

Grace Table Discussion 4



CONSECRATE

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.

YUMMY BIBLICAL RAISIN CAKES!

This recipe from www.cookingwiththebible.com is traditional Middle Eastern food, mentioned in 1 Samuel 25:18. It's great with coffee, unless you gave up coffee for Lent (sorry Ben)!

- 1½ cups raisins
- 2 cups water
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 tsp Balsamic vinegar
- ¾ cup butter
- 3 eggs
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1½ cups oatmeal
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 1½ cups plain flour
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1½ tsp ground allspice
- 1 tsp ground nutmeg
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ½ cup chopped walnuts

Preheat oven to 180°C. In a large pot, boil the raisins in 2 cups of water. Add the sugar and vinegar and stir. Stop for a while and let it cool for 20 minutes. Then, to the same pot, add the butter, eggs, vanilla, and all the remaining dry ingredients. Mix well, then pour batter into a greased oven tin. Bake for 35–45 minutes, or until a knife comes out clean. Serve with whipped cream.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Name one thing for which you are grateful.
- Name any habit you have.

WHAT DO OUR HABITS REVEAL?

Use over time for: habit



For some reason the English word ‘habit’ is used less these days. So let’s define it...

“Habits are regularly repeated patterns of behaviour that are often hard to change”

The best research suggests that to form a consistent habit takes between 18 and 254 days, with an average time for habit formation of 66 days.

- *How Habits Are Formed: Modelling Habit Formation In The Real World*, P. Lally, C.H. van Jaarsveld, H.W. Potts, J. Wardle, *European Journal of Social Psychology*. Volume 40, Issue 6, October 2010, Pages 998–1009.

Our personality is an accumulation of habits. We may think that our habits are the results of our appetites. But actually, our habits can form our appetites – so the more we do something, the more right it feels (eg. The more Netflix you watch, the more you want to!).

How might a person’s habits predict who they will become?

How can habits shape our life, mind, and faith?

WHAT DO JESUS’ HABITS REVEAL?

I read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John through looking at what they actually record as ‘regularly repeated patterns’ in the life of Jesus. This is not a to-do list for you, it’s about who Jesus is. Quietly reflect on the list, then share with the group:

- Which habit of Jesus attracted you?
- What does this habit say to you about who Jesus is?

HABIT #1. JESUS ATE WITH PEOPLE

Eating with people is not just something he did a little bit – it is a defining habit of who he is.

Mark 2:16. And the scribes, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

Luke 22:14-15. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

See also: Luke 5:29, 7:36, Luke 10:38, Luke 11:27, 14:1, 19:6-7, Luke 24:30, John 21:12 and many more!

HABIT #2. JESUS TOUCHED

If you sit and read the first three Gospels in one go, the touch is overwhelming. Open anywhere in Matthew, Mark or Luke (that’s not a block of preaching or teaching) and you will be near an instance of touch.

Matthew 17:7. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear."

Mark 10:16. And Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Also: Matt 8:3, 8:15, 9:29, 20:34, Mark 6:5, 7:32-33, 9:27, Luke 13:13, 8:54, 22:50-51, 24:39, John 20:28 ++

HABIT #3. JESUS TOLD STORIES

This is an obvious pattern in the way Jesus spoke. He could hardly teach without telling a parable or story.

Matthew 13:34. All these things Jesus said in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable.

See also: Mark 3:23, 4:33, 10:1. Matthew 13:3, 22:1, Matthew 22:1 and many more!

HABIT #4. JESUS PRAYED IN SOLITUDE

Although he loved people, to seek solitude and commune with the Father was natural for Jesus.

Luke 5:16. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

See also: Mark 1:35, 6:31, Matthew 14:13, 14:23, Luke 4:42, 6:12, 9:10, 9:18, 9:28, 22:39-40, John 6:15 ++

HABIT #5. JESUS GAVE THANKS AT MEALS

Jesus pauses in some way, blesses God, says thanks, breaks bread then he distributes food. Consecrate means to bless and to call something holy - Jesus consecrated meals.

Matthew 15:36. He gave thanks and broke them and gave them to the disciples...

Matthew 26:26. Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples

See also: Matthew 14:19, 26:26, 26:27, Mark 14:22, Luke 24:30, 1 Cor 11:23-24, John 6:11

THE POWER OF A HABIT OF GRATITUDE

Following Jesus is all gratitude. It is a life of thanks for what has already been done for us. One of those most basic habits of gratitude is commonly called 'table grace'. The simple act of saying 'table grace' could be one of the most powerful, soul shaping, habits we ever develop.

If you are a parent or grandparent, then modelling habits of gratitude (like table grace) is vital. It will shape faith and also grow resilience. Children grow up in a world where everything is instant. But a deliberate 'grateful pause' before something good teaches wisdom and slows us down to remember God's grace. When we practice this genuinely, it is contagious.

How can we 'form faith' in the young and in new believers by modelling this habit?

OPTIONAL BIT: RESEARCH ON GRATITUDE

If you enjoy evidenced based research, it's interesting to note that what the Bible says about gratitude is now being proven! Here's a list of some research on gratitude. If your group likes this, you're welcome to discuss the research (or just skip this bit if it's not your thing).

1. PRACTICING GRATITUDE INCREASES WELL-BEING (IT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD!)

"Gratitude is robustly associated with each of these conceptions of well-being."

- Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration. A.M. Wood, J.J. Froh, A.W. Geraghty. Clinical Psychology Review (2010).

2. PRACTICING GRATITUDE CAN HELP US COPE WITH PAIN

Researchers asked people with neuromuscular disorders to make ‘nightly lists’ of things for which they were grateful. After three weeks, participants reported getting longer, more refreshing sleep...

- Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation. R.A. Emmons, R. A., & M.E. McCullough. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2003 84(2), 377-389.

After two weeks of ‘daily gratitude journaling’ this group reported fewer headaches, less congestion, stomach pain, and cough or sore throat... - “A Thinks A Day Keeps The Doctor Away” E.R. Simon-Thomas

3. PRACTICING GRATITUDE CAN IMPROVE SLEEP

Gratitude predicted greater subjective sleep quality and length, less trouble getting to sleep and daytime drowsiness. - Gratitude Influences Sleep Through The Mechanism Of... A.M Wood, S. Joseph, J. Lloyd, S. Atkins. Journal of Psychosomatic Research 2009 Jan;66(1):43-8.

4. PRACTICING GRATITUDE CAN (OVER SIGNIFICANT TIME) HELP US COPE WITH TRAUMA

A number of studies have found that practice of gratitude over longer periods of time helped people adjust to disaster and trauma – in Syria and Indonesia.

- Gratitude and personal functioning among earthquake survivors in Indonesia. D. Mellor & R. Y. Hong (2014) The Journal of Positive Psychology, 9:4, 295-305

5. WHEN CHILDREN LEARN GRATITUDE RATHER THAN MATERIALISM THEY EXHIBIT HIGHER GRADES, LESS ENVY, LESS DEPRESSION, BETTER RELATIONSHIPS, AND ARE HAPPIER WITH LIFE!

1035 high school students participated in this study. “When materialistic values become essential to a person’s value system, personal wellbeing decreases ... Gratitude, however, seems to have an opposite effect on personal well-being... Materialistic youth seem to be languishing while grateful youth seem to be flourishing. We found that gratitude correlated with higher grades, life satisfaction, social integration, and lower envy and depression.”

- Gratitude and the Reduced Costs of Materialism in Adolescents. J.J. Froh, R.A. Emmons, N.A. Card, G. Bono, J.A. Wilson. Journal of Happiness Studies (2011) 12:289-302.

HOW TO DEVELOP A TABLE GRACE HABIT

We don’t have to say ‘table grace’ and we don’t have to do it a certain way. We have God’s love already assured in Christ. But simple habits like ‘table grace’ keep us centred on God’s love, form our faith, and grow us spiritually. Why on earth wouldn’t we try to grow in this healthy habit?

Simply discuss the outline below and share how you do it or your ideas about it...

1. Pause / Slow Down:

- a. Pause for a moment
- b. Be quiet for 20 seconds
- c. Use the moment to remember ‘you are loved’

(Not: “Come Lord Jesus be our guest and let this food to us be blessed Amen!”)

2. Physical Actions:

- a. Bowed head, closing eyes, or looking up
- b. Folding hands, holding hands, or open hands
- c. Blessing food, breaking bread, sign of the cross etc.

3. Speak:

- a. Try some different graces, cross-pollinate your practices with other Christians.
- b. Take turns leading. No pressure to be perfect.
- c. Pray ‘from the heart’ sometimes too.
- d. Try saying thanks not just for the food itself, but the rain, the soil, the plants, those who grew it, the truck that delivered it, the hands that prepared it, etc!
- e. Say grace it in public places and don’t be ashamed!