EVERY TABLE AN ALTAR

The Open Table Toolkit

A practical guide to making room for others, one ordinary meal at a time.

You do not need a larger house, a polished menu, or a special occasion to welcome someone. You need a little room in your schedule and a willingness to share what you already have.

Use these pages to choose someone to invite, make a simple plan, and practice hospitality that can become part of your life.

> “Practice hospitality.” — Romans 12:13 (NIV)

01 Begin with a person

Think about the people already near you: a neighbor, someone new at church, a coworker, a friend in a difficult season, or a person you have meant to know better. Start with one invitation.

Who could you welcome?

What might make saying yes easier for them?

- Offer two possible dates instead of an open-ended “sometime.”
- Tell them children are welcome if that fits your home.
- Ask about food allergies or dietary needs without making it complicated.
- Consider breakfast, coffee, dessert, or takeout if dinner feels difficult.

A simple invitation

> “We would love to have you over for dinner next Thursday around 6. Nothing fancy. Would you be free?”

> “We are having soup and bread on Sunday after church. Want to join us? Kids are welcome.”

02 Make a plan you can keep

Choose a format that works with your actual budget and energy. Hospitality is easier to repeat when the plan is manageable.

Four low-pressure ways to gather

• Soup and bread: One pot, a loaf of bread, and fruit.

• Build-your-own meal: Baked potatoes, tacos, or rice bowls with a few toppings.

• Potluck: You provide the main dish and invite guests to bring something if they wish.

• Dessert and tea: A shorter evening when a full meal is too much.

The 20-minute reset

• Clear the table and make space for everyone to sit.

• Tidy the bathroom guests will use.

• Set out water, cups, and serving utensils.

• Put your phone away before the doorbell rings.

A realistic hosting budget

Choose a spending limit before shopping. A meal people can share comfortably is enough. Store-bought food counts. Leftovers count. Paper plates count.

Our meal plan / date / budget

03 Welcome people as they are

A good welcome helps people feel at ease. Greet guests at the door, show them where to put their things, offer something to drink, and introduce people who do not know each other. If someone wants to help, give them a simple task.

Conversation openers

- What has been the best part of your week so far?
- What was the dinner table like in your home growing up?
- Who has made you feel especially welcome?
- What is something you are looking forward to?
- What is a place in this community you love?

A few things to remember

- Leave room for quieter people to speak without putting them on the spot.
- Avoid turning someone’s personal story into a group discussion topic without permission.
- If faith comes up, be curious and listen before offering your perspective.
- If someone has to leave early, receive that with ease.

A short table prayer

> Jesus, thank you for this food and for the people gathered here. Help us receive one another with gratitude and make room for the stories each person carries. Amen.

04 When things get awkward

Real tables include interruptions, differing opinions, children who spill drinks, and conversations that take unexpected turns. You can respond with patience and a little humor.

If conversation stalls

Ask about a favorite memory, a recent discovery, or what someone enjoys doing on a free afternoon. Silence does not always need rescuing.

If a disagreement begins

You can say, “I see that differently, and I would like to understand how you got there.” If the conversation becomes heated, redirect with respect: “I’m glad we can talk about important things. Let’s make sure everyone has room tonight.”

If your home feels imperfect

You do not need to apologize for ordinary signs of life. Let the dishes wait while you finish the conversation.

If someone shares something painful

Thank them for trusting the group. Resist the urge to fix their situation. Ask whether they would like someone to listen, pray, or help in a practical way.

If someone cannot come

Keep the door open without pressure: “We would love to try another time.”

05 After the meal

Hospitality often grows through small, repeated invitations. A brief message afterward can communicate that the time together was meaningful.

A follow-up text

> “We loved having you over. Thanks for spending the evening with us. We would enjoy doing it again sometime.”

Reflect before planning the next gathering

What helped people feel comfortable?

What would we simplify next time?

Who else might need a place at the table?

An ongoing rhythm

Try one shared meal a month. If that is already realistic, consider twice a month. The goal is a practice you can sustain across changing seasons of life.

Your next open table

Use this one-page planner to turn a good intention into a date on the calendar.

Who will we invite?

When will we gather?

What will we serve?

What can we prepare ahead?

What do we need to buy?

When will we send the invitation?

One practice for this week: Send the invitation before you close this guide.

A table that makes room

In the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly shares meals with people whose lives and stories differ. Around tables, people are noticed, questions are asked, and grace becomes tangible. See Luke 5:27–32, Luke 14:12–14, and Luke 19:1–10.

An open table will look different in every household. Some seasons allow long dinners; others make room for coffee on a porch or sandwiches after a soccer game. Begin where you are. Share what you have. Make room for someone.

A prayer before opening the door

> Lord Jesus, you welcomed people others overlooked. Teach us to see those around us with your love. Give us courage to invite, patience to listen, and gratitude for whatever this time together becomes. May this table be a place where people are known and welcomed. Amen.

EVERY TABLE IS AN ALTAR

A companion resource to Every Table an Altar. Scripture references are provided for personal reading and reflection.