



EATING AND DRINKING

with the body of Christ
(and)
with people far from God

a practice guidebook



“The secret weapon for gospel advancement is hospitality, and you can practice it whether you live in a house, an apartment, a dorm, or a high rise.”

Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements, [The Simplest Way to Change the World](#)

Jesus ate and drank with sinners. It’s well documented throughout the Scriptures. We know this with as much certainty as we know that He took time away from the crowds in solitude and silence, developed a relationship with His Father through prayer, and showed up to the synagogue on the Sabbath. In fact, these very same Gospel records tell us that He was accused of being a glutton and a lush because of the company He kept, earning Him the moniker “Friend of Sinners.”

How many of us could be accused in the same way?

Spiritual disciplines are often seen as austere and ascetic practices engaged only by the super-spiritual. But at the heart, the spiritual disciplines are simply the practices of Jesus—they are intentionally engaging the *lifestyle* of Jesus so that we might gain the *life* of Jesus as well. While prayer, fasting, Scripture reading, and meditation are vitally important practices, one of the well-documented aspects of the lifestyle of Jesus is His intentionality with meals. He didn’t simply show the Kingdom through His miracles and teachings—He ate dinner in a way that inaugurated the Kingdom of God as well.

The following booklet is designed to work through a bit of the “how” of this practice. The “why” will largely be covered as part of the teaching series at York Alliance in July 2019. (www.yorkalliance.org/sermons) Some of these practices are individual. Others will require a group. All of them will be best practiced and processed in community, through a Community Group, Discipleship Partner, or just a group of friends who are together seeking to engage apprenticeship to Jesus.

The exercises in this booklet will stretch over the next five weeks. Along with this booklet, I would encourage you to read “The Gospel Comes with a House Key” by Rosario Butterfield and “A Meal With Jesus” by Tim Chester. For bonus points, “The Simplest Way to Change the World” (referenced above) is a practical and helpful guide.

The weeks will be laid out as follows:

- Week One: Evaluating Your Table
- Week Two: Radically Ordinary Hospitality
- Week Three: Neighbors
- Week Four: Church Around a Table
- Week Five: Celebrating

These exercises are intentionally designed to balance the “action” of this practice with heart preparation and emotional engagement. Therefore, weeks 1 and 3 are a bit theoretical while 2, 4, and 5 require action. However, the bottom line is that this concept isn’t complicated, and it’s one that we can all easily engage with just a modicum of effort. So feel free to skip the frills and, as Nike says, “Just do it!” We often spend too much time trying to prepare to do something powerful and profound, while what Jesus has asked us to do is incredibly simple. I love this musing from Skye Jethani:

I am growing increasingly convinced that if every one of these kids burning with passion to write a hit Christian song or make that hit Christian movie or start that hit Christian ministry to change the world would instead focus their passion on walking with God on a daily basis, the world would change. . . . Because the world learns about God not by watching Christian movies, but by watching Christians.

And what better place to observe than around our dining room tables.

Week One: Evaluating My Table

“Churches mirror our relationships. If people are still coming to church primarily out of relationships they’ve nurtured with people in the church, then sanctuaries reflect dinner tables.”

Bryan Loritts, Insider Outsider

An initial reading of this quote provokes a relatively straightforward response: “Of course. That makes sense.”

But then, a few thoughts later, we’re struck with the blistering critique that it is—to the extent that our church lacks variance and diversity in areas such as race, socioeconomic status, worldview, politics, outward appearance, life experience, and any number of other factors, the problem can be found in our own kitchens.

Think about those with whom you regularly come in contact. Make a list in three categories:

- **Level One** relationships are passing acquaintances. You might know a name or just know them to see them, but don’t really know anything else about them.
- **Level Two** relationships range from knowing their name and a few key facts about their life to people you know pretty well but with whom you wouldn’t describe yourself as especially close.
- **Level Three** relationships are close connections whom you see and/or engage regularly (phone/text/etc.) and with whom you would be comfortable sharing struggles, anxieties, and joys, and (this is very important!) if you needed help with something, you would be willing to inconvenience them.

Now, evaluate your lists.

1. How many of those on the list overall are *different* than you in a major and substantive way? (I.e: different race, socioeconomic class, language, etc.)
2. How many are different in minor, less substantive ways? (For instance: political opinions, appearances, life experiences, etc.)
3. Does the number or percentage of “differents” change as you get deeper in relationship?
4. Is there a certain kind of “different” that you see quite a bit of on your lists? Can you think of a reason why that might be the case?
5. Is there a certain kind of “different” that doesn’t appear anywhere on your list? Can you think of a reason why that might be the case?

The goal of this exercise is not to “fix” anything, but rather to be aware of the relationships in our lives. If your life represented the church, what kinds of people would be missing? Do you have opportunities to develop those kinds of relationships?

The gospel is “good news” for all people. The message of Jesus doesn’t just appeal to all different kinds of people—all different kinds of people hear it, engage it, and understand it, and they do so in different and unique ways. Therefore, when our communities are made up of predominately one or two kinds of people (particularly when those are people like us!), we have a limited understanding of the gospel. In the same way, if the gospel message that we declare, either with our words or with our lives, only attracts a certain kind of person, then we can be sure that our gospel message is incomplete. Tim Keller says it this way in his book Prodigal God: “If the preaching of our ministers and the practice of our parishioners do not have the same effect on people that Jesus had, then we must not be declaring the same message that Jesus did.” Revelation 7:9 shows that the completed gospel requires all different kinds of people, from every nation, tribe, people, and language.

Does your dinner table look like that?

Questions for Community:

- How does this practice feel to you? Why do you think that is?
- What do you find when you evaluate those with whom you are in relationship? Why do you think that is?
- Are there barriers to deeper relationship with people who are not like you? Be honest.
- How does Revelation 7 impact your way of seeing the world around you?

Week Two: Radically Ordinary Hospitality

Our world is becoming increasingly secular by the year. In fact, according to the General Social Survey released in 2019, the religious “nones” (those who claim “no religion” when asked what is their religious tradition) is, at 23.1%, equal to Catholics at 23% and slightly ahead of evangelicals at 22.5%.

How do we combat this trend? The simplest way is just like Jesus did—one meal at a time. The Greek word for hospitality (*philoxenos*) literally means “love of the guest.” Through hospitality we can express the love of Jesus for those who are far from Him.

The practice this week is exceedingly simple: Have a meal with someone who has not yet experienced or embraced the love of the Father in their lives. No agenda, just learning about them and loving them as Jesus does. Follow this two-step process:

1. Through listening prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to bring a name or face to mind for you to share a meal with in the coming week.
2. Reach out to them and invite them to a meal! Dinner in a home is always best, so try to figure out a way to invite them into your home. If needed, a restaurant or coffee shop will do. Ask them lots of questions and get to know them! Feel free to speak into the conversation as well, but make your primary concern intentionally loving your guest. The goal is not to “sell” them Jesus—get to know them and make space for them to tell their story. However, certainly pray for them (out loud is fine if you feel that the situation allows it, but certainly silently!) before, during, and after your meal. Pray the heart of God into reality in their life!

One of the immediate challenges that people have is that “associating” with that person sends a mixed message of some kind of acceptance of their lifestyle. It’s an odd pushback that happens often in the church. Rosario Butterfield, in the introduction to her book [The Gospel Comes with a House Key](#) does an incredible job of speaking to this issue. As you prepare for the practice this week, read through her words:

Radically ordinary hospitality characterizes those who don’t fuss over different worldviews represented at the dinner table. The truly hospitable aren’t embarrassed to keep friendships with people who are different. They don’t buy the world’s bunk about this. They know that there is a difference between acceptance and approval, and they courageously accept and respect people who think differently from them. They don’t worry that others will misinterpret their friendship. Jesus dined with sinners, but he didn’t sin with sinners. Engaging in radically ordinary hospitality means we provide the time necessary to build strong relationships with people who think differently than we do as well as build strong relationships from within the family of God. It means we know that only hypocrites and cowards let their words be stronger than their relationships, making sneaky raids into culture on social media or behaving like moralizing social prigs in the neighborhood. Radically ordinary hospitality shows this skeptical, post-Christian world what authentic Christianity looks like.

Questions for Community:

- Is there anyone who immediately comes to mind as you've prayed during this practice?
- Do you regularly eat and drink with people who are far from God? Why or why not?
- What is the most challenging part of this practice for you?

Week Three: Neighbors

When Jesus was asked to delineate the most important commands, He narrowed them down to two. In fact, He said that the entirety of the law and the prophets depend on these two commands: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... and love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)

But who is our neighbor? Jesus defined the term so broadly that it even included our enemies, but we need to start somewhere... so what about our literal, physical neighbors?

The goal of the exercise this week is to brainstorm ways that you might, over the next several weeks and months, actually get connected with your neighbors. Maybe you already know them well, or maybe you know a name and a few assorted details, but don't really know anything about their lives. The goal of this week is to take a step forward!

Take some time to brainstorm ways that you might love your neighbors well and create opportunities for hospitality. Think about how you might get to know neighbors you haven't yet met or could go deeper with neighbors that you already know pretty well. If you're an introvert and want to do this alone, that's totally fine. However, it's most productive to create your list as a family or as a Community Group—brainstorm fun and creative ideas, as well as practical ones!

Here's a short list to get you started:

- Very simply, go across the street and introduce yourself.
- Prayer walk your neighborhood and ask Jesus for His heart for your neighbors.
- Host a cookout/party for the nearest holiday: Labor Day, maybe? Or make one up—the last Tuesday in July party.
- Create a standing "Neighborhood Night" for the summer where neighbors know that they can come to your backyard on Thursdays (for example) and you'll be making burgers and hot dogs and they can bring a side dish to share.
- Do a front yard BBQ—move the grill around to the front and invite people to stop in!
- Think about how you connect and use that. Maybe watching a sporting event? A book club? A day at the pool? Go for a hike?

After you've made a list, choose a few to put into practice! However, don't just say you're going to practice them—put them on the calendar, and get moving! Think through logistics, schedule, and what support you need. Depending on the idea, it might take a budget, so plan accordingly. If you have a larger vision of how these connections might happen, consider inviting others from your community into the adventure! Plan together, pray together, and love your neighbors together.

In all of this, we must keep Romans 15:7 in mind as our purpose for all that we do in loving our neighbors: "Welcome one another as I have welcomed you." It's the grace of Jesus that we've received that prompts us offer grace to others.

The immediate pushback that many feel isn't spiritual, but pragmatic—"I've lived in my neighborhood for years and I've never reached out to my neighbors. What will they think if I start now?" There are many faults to this line of reasoning, and again, Rosario Butterfield calls our bluff. Meditate on this quote as you prepare to be a brand-new kind of neighbor this week:

Our post-Christian world has not taken away our Bibles or the Holy Spirit's convicting rebuke on our Christ-owned consciousness. We have done this through high-minded moralism and unrepentant sin. And now we must be salt and light in a world that knows we have blown it. We will wear the title of hypocrite—and rightly so—until we repent to God and love our neighbor in word and deed. Now is the time to know our stuff and roll up our sleeves. Reconciliation starts with repentance.

Questions for Community

- How did you feel about this practice going into it? Are you nervous or excited?
- What are some ideas you have for how to engage your neighbors?
- What are the "first steps" that you need to take in this practice?

Week Four: Church Around a Table

The book of Acts describes the gatherings of the community of faith in a remarkable way:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–47, ESV)

Luke (the writer of the book of Acts) doesn't seem to describe a meal as something that preceded or followed the main event—it *was* the main event! Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, chastises the church at Corinth for the way that they were engaging the communion meals. However, as you read 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, it makes no sense within our modern practice of observing a symbolic "meal" with a chunk of bread dipped into a cup of grape juice as a small part of a larger worship gathering. The early church saw eating and drinking *together* with the body of Christ as foundational to what it meant to be part of the church.

For this week's practice, you are going to plan a meal with a fellow follower of Jesus, or a group of them. Pretty simple! If you have a Community Group that already meets together for a meal, the box is already checked! However, for many, this isn't part of our regular practice. For those for whom this *is* a regular part of your practice, it might be helpful to intentionally expand your table this week—in addition to your Community Group meal (or maybe as a part of it!) invite a believer that isn't a regular part of the group, or maybe even isn't a regular part of the YAC community. In fact, it might be a great time to look back at the exercise from Week One and "expand your table" with intentionality to those who look or act differently than you.

As you prayerfully consider who to invite, once again consider these words from Rosario Butterfield from her book [The Gospel Comes with a House Key](#):

We remember what it is like to be a new Christian, to be single, to have secrets that get you alone and torment you, and to have no place to go after worship, the odd tearing apart of the body of Christ as each retreats to her own corner or clique while the benediction still rings in the air. It is an act of violence and cruelty to people in your church who routinely have no place to belong, no place to need and be needed, after worship. Worship leaves us full and raw, and we need one another.

Keep this reality in mind as you think about what it looks like to engage church around a table. Families should consider inviting singles—and singles should consider inviting families! Think about widows and orphans (both literally and spiritually), and those who seem to be on the outside. Think about newcomers and how an invitation to dinner might be a welcome invitation. And most of all, ask the Holy Spirit to direct your invitation.

As you eat together, invite the Holy Spirit to minister to you and through you with generosity and power. And as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us, “Spur one another on to love and good deeds.”

Questions for Community:

- Is this practice easier or harder for you than the similar practice from Week Two? Why is that?
- How might this practice become a regular part of your life?
- What benefits do you see for you (and your family, if applicable) by engaging this practice with regularity? What are some of the benefits that you (and your family) bring to others who join you?

Week Five: Celebrating

Richard Foster, in his book [Celebration of Discipline](#) makes the point that “celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ.” In fact, he not only notes that joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), he says, “Often I am inclined to think that joy is the motor, the thing that keeps everything else going.” Jesus’ life was inaugurated with a message from the angels: “I bring you good news of great joy,” (Luke 2:10) and near the end of His earthly life, He passed a similar message to His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11) Even in the Old Testament, Nehemiah reminds us that “the joy of the Lord is our strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10)

Does your apprenticeship to Jesus reflect that joy? I often wonder if we in the North American church don’t take the call to joy seriously enough. What would happen if the Elders at York Alliance started to bring people under church discipline for the “sin of joylessness?” I’m being a bit facetious, of course, but the call to joy is clear throughout the Scriptures. Therefore, it shouldn’t be surprising that the practices of Jesus include a call to joyful celebration!

For this final week’s practice, you should get together with your community (either a Community Group or a group of people with whom you engage apprenticeship to Jesus) and throw a party! The specifics are truly up to you. Summer is a great time for all kinds of parties, so the only limit is your Spirit-led imagination!

Remember that our goal is not to necessarily throw a party like the rest of the world, but to have a Kingdom type of celebration that eats, drinks, and engages one another as Jesus would, and as an act of worship and gratitude to the Creator God who has abundantly blessed us. So get together with your community and brainstorm the following:

- Where is the best place for this party? Someone's house or a more public space?
- Who should be invited? How might this party represent well the community of our lives and the community we live in?
- Will there be a theme? There are tons of options here: A standard backyard BBQ, a "pool" party with kiddie pools and sandboxes, a movie theme, a time period theme (70's or 80's parties are always fun!), a holiday theme (Christmas in August?) or a "holiday" theme (make up your favorite "holiday"—National Left-Handed Slow Pitch Softball Players Day is a favorite of mine!). Be creative—the planning itself will be part of the joy of celebration!
- What is the cost for this kind of party, and how will you cover it? Will people bring things?
- What kind of games or activities should be happening during the party, and who will be in charge of them?

Obviously, this is likely something that will begin in the planning stages this week and extend later into the summer. But consider now—should it also be something that happens annually? Seasonally? As you brainstorm, consider putting your "second best" idea on the calendar for another date in the future! How wonderful would it be for apprentices of Jesus to become known for being the "most fun" people who throw the best parties!

Questions for Community:

- How do you feel about this week's practice? Is this a new way of thinking about worship and spiritual formation for you?
- What are some of the ideas that you like the best for this kind of celebration? Why do you like those?
- What are your hesitations or anxieties with this practice?
- As you have journeyed through these five weeks, have you found yourself thinking about "eating and drinking" in different ways than when you began? In what ways?