

Grace Table Discussion 1



Gather: invite someone, make a stranger a friend, break isolation.

Relate: turn off the TV, sit together, face each other, listen.

Accept: let the table be a place of acceptance and not judgement.

Consecrate: thank God, don't be ashamed to acknowledge the Giver.

Eat: shared meals grow trust, unite enemies, and define us.

WHAT? A FALAFEL RECIPE? YEP!

Jesus did not eat modern falafel. But he would have eaten an ancient ancestor of this dish. He definitely did not die with a falafel in his hand. But this recipe takes you to the flavours of Israel!

- 1 cup canned chickpeas, drained (or used dried chickpeas and soak for a day)
 - 1 small onion, diced (about 1/2 cup)
 - 2 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed
 - 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, finely chopped
 - 1 teaspoon ground cumin
 - 1 teaspoon ground coriander
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - 1/2 teaspoon dried chilli flakes (a little less if you don't like heat)
 - 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
 - 4 to 6 cups vegetable oil for frying!
1. In food processor, combine chickpeas, onion, garlic, parsley, cumin, coriander, salt, red pepper flakes, and baking soda. Pulse just until finely chopped and crumbly (mixture will resemble wet bread crumbs; do not over process into paste, or balls will be heavy).
 2. In large electric frypan over moderately high heat, heat oil.
 3. Form mixture into approximately 1-inch balls or disks. Lower carefully into hot oil and fry, turning, until deep golden brown, about 1 to 2 minutes. Drain on paper towels.

- From: www.epicurious.com

OPENING QUESTIONS

- Are Australians more connected or more isolated than before?
- Loneliness is as natural (and healthy) as hunger. What do you think?
- What does loneliness actually feel like?

LUKE 5:27-38 “LONELY LEVI”

Read and discuss Luke 5:27-38. What do you hear? What do you notice?

Levi is a ‘telones’ – a hated collaborator. He has to cheat to make a living. He is banned from the temple because he handles unclean money. What chance does Levi have of being connected? Can you think of anything similar in our culture?

Jesus “sees” Levi. This word indicates that he really looked at him; he noticed him.

But that “Lonely Levi” becomes “Magnanimous Matthew”. He holds a “great feast” (the word here comes from ‘receive’ and means a ‘reception’. He literally holds an event to receive people! What changed for him?

AUSTRALIAN ISOLATION – R U LONELY LIKE LEVI?

Simply read and discuss the research based factoids below...

The 2016 Lifeline Loneliness Survey found:

- 60% of respondents often feel lonely
- 53.4% say they have someone to confide in when lonely
- 82.5% say the feeling of loneliness is increasing in society
- 44.1% of those who believe this are living with a spouse
- 31.5% feel more lonely when using social media

CEO Pete Shmigel: *"For a society that is more technologically connected than we have ever been, the results suggest we're overlooking good old-fashioned care and compassion when it comes to our mental health and wellbeing."*

- From: www.lifeline.org.au

The ‘R U OK Australia 2016’ Survey found:

- We average of 46 hours of weekly downtime looking at TV and digital devices
- We average of 6 hours per week engaging with family and friends
- Half of us spend 2 hours or less connecting with people who matter to us.

- From: www.ruok.org.au

GATHERED MEALS AND PHYSICAL EMOTIONAL SPIRITUAL HEALTH?

Now simply read and discuss the research based factoids here...

1. Eating together regularly boosts a young child's vocabulary even more than reading storybooks!

Snow, C.E. & Beals D.E. Mealtime talk that supports literacy development, New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, Volume 2006, Issue 111

2. Regular mealtime together predicts high school scores better than doing homework!

3. Family dinners reduce likelihood of substance abuse such as taking illegal illicit drugs or unsafe alcohol consumption.

4. Despite what they may say, research showed that 81% of teens do want to have eat with family. Only 13% actually want to eat alone.

National Centre On Addiction & Substance Abuse, Importance Of Family Dinners IV, Sept 2007).

5. Eating together at a 'family dinner' is linked to better nutrition.

6. Children who eat meals together with family show better mental health.

7. Eating together as a family helps children feel better, physically, and mentally."

Marie-Josée Harbec, Linda S. Pagani. Associations Between Early Family Meal Environment Quality and Later Well-Being in School-Age Children. Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics, 2017:1.

Note that this study separated family 'connectedness' as a variable and corrected results for it – so the actual 'meal together' was demonstrated to correlate with better mental health even taking into account the 'connectedness' of the family!

8. Children who are bullied bounce back quicker if eating meals with family.

Eisenberg ME, Olson RE, Neumark-Sztainer D, Story M, Bearinger LH. Correlations Between Family Meals and Psychosocial Well-being Among Adolescents. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2004

9. Currently studies into dementia and eating together are likely to show significant benefits for those suffering dementia!

Of course, the real power of eating together isn't the food. If parents yell at each other, or scold their kids, family dinner won't confer positive benefits. You have to relate and accept each other at this table for it to be effective.

How does this all connect with or remind you of spiritual life?

HOSPITALITY MAKES STRANGERS INTO FRIENDS!

Everywhere Jesus went he ate with people. One expert says, "Jesus eats his way through the Gospel of Luke." When Jesus ate with people what was going on?

The word for 'hospitality' in the Bible is *philoxenia*. It is made up from two words: *philos* =g 'friendship/love' and *xenos* = 'stranger'. So it means 'making strangers into loved friends'. Specifically *philoxenia* referred to eating with people!

Read the following Bible verses about *philoxenia* then reflect on them quietly.

Romans 12:12-13. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

1 Timothy 3:2. So an elder's life must be above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must be hospitable...

Hebrews 13:2. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares!

What are you hearing? What is God saying to you, to our church, to this group?

Jesus commanded his disciples to accept hospitality too (Luke 10:8). Why is this?

How do hospitality and 'mission' go together?

AN OLD PRAYER OF GATHERING

*God is here among us:
let us all adore him
and with awe appear before him.*

*God is here within us:
Soul in silence fear him,
humbly fervently draw near him.
Now his own who have known,
God in worship lowly
yield their spirits wholly.*

*Come, abide within me;
let my soul like Mary
Be your earthly sanctuary.
Come, indwelling Spirit,
with transfigured splendor;
love and honor will I render.
Where I go here below,
let me bow before you,
Know you and adore you.*

*Gladly we surrender
earth's deceitful treasures,
pride of life,
and sinful pleasures.
Gladly, Lord, we offer
yours to be forever,
soul and life and each endeavor.
You alone shall be known,
Lord of all our being,
life's true way decreeing.*

*Words: Gerhard Tersteegen (1729)
Tune: Arnsberg (Wunderbarer König)*