alone to weather life's storms.

It's not surprising that "God added to their number daily those who were being saved" (verse 47). This group would have attracted people. They were joyful, sincere, and grateful to God for what they'd been given. Not that they would have been perfect, but people empowered by the Spirit can find unity in Christ, despite their differences.

It wasn't always smooth sailing for the early church. Eventually Paul would receive his mission to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Bringing together Jews and Gentiles, who were so culturally different was a serious challenge. They had to be convinced that it was God's will for them to be unified in Christ and that everyone should be welcomed at God's table.

Here at Christ Fellowship we're launching a fresh new vision, to reduce loneliness, anxiety and addiction by having meaningful conversations where people experience Christ through us. We're welcoming people to our tables, both literally and figuratively. From one on one conversations with a new friend over a lunch table, to a reunion with an old friend around your coffee table, we want to reach out to all kinds of people. Like those in the community that Acts describes, we want to experience real fellowship with one another.

## Respond

- Prayerfully reflect on your relationships with fellow Christians. Do you experience real fellowship with other believers regularly?
- Think about people in your life. Who do you know in your neighborhood, school, or workplace who might be in need of real, authentic community? Pray about the names that come to mind.

## Day 2

We live in a world that is more image conscious than ever. There are people who've made a career out of being a social media "influencer." They carefully curate their social media feeds to promote a certain way of life. Through their beautifully staged photos and posts, they try to prove that they are worthy to be followed and commodify that worth by the number of "likes."

Fashion is an insider language for these cultural communities. An outsider may not understand the significance of wearing a certain brand of shoe or style of watch. They may not pick up on the signals being sent by hair and clothing styles, but to those plugged into that culture, the message is loud and clear. It says “I am one of you.” Some people will pay whatever the cost to own the right things so they can be accepted.

The family of God can't function the same way as the world. Jesus Christ came to demonstrate God's willingness to accept everyone who comes to him. There is nothing to be done to earn his welcoming embrace. As his children, we have to have the same mindset as Christ.

Yet from the earliest days of the church, believers have struggled to break free of the culture's value system and replace it with the God's. The early church struggled with this and so do we. James, the brother of Jesus calls us out for it.

## Read

### James 2:1–10 (NIV)

*<sup>2</sup> My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. <sup>2</sup> Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. <sup>3</sup> If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” <sup>4</sup> have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

*<sup>5</sup> Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?*

*<sup>8</sup> If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. <sup>9</sup> But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*

- What expectation did James have for the way people should be treated in the church?

## Reflect

James is quick to point out a dangerous inconsistency in the way this church was functioning. They are believers in Jesus Christ, who was himself poor, yet they are honoring the rich at the expense of the disadvantaged. In the first century, Roman society was highly stratified. People

knew their place in the social hierarchy and stayed there. If you were poor, a slave, a foreigner, or had any kind of disability, you were looked down on. To that society, you were inferior in every way that mattered.

The gospel shatters these ideas with a powerful truth — all people were created in God’s image and loved by their Creator. Not only that, but all people are sinners in need of the redemption that comes through Jesus Christ. No one is worthier of God’s kindness, because no one is worthy on their own merits. People are worthy because God loves them. Yet, even those who know the gospel and the King whom it proclaims can struggle to see people the way God sees them. They can be reluctant to invite all kinds of people to join them at table.

Like the church in James’ day, we can still be dazzled by money and power. We can want to win the regard of those with higher status. The currency of our culture goes beyond naked displays of wealth to include all kinds of prestige and influence. We crave the attention of those we perceive to have some measure of the power that we desire. That can be anyone from the president of the P.T.A. to a local politician, or from the head of a corporation to an Instagram model. We try and garner their favor in hopes that their influence will rub off on us.

In James’ day that meant giving the wealthy the seat of honor at the table. It meant flattering them with deference and attention to curry their favor. It meant asking the poor to sit on the floor at their feet. In our day it may look different, but showing such favoritism is still poisonous to our souls.

James’ antidote is simple, even if it is difficult to swallow. It’s what he calls the “royal law.” It’s what Jesus said was the second greatest commandment. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Treat people as you would want to be treated. Don’t show favoritism to those who may have something to offer you in return. Treat all people as if they are worthy of dignity and respect because they are important to their Creator. How will the world hear this message if we don’t clearly demonstrate it inside the church?

## Respond

- What can we do to show those who are at the margins of our society that they are welcome at God’s table?
- How can the idea of meaningful conversations help with this? When is the last time you really talked to someone different from you to find out about them as a person?
- Pray about the types of people you tend to favor or show honor to. What does that reveal about the way you see people?

## Day 3

Can we all agree that sometimes church life can get messy? People don’t always act according to what they say they believe. If you’ve ever gone through a season where there was a sharp, contentious divide in your Christian community, you’re not alone. The first century Christians of Corinth would have understood.

The church in Corinth had all kinds of problems. There were factions fighting with each other, blatant immorality, and a lack of love. Here was a church of gifted believers, but many only cared about their own rights and privileges. Paul sends them a strongly worded letter to try and help them get back on track.

Like the Christians who James addresses in the passage we read yesterday, the believers in Corinth were favoring the wealthy at the expense of the poor. Let's see what Paul has to say about that.

## Read

### 1 Corinthians 11:17–22

*<sup>17</sup>In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. <sup>18</sup>In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19c</sup>No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. <sup>20</sup>So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, <sup>21</sup>for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk.*

*<sup>22</sup>Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!*

*<sup>23</sup>For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup>and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup>In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup>For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

- How was the Corinthian church abusing the Lord's Supper?

## Reflect

Jesus died to bring lost sinners home. He formed a covenant with us in his blood. By his broken body we find redemption from our slavery to sin and acceptance into the people of God. To remember his sacrifice and recognize our participation in it by observing the Lord's Supper is a sacred thing. It reminds us not only of what our Savior did for us, but who we are to our Savior. We are his beloved people — each one of us a sinner saved by grace with no reason to boast. Every person is loved enough that Jesus died for them, but also sinful enough that he needed to. How we treat one another should reflect this reality.

In their actions toward the poor at these meals, the Corinthians were acting just like their surrounding culture. Slaves and the poor were casually disregarded. Their lot in life was

thought to be an act of fate, and ultimately they were getting what they deserved. But that's not how people who follow Jesus are to see others. Redeemed slaves have every reason to be grateful and no reason to be proud. Yet the Corinthian church loved their factions. Many scholars think Paul is either being bitingly ironic or quoting a common slogan when he writes, "*No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.*" In other words, no there don't.

In our modern world, we still struggle with class differences. How often do you see wealthy people and the homeless gathered around a table? Have you ever seen it? These two groups often move in parallel universes in the same neighborhoods in cities across America. Yet the rich often avert their eyes and pretend the destitute don't exist, even as they pass by them on the street.

Yet the barriers that divide people extend beyond wealth to factors such as race and ethnicity. In recent times White Americans have been called out for their perceived indifference to and even complicity with unfair treatment of other races and ethnicities. How can there be racial reconciliation if the majority culture fails to hear and address the concerns of those in the minority?

We're also even seeing an increasing divide based on political preference. In 1960, about 5 percent of Americans said they would be upset if their child married someone from a different political party; in 2010, about 40 percent did (Republicans about 50 percent, Democrats about 30 percent).<sup>1</sup> I wonder if that percentage would be even higher today. The level of disdain that people have for each other based on politics is alarming.

In a country that's divided into so many factions, the church can show a different way. We can help alleviate the suffering of those in need. We can celebrate diversity while unifying around Christ's table. We can uphold the dignity and worth of all people and strive to see them from God's perspective, not just our own. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper and all that Jesus has done for us, we can remember that we are celebrating God's open table.

## Respond

If our vision as a church is to reduce loneliness, anxiety and addiction by having meaningful conversations where people experience Christ through us, then we can start by confronting our own biases. Who is it hard to imagine sitting down at your table? Pray about your answer.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/09/really-would-you-let-your-daughter-marry-a-democrat/262959/>

## Respond

# Day 4

We've seen this week that Jesus has sent out an open invitation to his table. There is not a roped off VIP section in the kingdom of God! Today we're going to look at one last passage that demonstrates God's welcoming acceptance of all who respond to his call. This time we're going to hear directly from Jesus about what his kingdom will be like.

## Read

### Luke 14:15–24 (NIV)

<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

<sup>15</sup> When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

<sup>16</sup> Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. <sup>17</sup> At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

<sup>18</sup> “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

<sup>19</sup> “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

<sup>20</sup> “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

<sup>21</sup> “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

<sup>22</sup> “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

<sup>23</sup> “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. <sup>24</sup> I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’ ”



- In Jesus' parable, who does the ruler invite to the banquet? Why do they decline? Who gets to dine at his table? Who do you think these groups represent?

## Reflect

God is a generous host who has planned an amazing party for all who are willing to come!

Jesus had been traveling all around Galilee to summon people to God's great dinner party. This was the moment that Israel had been waiting for. Their Messiah had come! But Jesus met with so much resistance, particularly from the religious elite. They were so fixated on the power and prestige they could gain in this world that they missed the arrival of their own Messiah.

Yet the poor and the disadvantaged came to Jesus in droves. These would be the people who responded to his invitation. Soon people of all nations, languages, and cultures would hear and respond to Christ's call. The good news was not just for Israel. Yet, even though the early church would have many generous wealthy patrons, it was those who lived on the margins who were the most responsive.

As followers of Jesus, we are invited to join him as a host. But it's not the people who can repay us that we should be inviting. We are to imitate his grace and mercy in extending invitations to those who would have nothing to give us in return. After all, we're not giving to get, but we're giving to imitate the heart of the one who gave us everything.

## Respond

- What do you think of Jesus' call to be generous to those who can't repay you? How could you do this?
- Spend some time praising God for all he has given you. Rejoice in his loving embrace. Evaluate your priorities in light of this time with the Father.

# Day 5

It's Friday, so you know what to do! Slow down, review the passages we looked at this week, and pray. Invite the Spirit to move you to a change of heart and a change in actions.

## Reflect

As you read over the passages from this week, consider who Jesus invites to his table? How can we imitate his behavior?

[Acts 2:42–47](#)

[James 2:1–10](#)

## [1 Corinthians 11:17–22](#)

## [Luke 14:15–24](#)

### **Connect**

God has set a big, beautiful, open table, and he's given us the task of extending his invitation to everyone who will respond. So who are we going to invite?

Too often we gravitate to people who look like us, share the same background, and live the same kind of lifestyle. If we follow our impulses down this path, we'll exclude others and may even find their differences threatening. But God's table is not a place of sameness, but a place of beautiful diversity where unity is found in Jesus himself.

As we think about sharing the message of Christ's love with the overwhelmed in our community, we may have to step outside our comfort zones. Let's not let ethnic, racial, or class lines keep us from reaching out. We might be surprised at who responds.

Love should flow in and through a God's family. Love from the heavenly Father who sent his Son to save humanity. Love from the Son who came to serve others and bring the lost home. Love from the Spirit who was sent to teach, guide, and empower. As recipients of such abundant, overflowing love, we should be more than willing to pour out what we receive into the lives of others. Let's gather around all kinds of tables with all kinds of people and share the love of Christ.

### **Respond**

What is your biggest takeaway this week? How can you expand your social circle to include a more diverse group of people? What might you gain from getting to know people who are different from you?

Think about who you'd like to share a meaningful conversation with in the next few months. Pray over the names and begin to make a plan about how you might approach them to get to know them better.

The Unity Table is a local organization created to drive people towards Christ and community rather than causes. It challenges us to be intentional about gathering with others who don't look like us; where questions can be asked, lessons can be learned and perspectives are broadened as we appreciate the special ways that God has created each of us.

Check out some of their resources at [unitytable.com](http://unitytable.com). Then pick out one person who is different from you with whom you'd like to share a meal and have a meaningful conversation.