

FISHERS OF MEN // Eat Some Meals

1. Begin with Prayer
2. Listen without Judgment
- 3. Eat some meals**
4. Serve Others
5. Share Your Story

Why are we doing this? To remove every obstacle that we can so that people that are far from God would come to know him.

- We start by praying.
- We listen without judgment
- We EAT some meals.

When you think of Jesus, you would probably think about His teachings, His healings, miracles, praying, but you likely wouldn't think of Him EATING.

Eating is an important part of any culture; it is central to life. Hospitality was a normal part of Jewish culture. It was normal to eat with people in order to connect with them and build relationships. Jewish culture is built around sharing meals, and they had many rhythms of meals, sabbath rest, and feasts.

Story after story, at every turn, God's presence through feasts, like manna appearing in the desert and even the meal of communion. God is making it plain to us that He wants to know us, He wants to be in relationship with us, and He is inviting us to take a seat at the table with Him. That's what God is like. He wants you to join Him at the table.

Jesus modeled this constantly. Matthew, Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, Mary and Martha, to the wedding at Cana, Jesus was always building relationships with people around a meal.

Even when Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, it wasn't until they sat around a table, and He broke the bread, that the Lord opened their eyes to see Him. It wasn't until the breaking of the bread that their eyes were opened.

Later, the early church followed in His footsteps. In Acts 2, listed amongst the other practices of the church, the “breaking bread” is mentioned as a regular practice of connecting with God and with one another, and the Lord added daily those who were being saved! Today’s message is very simple. Jesus ate meals with the lost, and He is inviting us to make room in our lives to do the same.

Note: This is not a formula or a manipulative technique!

An invitation to lunch can be a genuine invitation or used like bait on the end of a hook. That’s why the saying exists, “There is no free lunch.” Have you ever been invited to lunch as a sales technique? Food can be used manipulatively to coerce someone into relationship with the ultimate intention to make a “sale.” That is not what we see with Jesus. Christians should never use meals like bait! This is not a tool to trick people to Jesus. Sharing a meal is just the simplest way to let someone know they are loved, and it’s a natural place to get to know someone. The goal is that you will know them, and you will love them. Period.

Jesus was intentional but he was not manipulative.

When Jesus ate a meal with someone it was also a statement – an affirmation of a person’s worth, a willingness to be associated with them. It showed that He wanted to be with them, because He loved them. No matter what the outcome of the conversation was, Jesus ate with sinners.

Matthew 9:9-13, “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ And he rose and followed Him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ But when He heard it, He said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

In Jesus’ time, tax collectors were among the most hated people in Jewish culture. Tax collectors were seen as traitors because they were Jewish people who collected

Roman taxes. They worked for the occupying force of Rome. Often, they would gouge people to pad their salaries. They were corrupt, partnered with the Romans, and nobody likes taxes – even in Jesus' time. When Jesus chose a tax collector (Matthew) to be one of His disciples, it would have confused everyone. After Matthew decided to follow Jesus, the first thing Jesus did was go to his house and eat. Then, the "sinners" started showing up. These were the people that showed no regard to following God's laws. They were outcasts and people you were not supposed to eat with. But Jesus ate with them anyways. The Pharisees often accused Him of being a drunkard and glutton because He was always spending time with sinners, and food, and wine.

When Jesus heard the Pharisees' complaints, He responded:

Matthew 9:12, "But when He heard it, He said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice." For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

Warren Weirsbe, in his commentary wrote:

"The Pharisees' trouble was that although they followed the rituals of Judaism with great precision, their hearts were hard, cold, and merciless. So Jesus dismissed them with a challenge to learn the meaning of Jehovah's words, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice' (quoted from [Hos 6:6](#)). Although God had instituted the sacrificial system, He did not want the rituals to become a substitute for inward righteousness. God is not a Ritualist, and He is not pleased with rituals divorced from personal godliness—precisely what the Pharisees had done. They observed the letter of the law but had no compassion for those who needed spiritual help. They associated only with self-righteous people like themselves. In contrast, the Lord Jesus pointedly told them, 'I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

Let's look at what Jesus is doing here. It is so radically simple, and yet so powerful!

Tim Chester's book, *A Meal with Jesus*, reflects on the eating habits of Jesus. He writes, "His mission strategy was a long meal, stretching into the evening. He did evangelism and discipleship round a table with some grilled fish, a loaf of bread, and a pitcher of wine."

Last week, Pastor Rob had breakfast with an atheist. That meal, turned into a three-hour meeting where he was able to listen to his man's story, hear his current struggles in life, and his objections to Christianity. But by the end of the conversation, there was an openness, a curiosity, and an open door for further relationship that was absent before they shared a meal together. It's not about the meal, it's about the relationship.

Just imagine what would happen if every follower of Christ started regularly eating with their neighbors, co-workers, and friends who don't know Jesus. If we're going to bless the world, we have to stretch beyond ourselves!

We have an incredible opportunity before us. There are literally thousands of people moving into Middle Tennessee, and maybe you are one of them! If so, we are so glad you are here!

Did you know that between the second half of 2022 and the first half of 2023, Williamson County grew by approximately 20,000 people? It is an incredible opportunity for believers to be the first to put out the welcome mat and make people feel at home here by starting to pray, listening well, and sharing a meal with our neighbors.

Top 3 Objections:

#1. I don't know what to say! Just be curious! Care about them. Ask questions about their life, their interests, their career, their family, how they met their spouse, their children, what brought them to the area. The fear of knowing what to say goes away when you simply just become curious about the other person. Often, when we are genuinely intending to know and to love others, our own self-concern disappears.

#2. I don't have time. Busyness is a very real problem that we have to deal with. It takes real effort to make room in our lives for those we love, let alone making room for strangers. It can feel impossible to find time in our time-starved world. But I want to encourage you to not think in terms of adding this to your life as a "project." Instead, think in terms of integrating it into the everyday meals you already have.

Think about opening up room for people to join you in what you were already doing! Don't add this to your life—pull up another chair to the meals you were already planning.

#3. I don't like to have people in my home. Maybe you feel that your house isn't nice enough, or you feel the need to do something elaborate. Then go eat out! Remember, Jesus didn't have a home, but He still ate with strangers. Would a meal at your home be a great way to show someone hospitality? Yes! But why not eat out? Put a little money in your budget to be ready to extend grace to your neighbors.

Debbie, our Children's Director, shared a story with me. Someone invited her over to dinner, and when she showed up, they handed her a potato peeler and asked her to help make the meal. By the end of the night, she felt like was part of the family. She peeled the potatoes, did the dishes, and felt like she was actually a part of the family. She wasn't treated like a guest at a restaurant, but she was invited into a normal meal with the family.

There are lots of ways to share Christ with the world, but nothing gets to the heart faster than simply sharing a meal with someone with the aim to know and love them.

Alan Hirsch and Lance Fords in their book titled *Right Here, Right Now* wrote,

“Sharing a meal together on a regular basis is one of the most sacred practices we can engage in as believers. Missional hospitality is a tremendous opportunity to extend the kingdom of God. We can literally eat our way into the kingdom of God! If every Christian household regularly invited a stranger or a poor person into their home for a meal once a week, we would literally change the world by eating.”

Hospitality team: That's part of why we have invested so much into our hospitality ministry here at Grace. Each week, they do a fantastic job making people feel welcome and making delicious meals for our volunteers and families! They make us feel at home, and they also create a space where you could bring your friends and family to have a meal together before or after service. One of the most effective ways to connect your friends and family to a church is to bring them to breakfast!

Neighbor: This past week, someone told me that they ran into their neighbor at the mailboxes, and the neighbor shared that they were going through a difficult divorce. He invited the neighbor to church, but he was not able to come. A few days later, he offered to have the neighbor over for dinner and he jumped at the chance. This is huge! By sharing a meal with someone in your home or out to eat, you're paving the way for them to feel more at ease saying "yes" to invitations like this. By sharing meals with people, you're slowly lowering the barrier for entry for those that are far from God. You're building bridges to Christ.

Women's Group- I was teaching a discipleship class a couple months ago, and a woman in the class shared with me that she had invited her friends to come over and share recipes together. She didn't know who among the group were Christians, and as they began sharing meals together, they started to build relationships. This was not a Bible study or a small group. Just a person opening her home to share a meal with her neighbors. This group developed into a book club, and after getting to know these ladies, she asked them if they would be interested in studying a topic that introduced Jesus into the conversation. The group responded well to the invitation, and now, the group is beginning to study the Word of God together with people from all different backgrounds and beliefs, and many of them do not attend a church. This all happened naturally, not according to some planned out strategy or manipulation. It happened because she was simply willing to build relationships with her neighbors over a meal.

God wants us to join Him, know Him, and experience His love.

From the Garden of Eden to the last supper to feast of the Lamb, the Scriptures paint for us a grand picture- an invitation from God- to join the family for dinner. God has opened His table to the world. He has invited us in to be a part of the family of God. We are invited to His table, and He is asking us to open our tables as well.

Imagine what doors might open if you began to build relationships with your neighbors over meals. What would happen if you simply prioritized loving your neighbors in this way? What doors might God open? What conversations might open up? What might God begin to do in YOU as you live out what Jesus practiced?

Imagine if we all began to practice this. How many people that are far from God today would return to Him tomorrow? How many “bad experiences” with Christians could we begin to repair and become bridge builders rather than barriers to the kingdom of God? If we all took ownership, personal responsibility to “love our neighbors as ourselves” by breaking bread with sinners, just like Jesus did, what might God do? I think it would not only change our community, but it would also change us.