EVERY TABLE AN ALTAR

Jesus at the Table

A 12-week Bible study through the meals of Jesus

An invitation to read the Gospels with open eyes, share honest conversations, and practice the hospitality of Christ in ordinary life.

How to use this guide

Gather with two or more people around a meal, coffee, or an ordinary table. Plan for 60–75 minutes. Read the passage aloud before discussing the historical setting and the questions. Leave time to pray and choose a shared practice for the week.

Each session offers historical context, a passage overview, four discussion questions, a weekly practice, and a closing prayer. The historical notes are concise starting points; return to the biblical text whenever the conversation raises a question.

A simple gathering rhythm

Welcome and eat (15 minutes). Share food and check in on the week.

Read and notice (10 minutes). Read the full passage aloud, then name what surprises you.

Discuss (25–35 minutes). Use the questions as a guide rather than a checklist.

Respond (10 minutes). Pray and decide how to put the passage into practice.

A covenant for the table

Make room for every voice. Listen without rushing to fix. Treat personal stories with care and confidentiality, while recognizing that safety concerns may require outside help. Give people permission to pass on a question. Welcome honest disagreement without turning someone into a project.

A note about Scripture

Read the listed passages directly from your preferred Bible translation. References are supplied throughout so participants can encounter each story in its full biblical context.

WEEK 01 / Luke 5:27–32

An Unexpected Guest

Jesus eats with Levi and other tax collectors.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

Luke 5:27–32 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

Tax collectors worked within Rome's system of extraction and were often regarded as compromised or dishonest. Sharing a meal publicly signaled association, so Jesus' presence at Levi's table provoked questions about belonging.

Walk through the text

Jesus calls Levi, who responds by hosting a banquet. Religious critics question the company Jesus keeps. Jesus answers with the image of a physician who goes where the sick are.

Questions for conversation

1. What do you notice about Levi's response to Jesus?

2. Why might a shared meal have been more provocative than a private conversation?

3. Who would be surprised to find themselves welcomed at our tables?

4. Where might Jesus be inviting you to cross a social boundary?

Practice this week

Invite someone you would not normally spend time with to share coffee or a meal.

Prayer for the table

Jesus, make our welcome wider than our comfort.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 02 / Luke 7:36–50

The Host Who Became a Guest

A woman interrupts a meal at Simon's house.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

Luke 7:36–50 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

A formal meal could involve reclining at a low table, with guests' feet away from the food. The woman's public actions expose contrasting understandings of honor, forgiveness, and hospitality.

Walk through the text

Simon evaluates the woman through her reputation. Jesus tells a story about two debtors and asks who will love more. He then contrasts Simon's welcome with the woman's costly devotion.

Questions for conversation

1. Whose perspective dominates the opening of the story?

2. What does Simon fail to offer Jesus?

3. How does Jesus connect forgiveness and love?

4. What assumptions about people might prevent us from seeing them clearly?

Practice this week

Offer meaningful welcome to someone who might feel overlooked.

Prayer for the table

Lord, free us from the habit of ranking people.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 03 / Luke 14:1–24

A Seat for the Outsider

Jesus challenges the seating chart and guest list.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

Luke 14:1–24 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

Meals in the ancient Mediterranean world often reinforced status through seating and reciprocal invitations. Jesus challenges the expectation that hospitality should yield prestige or repayment.

Walk through the text

At a Pharisee's table, Jesus speaks about humility, invites hosts to include those who cannot repay them, and tells a banquet parable about people who refuse an invitation.

Questions for conversation

1. How does the setting shape Jesus' teaching?

2. What forms of reciprocity shape our invitations?

3. Who is missing from the tables where we feel most at home?

4. What might humble hospitality cost us?

Practice this week

Make an invitation with no expectation of repayment.

Prayer for the table

God, teach us to make room without keeping score.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 04 / John 6:1–15

More Than Enough

Jesus feeds a crowd on a hillside.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

John 6:1–15 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

John places this sign near Passover, inviting readers to hear echoes of Israel's wilderness story. The detail about barley loaves points to ordinary food offered in a moment of extraordinary need.

Walk through the text

Jesus asks Philip about feeding the crowd, receives a small offering through Andrew, gives thanks, and distributes food. The people eat their fill and leftovers are gathered.

Questions for conversation

1. What do Philip and Andrew each notice?

2. Why does John mention the approaching Passover?

3. What does Jesus do before the food is distributed?

4. What ordinary resources could you offer for someone else's good?

Practice this week

Share a meal or groceries with a person or household experiencing need.

Prayer for the table

Provider of daily bread, make us generous with what we have.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 05 / John 6:25–40, 48–58

Bread for the Journey

Jesus speaks of himself as the bread of life.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

John 6:25–40, 48–58 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

After the feeding, the crowd searches for Jesus. His words draw on the memory of manna, while pushing listeners toward the deeper question of what truly sustains life.

Walk through the text

Jesus challenges the crowd's motives and invites belief in the One sent by the Father. His bread imagery points to the life he gives, ultimately bound up with his self-giving.

Questions for conversation

1. What are the crowd's expectations of Jesus?

2. How does manna help explain Jesus' language?

3. Where do you look for lasting satisfaction?

4. How might meals remind us to depend on Christ?

Practice this week

Begin one meal with a moment of silence and a prayer of dependence.

Prayer for the table

Jesus, bread of life, sustain us today.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 06 / Mark 8:1–10

A Table in the Wilderness

Jesus feeds another hungry crowd.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

Mark 8:1–10 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

Mark records a second feeding account, this time with a crowd that has been with Jesus for three days. The repeated meal scenes invite attention to Jesus' compassion and the disciples' slow learning.

Walk through the text

Jesus names the crowd's hunger, involves his disciples, gives thanks, and feeds the people. The disciples' question reveals how quickly they forget what they have already seen.

Questions for conversation

1. What moves Jesus to act?

2. How does this account echo and differ from Mark 6:30–44?

3. Where are you tempted to forget earlier provision?

4. What would compassionate attention look like this week?

Practice this week

Notice a practical need and meet it with another person.

Prayer for the table

Christ, give us eyes for the hungry and weary.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 07 / John 12:1–8

A Dinner of Extravagant Love

Mary anoints Jesus in Bethany.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

John 12:1–8 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

Bethany is close to Jerusalem, and the meal takes place as opposition to Jesus intensifies. Mary's costly perfume and the response to her action highlight competing ideas of value and devotion.

Walk through the text

Martha serves, Lazarus reclines, and Mary anoints Jesus' feet. Judas objects to the expense. Jesus interprets Mary's act in light of his approaching burial.

Questions for conversation

1. What do Martha, Lazarus, and Mary each contribute to the scene?

2. What makes Mary's action so costly?

3. How does Jesus interpret her gift?

4. What does love look like when it cannot be measured by efficiency?

Practice this week

Express gratitude through an intentional act of costly care.

Prayer for the table

Jesus, receive our devotion and reshape our priorities.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 08 / John 13:1–17, 34–35

The Lowest Place

Jesus washes his disciples' feet at supper.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

John 13:1–17, 34–35 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

Foot washing addressed the dirt of travel and was normally associated with low-status service. John's account places Jesus' action at the threshold of his passion.

Walk through the text

Knowing his hour has come, Jesus rises from supper, washes feet, and then explains his example. The act embodies the love he commands his followers to share.

Questions for conversation

1. What does John say Jesus knows before he serves?

2. Why does Peter resist?

3. How does this action redefine leadership?

4. What service would be meaningful in your household or community?

Practice this week

Perform an unnoticed act of service for someone at your table.

Prayer for the table

Servant King, teach us to love as you have loved.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 09 / Luke 22:7–20

Remember Me

Jesus shares the Passover meal before his death.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

Luke 22:7–20 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

Passover remembers God's rescue of Israel from Egypt. At this meal Jesus interprets bread and cup in relation to his coming suffering and the new covenant.

Walk through the text

Jesus desires to eat with his disciples, gives thanks, breaks bread, and speaks of his body given for them. The cup announces the new covenant in his blood.

Questions for conversation

1. What does Passover contribute to the meaning of this meal?

2. Why are remembering and thanksgiving important?

3. What does Jesus' self-giving reveal about God's love?

4. How can ordinary meals prepare us to receive Communion with attention?

Practice this week

Read this passage before a meal and share a prayer of thanksgiving.

Prayer for the table

Crucified Lord, keep your love before us.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 10 / Luke 24:13–35

Known in the Breaking

The risen Jesus is recognized at Emmaus.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

Luke 24:13–35 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

The travelers' disappointed hopes reflect the shock of the crucifixion. Luke's narrative moves from Scripture on the road to recognition at the table.

Walk through the text

Jesus walks with two disciples who do not recognize him, explains the Scriptures, and accepts their invitation to stay. Their eyes are opened when he takes, blesses, breaks, and gives bread.

Questions for conversation

1. What expectations have the travelers lost?

2. Why does Jesus begin with Scripture?

3. What changes when they invite him to stay?

4. Where have you recognized Christ in hindsight?

Practice this week

Share a meal and tell a story of unexpected hope.

Prayer for the table

Risen Jesus, open our eyes to your presence.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 11 / John 21:1–19

Breakfast on the Shore

Jesus feeds and restores his disciples.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

John 21:1–19 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

Fishing was familiar work for several disciples. After a fruitless night, Jesus meets them with a charcoal fire and breakfast; John's mention of charcoal recalls the fire near Peter's denial in John 18:18.

Walk through the text

Jesus directs a catch of fish and invites the disciples to eat. After breakfast, he asks Peter three times about his love and entrusts him with care for his sheep.

Questions for conversation

1. What is significant about Jesus preparing breakfast?

2. How might the charcoal fire deepen Peter's experience?

3. What do Jesus' questions and commissions reveal about restoration?

4. How can a table become a place for a difficult but hopeful conversation?

Practice this week

Reach out to someone with whom you hope to rebuild trust, when doing so is safe and appropriate.

Prayer for the table

Restoring Lord, meet us with truth and mercy.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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WEEK 12 / Revelation 19:6–9; 21:1–5

A Table Without End

The biblical story culminates in a wedding feast and renewed creation.

Begin at the table

As you share food or settle in, ask: Where have you experienced welcome, surprise, or a meaningful conversation around a table recently?

Read the passage

Revelation 19:6–9; 21:1–5 | Read the whole passage aloud. Pause for a moment before anyone speaks.

Historical and cultural setting

Revelation uses vivid symbolic imagery to sustain hope among churches facing pressure. The marriage supper of the Lamb draws on biblical wedding imagery and God's covenant faithfulness.

Walk through the text

Heaven rejoices over the Lamb's wedding feast. The vision of new creation announces God's dwelling with humanity and the end of death and mourning.

Questions for conversation

1. What kind of future does the wedding feast evoke?

2. How does the Lamb shape our understanding of celebration?

3. What does the promise of renewed creation awaken in you?

4. How might future hope change whom we welcome now?

Practice this week

Host a meal that celebrates hope and includes someone who might otherwise be alone.

Prayer for the table

God of all things made new, let our tables anticipate your kingdom.

Take it with you

What is one sentence from this passage you want to carry into the coming week?

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After the Twelfth Table

A closing reflection for your group

Look back

• Which meal story changed the way you understand Jesus?

• Who has become more visible to you over these twelve weeks?

• What has changed in the way you share meals, listen, or extend invitations?

• What practice will you continue over the next three months?

Build your next rhythm

Our next shared meal: _____

Someone we want to invite: _____

One practice we will keep: _____

A sending prayer

Lord Jesus, you welcomed the overlooked, fed the hungry, served your friends, and made yourself known in the breaking of bread. Form our lives around your love. Let our ordinary tables become places of gratitude, friendship, truth, and welcome. Send us from these meals to love our neighbors with the generosity we have received from you. Amen.

Every Table an Altar | A printable resource for personal and group use.