

Session 1: Do I Have a Seat at the Table?

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: No weakness, fault, or pain can uninvite us from Jesus's table. Because he welcomes each one of us, we are empowered to invite others, no matter their struggles, into our lives.

Head Change: To know that Jesus has invited us into a relationship—community—with him

Heart Change: To feel relief that we don't have to earn our place in God's family.

Life Change: To stop making excuses about why we aren't good enough for God, and to accept his invitation to sit at his table.

Each session in *Table Talks* corresponds to a video segment featuring a recipe. Feel free to watch the video as a group, make the recipe together, and use the icebreaker question below to spark conversation while you eat.

OPEN

What groups do you belong to? What do you like about participating in those groups?

We all have a need to belong. Perhaps to an organization, or to a family, or to a person. We need to know we are accepted and have a place we can call home. In this seven-session series, author and teacher Bianca Juárez Olthoff explores the motif of the table in the book of Luke as a metaphor for belonging, fellowship, and community to teach us about Jesus and ourselves. In this first session, she focuses on the largeness of Jesus's table—his supremely welcoming invitation for all sorts of people to join him.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Bianca Juárez Olthoff's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to the following questions.

What is the proverbial question Bianca has been asking all her life?

Whom does God welcome to his table?

Show Session One: *Do I Have a Seat at the Table?* (8 minutes).

REVIEW

Bianca opened with a reflection on the centrality of food to the Christian experience. As food and drink satisfy the body, so fellowship around a table satisfies the soul. When we eat with others, we become a community. **What do you enjoy about sharing a meal with friends? In what ways has eating and drinking together helped**

focus on our shortcomings—he knew our faults and chose us anyway. **In what ways, if any, have you felt out of place or unworthy at God’s “table”? What does it look like to accept the truth—that God loves us, chooses us, and does not count our sins against us as his children?**

In the parable, the invited guests made excuses when it was time for the feast. So, the master, determined to share his bounty, opened up the party to anyone who was willing to attend. **How does the master’s exuberance for hospitality echo God’s generous love?**

When has someone showered you with unusual, exorbitant generosity? How did you respond?

Scripture shows us that God has a place for any kind of person to join his kingdom—rank and ability count for nothing. Consider Moses, a stuttering murderer (Exodus 2:11–15; 4:10–11), or David, who stole his friend’s wife and then had his friend killed (2 Samuel 11). Moses went on to deliver Israel from slavery, and David was forgiven and restored to lead his people. **What sort of shortcomings have made you feel disqualified to serve God? What happened to show you that God had a place for you in his work?**

Everyone who trusts in Jesus comes to faith in different ways. Think of your faith journey. Whether it was a slow-growing belief from childhood or a dramatic turnaround from a destructive lifestyle, you said “yes” to Jesus’s invitation. **What made you accept him? How can you encourage someone else today by sharing your story?**

Bianca ended her teaching with a challenge: "The table is set; the party is starting. So get up, dress up, and show up. There's a seat at the table for you." Through his parable, Jesus described the wide-open invitation God has given each of us to join him. The only disqualification is refusing to come. If anything is stopping you from saying yes to God, ask a friend to help as you keep searching for answers.

BIBLE EXPLORATION

In the Gospels, Jesus often alluded to food and drink, eating and imbibing, feasting, and celebrating. Sometimes he compared great spiritual truths to common spices and staples on the table, while other times he was the unpredictable guest of honor at the table. In this session's passage, Jesus is at a feast himself, observing his fellow guests. Their behavior prompts him to comment, then tell a parable.

Read Luke 14:1–11.

In verse 1, Luke tells us that even as a guest, Jesus was being watched. The Pharisees were suspicious of him and many were fully antagonistic toward him. To heal a person on the Sabbath, they believed, would violate God's Law (see Exodus 34:21). Knowing the Pharisees brought the diseased man as a test, Jesus asked the gathering his own question in verse 3: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?"

They remained silent, and he healed the man.

What does this exchange tell you about the hearts of the Pharisees at that dinner?

Re-read verse 5. Using a rhetorical question, Jesus told the gathering why he healed the man on the

Sabbath. **What reaction was he hoping to provoke from his hosts? How did they actually respond?**

Jesus then noticed how other guests were choosing the honored seats over the lesser places at the table. So he admonished them to think humbly of themselves, lest they be embarrassed when the host moved them out of a seat of importance because a more illustrious guest had arrived.

Read Proverbs 27:2.

How do you feel when someone honors you in front of others? In what ways is it better to let someone else reflect on your positive attributes instead of talking about them yourself?

Jesus was reminding the religious leaders that true honor cannot be grasped; rather, it is earned and recognized by others. **In what situations have you experienced or witnessed the beauty of someone being honored?**

Read Luke 14:12–15.

Jesus warned his fellow guests to avoid what they were just doing—honoring themselves. And if they were to give their own banquet, he said—flipping the cultural script—the invitation list should include those who could not pay them back. **What does he say their repayment will be in verse 15?**

How often do you think of eternal rewards, rather than more immediate gratification, when you are serving others?

LAST WORD

Jesus's parable is good news to everyone. He is the master portrayed in the story—the ultimate host, setting up a feast and opening his home to everyone who responds to his invitation. What will it take for you to RSVP with a “yes”? If you've already accepted Jesus's invitation, whom can you invite to join you? As believers we represent Jesus to everyone around us. Let's consider how well we model his generosity and hospitality.

DEEPER WALK

Memorize: To remember Jesus's primary message communicated in the parable, memorize Luke 14:11. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Host: Create a guest list of people who would not consider themselves in your closest circle of friends. Send the invitations. Using the recipe from this session, create a meal, and welcome new people into your world.

Serve: Seek local opportunities to serve those in need around you in a meal-centered setting. Perhaps you could volunteer at a soup kitchen, or deliver meals to the home-bound, or visit care facilities for the elderly. Or consider bringing a meal to a friend or neighbor who needs short-term help.

Pray: Ask God to reveal any tendency toward pride in your heart and to empower you to humble yourself more and more.

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