The First Table

A New Year guide to remembering God’s faithfulness and making room for the life ahead

Before the year fills up, gather around a table.

The beginning of a year often arrives with a long list of things to improve. Scripture offers another starting place: remember what God has done, receive this day as a gift, and choose how we will love the people entrusted to us.

This guide is designed for New Year’s Eve, New Year’s Day, or any meal in the opening weeks of the year. Use it alone, with friends, with a spouse, or around a family table. There is no perfect way to begin.

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Four guided conversations / A New Year table liturgy / Reflection worksheets / A twelve-month hospitality planner / A household rhythm worksheet / A sending blessing

“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Psalm 90:12 (NIV)

GETTING STARTED

A meal worth making time for

A simple way to use The First Table

Prepare

Choose a meal you already know how to make. Put phones away where they will not interrupt the conversation. If you like, place a candle or a small bowl at the center of the table as a reminder that your time together is set apart.

Gather

Allow 45–75 minutes. The four conversations can happen in one meal, across several meals, or as a private journaling practice. Families with younger children can use the short questions marked “With children.”

Read

Open the Bible and read the listed passages aloud. The references are invitations to engage the whole text rather than substitute a devotional summary for Scripture.

Listen

Give each person permission to pass on a question. Share your own story without correcting someone else’s. Do not force gratitude where there is grief or demand optimism from someone walking through a difficult season.

Choose

End with one next step you can actually practice. You do not need to redesign your entire life over dinner.

THE FOUR MOVEMENTS

Remember the year that was. Release what you cannot carry forward. Discern what deserves your attention. Make room for God and neighbor.

CONVERSATION 01 / REMEMBER

Remember the year that was

Psalm 90:1–12 • Joshua 4:1–9

Enter the story

Psalm 90 places our short lives inside the enduring faithfulness of God. In Joshua 4, stones drawn from the Jordan become a visible reminder of the Lord’s presence when Israel crossed into a new chapter. Remembering is a way of telling the truth about where we have been and who has carried us.

Read aloud

Read Psalm 90:1–12 and Joshua 4:1–9. What does each passage teach about memory?

Talk together

- What was one ordinary moment from this past year you hope you never forget?
- Where did you receive help you could not have provided for yourself?
- What was difficult or disappointing, and what would it mean to acknowledge that honestly before God?
- Which relationship changed the shape of your year?

With children

What made you laugh this year? Who helped you when something was hard?

A table practice

Invite each person to name one “stone of remembrance”: an event, a person, or an act of provision they want to remember. Write it on the Year in Review page. Allow room for memories that carry both gratitude and sorrow.

Pray

God of our years, you have been present in days we understood and days we did not. Help us remember with honesty and give thanks for the gifts we might otherwise overlook. Amen.

CONVERSATION 02 / RELEASE

Name what you are carrying

Matthew 11:28–30 • Philippians 3:12–14

Enter the story

Jesus invites the weary to come to him and learn his way of life. Paul speaks of pressing on toward Christ while refusing to be trapped by what lies behind. Neither passage asks us to pretend our past has disappeared. Both invite us to trust God as we take the next step.

Read aloud

Read Matthew 11:28–30 and Philippians 3:12–14. Listen for what is promised and what is asked of us.

Talk together

- What made this past year heavier than you expected?
- Is there an expectation you need to stop placing on yourself or someone you love?
- What unfinished grief or unresolved situation needs patient attention rather than a quick resolution?
- What burden can you entrust to God today, even if the circumstances remain unchanged?

With children

Is there something from last year you wish had gone differently? What would help you feel supported?

A table practice

Write down one burden or false expectation on a scrap of paper. Keep it, fold it, or place it in a bowl as a way of praying. This is a sign of trust, not a demand to forget. If your situation involves harm or abuse, seeking safety and wise support may be the faithful next step.

Pray

Jesus, meet us where we are tired. Give us courage to name what is true, wisdom for what requires action, and freedom from burdens that were never ours to bear. Amen.

CONVERSATION 03 / DISCERN

Choose what gets your attention

Luke 10:38–42 • John 15:1–8

Enter the story

Martha’s welcome opens her home to Jesus. In the middle of genuine responsibility, Jesus calls her attention back to the person before her. In John 15, Jesus describes the life of a disciple as abiding in him. Both passages invite us to consider the source and direction of our activity.

Read aloud

Read Luke 10:38–42 and John 15:1–8. Notice the relationship between attention, fruitfulness, and love.

Talk together

- Where did your calendar reflect your deepest commitments last year? Where did it drift?
- When were you most present to God or to someone you love?
- What tends to claim your attention before you have chosen to give it?
- What ordinary rhythm would help you remain connected to Jesus this year?

With children

When do you feel like our family is really together? What should we make more time for?

A table practice

Choose a word or short phrase for the year only if it helps you remember the kind of life you want to cultivate. It is an invitation to prayer rather than a prediction of what the year will bring.

Pray

Father, teach us to receive our days with wisdom. Help us notice what draws us toward you and toward one another. Form our desires as we learn to abide in Jesus. Amen.

CONVERSATION 04 / MAKE ROOM

Set the table for the year ahead

Acts 2:42–47 • Romans 12:9–13

Enter the story

The earliest Christian communities shared their lives through teaching, prayer, generosity, and meals. Paul urges the church in Rome to practice hospitality as an expression of sincere love. These are habits that grow in ordinary households and open our lives to neighbors.

Read aloud

Read Acts 2:42–47 and Romans 12:9–13. Look for the everyday practices that made faith visible.

Talk together

- Who regularly finds a place at our table? Who might be missing?
- What makes welcoming others difficult in this season of life?
- What recurring meal or gathering could we protect on the calendar?
- Who could we invite in the next thirty days?

With children

Who would you love to have over for dinner or dessert? How could we help them feel welcome?

A table practice

Before you clear the dishes, choose one date for a meal and one person or household to invite. Small plans have a way of becoming real when they have a name and a place on the calendar.

Pray

Lord Jesus, you have made room for us. Make our homes places where people are seen and our tables places where friendship can grow. Lead us toward the neighbors you have placed nearby. Amen.

A MEAL LITURGY

The First Table liturgy

For a shared New Year’s meal

Assign the “Leader” lines to one person and invite everyone to respond together. Adapt the language for your setting. Use a candle only where safe.

OPENING

Leader: The Lord has been our dwelling place throughout all generations.
All: We enter this year held by the faithfulness of God.

REMEMBER

Leader: We remember what brought joy and what stretched our hope.
All: God was present in the days we celebrate and the days we grieve.

Pause. Invite each person to share one memory from the year.

RELEASE

Leader: Christ invites the weary to come to him.
All: We bring our burdens to Jesus and ask for his wisdom in the days ahead.

Leave a moment of silence.

RECEIVE

Leader: Every good gift comes from God.
All: We receive this meal and this day with gratitude.

MAKE ROOM

Leader: Christ has welcomed us.
All: Help us extend that welcome to others.

BLESS THE MEAL

God of every season, thank you for the food before us and the people with whom we share it. Let this table remind us of your generosity. As a new year begins, teach us to live with open hands and open hearts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRINTABLE REFLECTION / 01

Our year in review

Use this page alone or share your answers around the table.

A moment I want to remember

A person whose presence was a gift

Something I learned through a difficult season

A provision or answer to prayer I want to remember

A grief or disappointment I want to acknowledge

PRINTABLE REFLECTION / 02

What we carry forward

You can complete this privately before sharing what you wish.

A habit or expectation I want to release

A practice that helped me become more attentive to Jesus

A relationship that deserves more time this year

One word or phrase I want to return to in prayer

A first small step I can take this month

PRINTABLE PLANNER / 01

A year of open tables

January–June • Write a name or an occasion, not a complicated event plan.

Hospitality can be shared pizza, soup after church, a porch conversation, or coffee with someone new. Use these pages to notice opportunities rather than create twelve additional obligations.

MONTH	WHO / WHAT KIND OF GATHERING?	A FIRST STEP
January	_____ _____	_____ _____
February	_____ _____	_____ _____
March	_____ _____	_____ _____
April	_____ _____	_____ _____
May	_____ _____	_____ _____
June	_____ _____	_____ _____

A helpful rhythm: Choose a date, extend an invitation, and make the meal manageable. Leave open space for unexpected opportunities.

PRINTABLE PLANNER / 02

A year of open tables

July–December • Write a name or an occasion, not a complicated event plan.

Hospitality can be shared pizza, soup after church, a porch conversation, or coffee with someone new. Use these pages to notice opportunities rather than create twelve additional obligations.

MONTH	WHO / WHAT KIND OF GATHERING?	A FIRST STEP
July	_____ _____	_____ _____
August	_____ _____	_____ _____
September	_____ _____	_____ _____
October	_____ _____	_____ _____
November	_____ _____	_____ _____
December	_____ _____	_____ _____

A helpful rhythm: Choose a date, extend an invitation, and make the meal manageable. Leave open space for unexpected opportunities.

PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

A simple household rhythm

Let the practices serve your life with God and your love for others.

A Rule of Life is a set of chosen rhythms that make room for what we value. Begin with one realistic practice in each area, adjusting for your household and your season.

DAILY / A moment of attention

When could we pause to pray, read Scripture, or listen to one another?

WEEKLY / A shared table

Which meal can we protect from needless distraction?

MONTHLY / An open chair

Whom might we welcome into our home or meet somewhere else?

SEASONALLY / A longer conversation

When will we review our rhythms and make changes?

Our simplest next step: _____

PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Plan your First Table

An ordinary meal can become a meaningful annual tradition.

OUR MEAL

Date and time: _____

Where: _____

What we'll eat: _____

PEOPLE

Who will share this table?

Who else might need a place this season?

THE CONVERSATION

Choose two questions that fit your group.

- Where did you see God's faithfulness this past year?
- What do you hope we make more room for in the coming year?
- Who do we want to remember in prayer?

OUR NEXT INVITATION

Person or household: _____

When we will invite them: _____

An invitation you can send: "We're hoping to be more intentional about sharing meals this year. Would you like to come over for dinner sometime this month? Nothing fancy. We'd love to spend time together."

A BLESSING FOR THE NEW YEAR

Sent from the table

Read aloud as you finish the meal.

Read Numbers 6:24–26 from your Bible.

May the Lord teach us to number our days with wisdom.

May we recognize his gifts in the year behind us and trust his presence in the year before us.

May the Spirit make us attentive to the people who share our lives, especially those we are tempted to overlook.

May the way of Jesus shape the ordinary things we do, including the meals we share and the invitations we extend.

May our homes have room for honest conversation and our lives have room for the work of love.

And when another year has passed, may we look back and find that we have become a little more like Christ.

All: Amen.

TAKE ONE PRACTICE INTO JANUARY

Write the next invitation you want to offer. Put a date beside it. Let the first step be small enough to take.

EVERY TABLE AN ALTAR / THE FIRST TABLE

A resource for personal use, households, and church communities. Scripture references are provided for reading aloud from your own Bible.