

**THE
COMMUNION
REVOLUTION**

REDISCOVER THE KINGDOM THROUGH FAITH,
COMMUNITY, AND THE TABLE

MATTHEW ARTHUR JOHN
MCPHERSON

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ENDORSEMENTS

“In *The Communion Revolution*, Matthew McPherson serves up a feast for the soul, reminding us of the transformative power of shared meals in Christian community. McPherson’s outsider view—unconstrained by ecclesiastical or academic guilds—allows him to distill the essence of Christian fellowship with remarkable clarity. He powerfully argues that the Kingdom of God is as present in our dining rooms or breakfast nooks as in our sanctuaries, challenging us to rediscover the centrality of hospitality and communal discipleship in our daily lives.

In an age of digital isolation, *The Communion Revolution* offers a practical, timely antidote: a return to the table as the heart of spiritual formation. McPherson’s insights have the potential to revolutionize not just our homes and churches, but our entire cultural approach to community and faith. This book is more than a good read—it’s a clarion call to action. For anyone hungering for deeper connections and a more vibrant faith, *The Communion Revolution* is an essential guide to nourishing both body and spirit. Don’t just read it—live it, and watch your community go higher and deeper.”

Dr. Leonard Sweet, Bestselling Author of *From Tablet to Table*, Professor at Drew University and George Fox University, and Founder of Preach the Story

"The Communion Revolution is a clarion call to rediscover the primal path of Jesus and his early followers. During an epidemic of isolation and loneliness, Matthew McPherson reminds us that shared meals and radical hospitality are essential to practicing the way of Jesus. I hope this book inspires many people

to return to the table to experience the transformation and belonging we so desperately desire. It's time to eat together!"

Mark Scandrette, author of *The Ninefold Path of Jesus and Practicing the Way of Jesus*

"In *The Communion Revolution*, Matthew McPherson reminds us of the profound and often overlooked power of hospitality in shaping communities of faith. Through a thoughtful exploration of table fellowship and the practice of agape feasts, he presents a compelling vision for how communal discipleship can bring spiritual renewal to both our churches and our everyday lives. While not everyone may agree with every detail of his approach, this book offers an important invitation to reimagine the way we live out our faith, rooted in the love of Christ and shared around the table."

Dr. Todd Engstrom, Executive Pastor of Ministry Strategies at The Austin Stone Community Church, Consultant, and Author

"*The Communion Revolution* is a must read for every Christian who longs to see the Church fulfill it's calling to bring in the Kingdom of God on earth, as it is in Heaven! McPherson boldly proposes a radical change to how we live out our lives as Christians. He clearly outlines how our love for God should be reflected in how we deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Jesus in reaching out to 'Lost and Broken' people. To go and make disciples of all nations. The message of *The Communion Revolution* is, I believe, what God is saying today, to establish a new wineskin for the Church to reach our lost and very broken world!"

Gerard Long, Author, Pastor, Executive Director of Prayer at the Heart Ministries, and former Executive Director of Alpha USA

"For many in the church today, Christian fellowship often lacks the transformative depth that so profoundly shaped the lives of Jesus' first followers. *The Communion Revolution* offers insightful reflections on how Jesus used meals

as a setting for some of His most important teachings and interactions. It challenges us in the 21st century to reclaim the dinner table as a vital space for authentic fellowship, where Christ's life can be shared and experienced. Such a shift demands more than gentle nudges—it calls for a true revolution in how we think, live, and build community."

Luke Thomas, Director of Holsby Bible School, Torchbearers Sweden

"In a world that's all about platforms, McPherson brings us back to what matters most—building community around meals with Jesus at the center."

Bob Goff, New York Times Bestselling Author of *Love Does* and *Everybody, Always*, and Founder of Love Does

"*The Communion Revolution* is about the importance of creating real connection in a disconnected world—something we all desperately need right now. A lot of people are waiting around to be invited, when they could be the ones to issue the invitation."

Jack Canfield, New York Times Bestselling Author and Co-Creator of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* Series

EPIGRAPH

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, *the communion of saints*, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

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1

INTRODUCTION

A CALL TO RECONSTRUCTION

In a world where loneliness has become a quiet epidemic,
kitchen table hospitality is nothing short of revolutionary.



Come for Dinner

When I first met my wife's extended family, I was nervous about what to expect.
Would they like me? Would I fit in?

But the moment I stepped through the door, Grandma Sue's smile greeted me
as if I was an old friend: *"Ob bello! I'm so glad you made it, Matt."*

And just like that, my nerves settled down.

Her kitchen carried the comforting aroma of something delicious, and her table
was a refuge of laughter and conversation. In her presence, you could simply *be*.

And of course, you could count on Uncle Brad to joke—loudly—about how great Grandma’s buns looked.

As I left, I already felt like family. And as we walked out the door, Grandma, with a twinkle in her eye, said her signature send-off: *“You need to come for dinner again soon!”*

Before she passed in 2021, she left us a gift—a cookbook called *Come for Dinner*, filled with our family’s favorite recipes. Those three simple words summed up her life: it was about *hospitality*—loving, serving, and welcoming others.

Her table reflected the heart of Jesus—who broke bread with outcasts and welcomed all to follow Him. Jesus changed lives around the table, welcoming us into the family of God.

You can be just like Grandma Sue and Jesus. That’s what this book is all about.

Why don’t you come for dinner with Jesus—and see for yourself?

I Bring You Good News of Great Joy!

When Grandma invited us over, she welcomed us into a place of love and belonging.

Jesus offers us an invitation like that, too. But His is far greater. He calls us to more than a meal; He calls us to Himself. He gives us a belonging that doesn’t fade, a love that never wavers, a place at His table that no one can take away.

In a world that’s unraveling at the seams, His invitation is more urgent than ever.

Right now, life feels heavy—wars rage, politics divides us, and uncertainty hangs in the air. Our screens glow with bad news, and we wonder: *Where is the world headed? Is there any hope left?*

For Christians, the weight feels even heavier. Church attendance is shrinking, faith is met with skepticism, and our culture feels like it's drifting further away from God. Maybe you've wondered: *Is the church irrelevant? Have we lost something we can't get back?*

Are these the days Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24—wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters, and hearts growing cold? It's easy to feel like the brokenness is too great, the wounds too deep.

But Jesus gave us a reason to hope. He gave us a promise:

"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."¹

Christ still speaks peace to storms, fills empty hearts, and draws the lost to Himself.

His peace is not distant. His Spirit is alive—moving, working, ready to enter into our everyday lives. And maybe, you can find hope again—right where you are. *At your table.*

This book isn't just about opening your home; it's about opening your heart. Letting God use your hospitality—the simple, life-giving act of gathering for dinner—to bring healing to a hurting world.

Jesus changed lives through personal presence by sharing meals, listening well, and loving deeply. And He calls us to love our neighbors, as ourselves.

Within these pages, you'll discover how something as ordinary as a meal can become an extraordinary reflection of God's love. You'll find practical ways to welcome others in, to build relationships that matter, and to experience the beauty of true community.

My prayer is that you'll start to see the world not as a hopeless mess but as a mission field full of opportunity. Your table can be a place where heaven meets earth and where lives are changed.

So, what are you waiting for? Pull up a chair.

And let's see what God will do.



The Wildfire of Deconstruction

Faith once stood like an ancient forest in our culture—deep-rooted, towering, unshakable.

For years, churches put on polished performances and programs. They promised purpose, connection, and belonging. But for many, they delivered a faith that felt hollow, staged, and increasingly irrelevant to real life.

Then came the spark.

After 9/11, a generation raised in seeker-friendly churches started to ask questions. Doubts that began as a flicker were fueled into an inferno by voices like Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett, and Harris—the so-called *Four Horsemen of New Atheism*.

The wildfire soon raged. Millions of young Christians searched for truth—only to find emptiness. New doubts consumed their faith, leaving behind only the charred remnants of what once felt certain.

Churches emptied, trust eroded, and a deep spiritual homelessness took hold.

This is the story of my generation. I've seen it firsthand—watching friends walk away, unsure if there was anything about the faith worth holding onto. Many left quietly, burdened by doubts they couldn't put into words. Others grew angry, feeling betrayed and suspecting evil intent.

The name of this wildfire is *deconstruction*— a process of questioning long-held beliefs, often triggered by doubt, personal crisis, or disappointment with the church.

For many, what started as innocent questions soon unraveled everything they once believed, leaving them spiritually lost and unsure of where to turn.

This wave of deconstruction left many wondering: *How can anything good come from all this devastation?*

But as destructive as they are, wildfires don't just destroy—they also prepare the ground for something new.

In 2003, a massive wildfire swept through Kootenay National Park in British Columbia, reducing over 17,400 hectares to ashes. For years, the landscape looked barren—blackened ground, skeletal trees, and silence where the forest was once teeming with life.

Yet deeper, new life was quietly stirring. The fire's heat had cracked open pinecones, releasing seeds that could only germinate in its aftermath.

I believe something like this is happening in the church today. Perhaps deconstruction isn't the end, but it's a new beginning. What if God used the wildfire to clear away the artificial and manufactured to make space for something more rooted, more authentic, more Christ-centered?

Deconstruction may have left people disillusioned with church institutions, but reconstruction can start at your home with a table, a meal, and God's grace.

It's ordinary people practicing ordinary hospitality. By opening their homes and fostering real connections, they'll develop their faith in ways that go beyond Sunday morning services.

That's *The Communion Revolution*. And it's simpler than you think.

Now, even in the ashes of deconstruction, new life is stirring—not just in the church, but in hearts longing to hope again. The hunger for belonging, for genuine community, for meaningful faith—it's still there. And it's growing.

God is planting seeds of renewal in people's hearts. Are you willing to help nurture them through small, faithful acts of Christlike hospitality?

All you need to do is welcome others in.

The Nehemiah Option: Reconstructing Faith Through Hospitality

The wildfire has passed. The ground is scorched. And the old structures lie in ruins.

However, the foundation still stands. In the wake of deconstruction, we're left with an opportunity—to rediscover faith in its *communal* form.

It's time to rebuild, through hospitality and love.

Like a city whose walls have crumbled, the church stands exposed—vulnerable to confusion, division, and despair. The cultural assumptions we once relied on have been shaken, leaving many wondering if faith can ever be restored.

This is where Nehemiah's story offers us hope.

In 444 BC, Jerusalem was in shambles—its walls reduced to rubble, its people discouraged and exposed to every enemy that passed by.

When Nehemiah heard the news, he was heartbroken, but he didn't wait for someone else to act. Instead, he prayed, stepped in, and led the charge to rebuild the walls.

Brick by brick. Hand by hand. House by house.

And what the people of Jerusalem had neglected for generations was restored in just 52 days.

Today, we face a similar moment. The walls of faith have eroded, and the church feels fragmented and fragile. But the answer isn't to give up or withdraw.

God is calling us to something far greater—***reconstruction***.

We can rebuild by following an ancient blueprint. This project doesn't begin with bricks, but with tables—it's built through faith and Communion.

Like Nehemiah, we're called to start with what's right in front of us—our homes, our neighbors, our communities. Reach out to those nearest to you—hearts longing for healing, communities aching for renewal.

That's the heartbeat of *The Communion Revolution*.

It's not about waiting for institutions to fix what's broken. It's about turning our dinner tables into sacred spaces of connection.

Small acts of hospitality are like bricks in the wall. One invitation, one conversation, one meal can start to rebuild what's been destroyed.

Because hospitality is more than a meal. It's a declaration of hope and faith, saying to the lonely, "*You are seen. You are loved. You belong.*"

God calls ordinary people—like you and me—to take small steps. Set the table, extend an invitation, and rebuild community.

The walls won't rise overnight, but one meal at a time, something precious will take shape.

Are you ready to begin?



Agape Feast: The Early Church's Blueprint for Building Community

The early church gathered around tables, sharing meals that fed both body and soul.

They called it the *agape feast*—or the love feast.

Writing in the 2nd century, Tertullian described these feasts as gatherings where believers shared a meal in simplicity and love, ending with prayer and hymns. He said:

*"Our feast explains itself by its name. It bears the name of love because we hold it with love for one another."*²

These meals weren't just casual get-togethers; they were essential rhythms of life—moments of worship where faith was practiced, not just preached.

Bread and wine were shared, and with them, the presence of Christ. These meals were the essential core of the church's fellowship, and Christians lived together like a family of God.

The Book of Acts paints a picture:

*"All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals."*³

Early Christians wove discipleship into daily life through these gatherings—passing on faith not just through teaching, but through relationship.

The table became a place of radical generosity, where those with wealth shared freely with those in need. It was also a space of unity, where rich and poor, slave and free became one in Christ, and social divisions dissolved.

These feasts were treated with deep reverence. In 1 Corinthians 11:20-34, Paul instructs the church to ensure that no one was left out or dishonored during these gatherings. He said:

*"When you gather to eat, you should all eat together."*⁴

The agape feast was revolutionary. In Roman society, meals reinforced class divides. But in Christ, all were welcome and all were equal.

During the agape feast, the love of God was lived out. Strangers became brothers and sisters in Christ, and the Gospel shaped their collective identity.

The early church didn't just *talk* about community. They *ate* their way into it.

What was once a normal way of life for the early church has faded into the background of modern Christianity. But the need remains.

Today, we live in a profoundly lonely culture. We eat fast food, keep fast schedules, and have fragmented relationships. We've traded tables for takeout, and deep connection for transactions.

In our hectic, fast-paced, hurried culture, where can we go to find the belonging we're yearning for? Will you find it in another church program or sermon?

What if you can only find it back at the table?

Reviving the agape feast is how we can restore what's been lost. It's how we can offer real connection in a disconnected world, turning ordinary meals into grace-filled moments.

The Gospel can come to life through hosting dinner for a neighbor or gathering friends for a shared meal and conversation. The agape feast is how the church can be rebuilt today.

Hospitality has been a catalyst for revival and renewal throughout history.

John Wesley and the Methodist Movement

In 18th-century England, John Wesley saw that the church had grown cold and distant from ordinary people. So he did something radical—he brought the Gospel into homes, forming *class meetings*.

In these small groups, believers shared meals, held each other accountable, and grew in faith—learning to apply it in daily life. For Wesley, hospitality wasn't an afterthought; it was the heartbeat of a movement that transformed a nation.

The Celtic Monks

Centuries earlier, the Celtic monks were doing the same in the wilderness of Europe.

In the Dark Ages, when society was in chaos, missionaries like St. Columba and St. Aidan created communities of hospitality—welcoming each sojourner as if they were welcoming Christ.

Their monasteries were known as places of refuge, where the weary could find food, shelter, and spiritual strength. Through these simple acts of welcoming strangers, the Celts carried the Gospel across Europe.

Their hospitality wasn't complicated or extravagant; it was simple, consistent, and rooted in love. It wasn't just kindness; it was mission. And it turned the world upside-down.

You and Me, Starting Today

The same approach they used can still change lives today. Imagine what God could do—right in your home, around your table—if you welcomed Him in.

Picture a small group gathered in a modest dining room, sharing a pot-luck dinner. The table is crowded with mismatched plates.

A woman who hasn't prayed in years bows her head as someone says grace. A young couple, struggling in their marriage, finds comfort in the laughter and shared stories of others who've walked through the same storms. Across the room, a teenager listens silently but stays long after the meal, asking questions about faith when everyone else has left.

These moments are happening right now. In homes across neighborhoods and cities, where believers are opening their doors and sharing simple meals with neighbors, friends, and strangers—where Communion is shared not just as a ritual but as a living practice of grace.

Others are gathering for regular dinners, reading Scripture, praying, and letting relationships deepen organically over time.

What if your table could become a place like that—where faith was restored, relationships healed, and lives were transformed?

Now, it's our turn. Let's revive the agape feast and turn our homes into places where Christ's love is shared.



How This Book Will Guide You on the Journey

This book calls you to reclaim the table as a place of transformation, restoration, and renewal. Hospitality is an ancient practice that's more relevant than ever.

This journey will help you recognize the deep ache of loneliness in our culture, rediscover the power of shared meals, and embrace a vision capable of transforming not only our homes but also our churches, cities, and beyond.

The book unfolds in three parts—each one leading you from vision to action, from inspiration to practical steps you can take right where you are.

Part 1: Laying the Foundations

Before we set the table, we need to understand why it matters.

Part 1 lays the groundwork—exploring the ache of loneliness, the beauty of Christ-centered hospitality, and the practical ways we can bring it to life.

The Problem of Loneliness

This chapter unpacks why loneliness matters—not just socially, but spiritually—and how Gospel-driven hospitality offers a radical response.

Rediscovering Communion

Jesus didn't build an institution; instead, He set a table. Here, we'll explore how the agape feast wasn't just an accidental tradition, but the heart of His mission to seek and save the lost.

The Hospitality Game Plan

This chapter explores how small, intentional acts of welcome can break down walls, push back darkness, and advance God's Kingdom. Hospitality isn't just a kind gesture—it's a spiritual weapon.

Part 2: Joining Jesus at the Table

In Part 2, we take our seat alongside Jesus, walking through ten powerful stories in the Gospels where meals became moments of transformation.

Each story reveals how table fellowship can embody Kingdom values, which change lives in profound ways.

- **Patient Endurance** with Simon Peter
- **Expectation** at the Wedding at Cana
- **Listening** with Martha and Mary
- **Courage** at the Feeding of the 5,000
- **Repentance** with Simon the Pharisee
- **Advocacy for Sinners** with Levi the Tax Collector
- **Salvation** with Zacchaeus
- **Generosity** with the Greedy Pharisees
- **Forgiveness** with Mary and Judas Iscariot
- **Hope** on the Road to Emmaus

Through these stories, you'll see how Jesus practiced hospitality—using meals to break barriers, heal hearts, and usher people into the Kingdom.

And you'll find practical ways to bring these same virtues to life in your home and community.

Part 3: A Bold Vision for Cultural Renewal

The Communion Revolution isn't just about setting tables; it's about rebuilding what's been broken—in our lives, our churches, and our culture.

At the center of this vision is the agape feast—the meal that can once again become the heartbeat of discipleship.

This vision grows—from the table, outward:

- **Deepening Faith** by forming spiritual families.
- **Interceding for Cities** by walking the streets in prayer, seeking God's hand at work in our neighborhoods.
- **Equipping Churches** by fostering networks of mission, discipleship, and collaboration.
- **Fostering Christian Unity** by breaking down denominational walls with humility, holiness, and hospitality.

In Part 3 of this book, you'll find the Manifesto—a bold declaration of what could happen if we take Jesus' model of table-driven discipleship seriously, starting a movement to make hospitality the thing that Christians are best-known for.

The change starts small, but as more tables open, the ripple effect can transform entire communities—one table turns into ten, ten turn into a hundred.

Whether you're drawn to the grand vision or the simple, practical steps, this book will equip and inspire you to bring it to life. It's an invitation to step into something life-changing—starting at your kitchen table.



The Revolution Starts With You

Every movement of revival begins somewhere small and with people like you.

It often begins around a table—with a simple invitation, a meal shared, a door opened.

Your humble, everyday table can become a sacred place—where the Gospel takes on flesh through laughter, conversation, and a shared life.

Imagine:

- **Healing Relationships** What if a meal became the bridge that re-connects estranged family members, deepens friendships, and mends wounds long thought unhealable?
- **Rekindling Faith** What if faith no longer felt like a checklist, but something alive, joyful, and deeply rooted in your daily life?
- **Restoring Community** What if your table became a beacon in your neighborhood—a place where the lonely find belonging and where strangers become friends?

This is *The Communion Revolution*.

And it begins with *you*.

The Holy Spirit moves through ordinary people doing ordinary things with extraordinary love.

Each meal could become part of a movement of hospitality—rebuilding neighborhoods, churches, cities.

As you step in, you'll find your own life transformed—deeper purpose, richer relationships, and the unspeakable joy of knowing you're part of God's Kingdom unfolding around your table.

The invitation is simple.

Open your home. Set the table. Trust God to do the rest.

This book is your guide to making it happen. Together, we'll rediscover the joy of gathering around a table and living out the Gospel through meals, grace, and personal connection.

Are you ready to begin?

2

PART 1

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE COMMUNION REVOLUTION

If You've Got a Copy of This Book, You're Part of Something Important

Maybe you're longing for deeper connection. Maybe you're remembering meals you've shared, conversations that lingered, or the simple joy of being with others.

If that's true, then here's an invitation: **Make this message yours.**

This book isn't just something to read—it's something to live. And the beautiful thing about hospitality? The more it's shared, the more it grows.

That's where you come in.

If you believe in this vision—if you see its beauty—I'd be so grateful if you could help me share it. Not for my sake, but for the sake of those who are longing to find a place to call home.

To make sharing easier, I'd love for you to grab a **FREE digital copy** of this book to give to a friend.

Visit www.comunionrevolution.com/free to download your copy and pass it along to someone who needs encouragement.

Here Are a Few Ways You Can Help Bring This Vision to Life

1. Set the Table in Your Own Life

- Invite someone for coffee or conversation.
- Host a meal, and see what unfolds.
- Start practicing this way of life and trust God to do the rest.

2. Share This Book with Someone Who Needs It

- Send a free digital copy to a friend longing for connection.
- Leave a copy with your church, small group, or local coffee shop.
- Start a conversation that matters—*you never know how it could change a life.*

3. Tell Others What This Book Means to You

- Write a short review on Amazon, Goodreads, or wherever you found it.
- Share a quote or takeaway on social media, or in a message to a friend.
- Talk about it when the moment feels right—*it could inspire someone else.*

4. Gather a Small Group and Dive Deeper

- Read this book with friends, family, or your church group.
- Use it as a guide to explore what community could look like.

- Make it practical—apply what you read, one meal at a time.

5. **Pray for What's Next.**

- Pray for the lonely, the searching, and those hoping to belong.
- Pray that God will use your home, your table, your life as an extension of His welcome.
- Pray for this book to reach the people who need it most.

A Final Word of Thanks

I'm so grateful you're here. I believe this journey matters, and you're a big part of it.

Let's not just talk about hospitality—**let's live it, share it, and invite others in.**

Because the Gospel was never meant to stay on the page. It was meant to be shared—over bread, over laughter, and over life.

Will you take the next step?

Visit www.communionrevolution.com to get your free digital copy and start sharing today!

Let's make hospitality the thing that Christians are best-known for.

Gratefully,

Matt McPherson

Follow me on social media: X @CommunionRev, Instagram and YouTube @CommunionRevolution

3

THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

Genesis 2:18 NLT



Lost in Deconstruction

Kate never imagined she'd leave the church. Faith wasn't just something she believed. It was the air she breathed, the ground beneath her feet.

Her whole life had been wrapped up in it—Wednesday night youth group, summer mission trips, worship songs with hands lifted high and eyes closed tight.

But the doubts crept in quietly—small questions whispered in the corners of her heart. She brushed them aside, until she couldn't ignore them any longer.

One night, her youth pastor harshly dismissed a social justice issue she cared about, and something inside her snapped. The questions grew louder, harder to ignore.

She started reading, exploring—searching for answers in secular philosophy and other religions. And slowly, her beliefs unraveled.

She learned there was a name for this experience: *deconstruction*.

Initially, it felt liberating, like shedding a heavy coat on a scorching summer day. But as the layers of her faith fell away, so did the people she once knew. Walking away from her faith meant walking away from her community.

"My whole life used to be tied to church," she told me. "All my closest friends were Christians. But now? It's like I'm radioactive to them. Some won't talk to me at all. Others keep me at arm's length. It's like they're afraid I'll infect them."

Part of her felt like her friend's reactions proved her point: "*Christians really are hypocrites*," she thought.

But another part of her was filled with a deep heartache.

"I thought leaving the church made me free, but now I just feel... untethered. I don't know where I belong anymore, but I know I can't go back."

Her fingers gripped her coffee cup, knuckles white. She looked down, blinking hard, trying to hold back the tears she wasn't ready to release.

This experience isn't unique. I've heard stories like Kate's many times—in coffee shops, late-night messages, and online. Deconstruction strips away the old, but too often, it leaves nothing in its place. In the aftermath, people find their relationships withered, trust eroded, and social connections reduced to ash.

Freedom promised. Isolation delivered.

"Even my family feels distant," Kate said. "It's like we're speaking different languages. My parents and grandparents don't understand me, anymore."

She missed the intimacy of warm home-cooked meals at Grandma's—the shared laughter, the feeling of being welcome, the memories of holidays past. But now going home always felt a bit awkward. It's like they inhabited different worlds—politically, morally, and spiritually.

The Table is Waiting

What should we, as Christians, do in light of the loneliness of deconstruction?

Perhaps the old church structures needed to fall, so that something new could rise.

Jesus said:

"He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more."¹

But what is the new thing that will bear fruit?

I believe it's actually an *ancient* thing. What Kate longs for—and what so many are searching for—is what the early church had: the *agape feast*.

Hospitality is how we can re-create places where faith is shared, questions are welcomed, and strangers become family. These simple meals can become like stepping stones—walking us back into community, through something as ordinary as sharing a casserole.

The agape feast is a table, a meal, and a chance to belong. And it was the lifeblood of the early church.

I believe it could be that for us again.

The table is waiting. And it's time to pull up a chair.

The Lonely Planet: A Widespread Crisis

Kate's experience reflects a larger crisis that's affecting countless numbers of people today.

We are living in an age where isolation is woven into the fabric of our culture. People feel more disconnected than ever before. Her story may be personal, but you've probably felt it too.

The statistics paint a sobering picture:

- Nearly **1 in 4 young adults** in Canada report feeling chronically lonely, according to Statistics Canada. In the United States, about 1 in 7 men report having **zero** close friends.
- In 2023, the **U.S. Surgeon General** declared loneliness an "epidemic," comparing its health effects to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.
- Studies show that loneliness increases the risk of **premature death by nearly 30%**, with devastating links to heart disease, dementia, depression, and anxiety.

Psychologists describe loneliness as a form of chronic stress—keeping your body locked in a relentless fight-or-flight state. Over time, it erodes health, weakens immunity, and invites anxiety, depression, and despair.

And its consequences are devastating.

In Canada, assisted suicide (MAID) is increasingly being sought by those citing loneliness—not terminal illness—as their reason for wanting to die.

Let that sink in. People are choosing death, not because their bodies are failing, but because their hearts can no longer bear the weight of being alone.

Modern loneliness is very real.

Picture a quiet suburban street at dusk. The lawns are manicured, the houses pristine, their facades glowing with the soft flicker of blue light from television screens. But the sidewalks? Empty.

You hear no laughter, no neighbors on porches, no children playing outside. Just the occasional hum of a car before it pulls into the garage. Silence settles in again.

Suburbia promised us a neighborhood—a haven where life would unfold in backyard barbecues, impromptu block parties, and kids riding bikes until dinner time. But for many, that dream has never materialized.

Fences are taller, doors locked, and the spontaneous moments that once bound neighbors together are disappearing. We wave politely but never truly know one another.

And inside? The detachment continues. Families live under the same roof yet in separate worlds—each lost in their own perfectly staged virtual realities. Dinner tables sit empty, and conversations are reduced to texts and emojis.

We swipe, scroll, and stream through carefully curated feeds—fed with counterfeit friendships and unrealistic highlight reels. Yet we're left feeling unseen, unknown, and alone.

Technology promised connection, but it's left us more disconnected than ever. Superficial relationship has never been more accessible, yet genuine community never more elusive.

Even the simple interactions that once anchored us—chats with a neighbor at the grocery store, small talk with a barista, a friendly nod at the mailbox—are vanishing.

Amazon and Uber Eats bring convenience, but can't deliver what our souls crave—friendship, love, connection. We have everything we need—except each other.

Like a thief, loneliness creeps in, stealing joy, leaving an insatiable hunger for true companionship. The full weight settles in during the quiet moments—the empty chair at the dinner table, the unanswered text, the long nights spent scrolling but finding no one who truly sees you.

Suburban isolation isn't just a social issue; it's a spiritual one—a form of spiritual poverty.

In a world drowning in material wealth and distraction, this kind of poverty is easily ignored—buried beneath busyness and shallow connections. But beneath the quiet cul-de-sacs and picture-perfect exteriors, there's a whisper in the stillness of our hearts: *Where is everyone? Is this really the good life?*

The soul-ache for connection reveals a fundamental truth about human nature—**it's not good for us to be alone.**

God placed the desire for Communion deep within us. Made in the image of a triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—we mirror His nature of relationality. It's not a flaw; God desires for us, "to share his divine nature."

Deep down, we all know loneliness is not good. Yet we resist real closeness, trading it for convenience. We resist vulnerability, preferring self-sufficiency. We resist communion, and instead withdraw. And the emptiness inside remains.

The question is—How can we find our way back to one another?

The loneliness is real, but it doesn't have to be the end of the story. The good news? The cure starts with something as simple as kitchen table hospitality.

What if the answer is closer than we think, waiting for us at the table?



The Spiritual Homelessness of Modern Christianity

Loneliness is a crisis in our society, and the church should be a refuge. After all, Jesus commands us to welcome the lost, heal the broken-hearted, and love the outcast.

But for many, walking into church doesn't ease their restlessness—it deepens it. The sanctuary feels cold and uninviting. The crowd seems distant and uninterested. Instead of finding a family, we find an institution.

I know the feeling.

At a spiritual retreat once, I was asked to describe how I felt in a single word. My word was *homeless*.

Despite showing up—attending small groups, serving on teams—I never found the deep bond of connection I hoped for at church. I yearned to find a community shaped by spiritual formation—the kind I'd read about in Henri Nouwen and Dallas Willard—where people didn't just attend, but journeyed together toward Christlikeness.

Instead, I found it more like a corporation—always asking, always planning, always doing. And just when I'd start to feel like I'd found some friends, the people I connected with moved on to another job, another city, another church. No matter how involved I got, church never felt like home.

Later, over dinner, someone at the retreat leaned in. "What you said... it hit me. I feel the same way, like I just never really belong."

One by one, others nodded. "Me too."

Soon, we were all voicing the same quiet ache—a longing for something deeper, something real. A place where we could finally say: "I'm home."

But too often, churches feel more like businesses than homes—places to attend, not families to belong to.

I wished it felt more like Grandma Sue's kitchen, where everyone had a seat, where stories were shared, and where no one left feeling empty.

It's not my intention to point fingers at the church. This crisis runs way deeper than any one place. It's cultural—we prize independence over interdependence, production over presence, programs over people. If churches don't offer that, people don't come.

But maybe the reason why churches don't feel like *homes* is because we've stopped doing what *families* do—gathering, breaking bread, sharing life—just like Grandma Sue did.

Maybe the answer isn't to ask the church to run another program.

Maybe it's just to host a meal, to have a conversation, to extend an invitation.

Maybe we don't need somebody else to do this *for* us—we can just start doing it.

Loneliness isn't a crisis—it's an opportunity.

Christians can offer people what nothing else in the world can—the radical love of Christ, embodied in a spiritual family.

This is the heartbeat of the Gospel. God didn't watch from a distance while we struggled in separation from Him. He stepped into our reality, becoming *Emmanuel*—God with us.

Jesus walked our streets, sat at our tables, and welcomed us into His family.

And now He calls us to do the same.

That's why the church exists—to show people they are seen, known, and loved by God. And in a world where people are starving for a place to call home, hospitality could be our greatest mission field.

Now is our chance to embody the love of Christ—to welcome the weak, the weary, and the wandering into the family of God.

Because people aren't just looking for another place to *go*. They're looking for a place to *belong*.



Discipleship is Communal

Faith isn't meant to be a solo journey; it's meant to be shared—woven into the relationships that shape and sustain us.

But somewhere along the way, discipleship became a private pursuit—personal devotions, quiet prayers, a life with God lived behind closed doors.

Spiritual disciplines are good—even essential—but they often miss something vital: *Jesus never called us to follow Him alone.*

Most churches recognize the need for fellowship and try to create spaces for it. They offer small groups, Sunday school classes, and ministry teams in an effort to foster connection.

But these become environments where people pursue faith alongside each other, yet still separately. We attend, we participate, but we remain strangers—mistaking proximity for belonging.

Jesus took a radically different approach.

He didn't just make disciples *in* a community; He formed them *as* a community.

They lived life together—eating, praying, struggling, and walking with Christ, not just individually, but *as one body*. Faith wasn't just taught; it was caught—formed in the everyday moments, around tables, on dusty roads, in late-night conversations by the fire.

Jesus didn't simply transform individuals within a group; He transformed the group itself, shaping them into the body of Christ.

It's time to return to His way. We've made discipleship about filling pews, but Jesus made it about filling tables.

So how do we reclaim the communal nature of discipleship we've lost?

Agape Feast: Where Community Becomes Communion

The early church understood something we've forgotten—discipleship happens best through relationships, not just through sermons and studies.

The agape feast was where faith in Jesus became more than a belief—but a way of life.

In Christ, all were welcome, all were known, all were family. Sins were confessed, burdens were carried, and grace was poured out freely. They gathered. They prayed. They belonged.

Acts gives us a glimpse into their life together:

"They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved."²

Could reclaiming this ancient practice be the cure for our modern crisis of isolation?

Imagine stepping into a home filled with warmth—not perfection, but presence. Picture a mix of chairs pulled from every corner of the house and a potluck of whatever people could bring.

At first, the conversation is light—weekend plans, funny stories, the small talk of everyday life. But as the meal unfolds, people begin to open up. Vulnerability is met with compassion. Relationships deepen.

Now, place yourself there. Surrounded by people from different walks of life—some lifelong friends, others whom you don't know, but soon will. There's room for your doubts, your questions, your joys.

The weight of loneliness begins to lift. And as you pass the breadbasket, a quiet realization settles in—*this is the home you've been looking for.*

The table has become holy ground—a place where hearts are healed, faith is strengthened, and isolation is replaced with belonging. This isn't just a meal; it's discipleship.

The agape feast isn't just a memory from church history; it's an invitation for today.

Reclaiming Jesus' model of discipleship won't happen through another program or conference. It will start with hospitality—an open table and an open heart.

It'll begin in our homes—when we stop waiting for someone else to build our community for us and realize that our own kitchen tables are all we need.

The agape feast built the early church. And it can rebuild ours—if you're willing to set the table.



The Table is Calling

The church doesn't need more stages; it needs more tables.

In a world starving for connection, this is where real change begins.

Imagine the possibilities of what God could do if you made space for Him at yours.

Reviving the agape feast will mean rethinking discipleship—not as theory, but as a spiritual practice. This is about reclaiming the heart of what it truly means to follow Christ together.

Hospitality is not about adding another task to your busy life; it's about slowing down and prioritizing relationships. You never know how much one meal can mean to someone.

And the need in our society is huge. What if your table could be the place where someone finally feels seen? Where a friendship begins? Where faith is rekindled?

The harvest is great, but the tables are few.

Start Now

It can be as simple as:

- Inviting a friend for coffee this week, just to listen and share life.
- Hosting a casual dinner with your closest friends—paper plates and takeout count.
- Sharing this book with a friend and exploring what your table could become.

Who is God calling you to reach out to right now?

4

CHRIST'S VISIONARY IDEAL

ORGANIZING AROUND THE COMMUNION TABLE

Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it.

Jeremiah 6:16 NLT



Finding The Church That Jesus Envisioned

What kind of church did Jesus call us to cultivate?

At the Last Supper, He gave His disciples a striking command:

“Do this in remembrance of me.”¹

What if the church Jesus envisioned wasn't built on bricks and mortar, but around a table—where friends gather, grace flows, and His presence is alive?

What if Jesus intended His church to be centered on *Communion*?

Growing up, my experience of Communion was a quiet, formal ritual that we did once a month. We passed trays of tiny crackers and grape juice, bowed our heads, and reflected on Jesus' sacrifice.

Then it was over—solemn and serious, yet something essential felt missing.

Jesus didn't distribute pre-packaged cups in hushed auditoriums. Instead, He shared a meal with friends. They talked, asked questions, and shared hopes. It was deeply relational.

For many of us, it's hard to picture Communion as a family dinner around a table—full of warmth, conversation, and connection.

And it makes me wonder—have we lost sight of the meaning of Jesus' words, "*Do this in remembrance of me*"?

What if Communion is more than a symbolic ritual? Could it be that Communion was meant to be the heartbeat of the church—shaping our relationships, our communities, and our very way of life?

Jesus prepared His disciples for the future, not by handing them blueprints for building cathedrals or strategies for effective ministry—He handed them bread and wine and said, "Do this."

At the Communion table, we step into His Kingdom, receiving forgiveness and an eternal relationship with God. And this meal is central to His mission.

Consider what Jesus said in Revelation 3:20:

“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will *share a meal together as friends.*”²

He is a Savior who longs to share a meal with us—so much so that He *became* the meal for us in the Eucharist, where we partake of His body and blood. He said:

*“Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.”*³

Will you open the door and let Him take a seat?

Communion isn’t just how our relationship with God begins—it’s also where it’s leading. When Christ makes all things new, we’ll sit at the great wedding feast of the Lamb. His Kingdom is a heavenly banquet, where we’ll eat together.

And that eternal feast isn’t a far-off hope. It begins here and now—every time we come to the Lord’s table.

This is the kind of church Jesus envisioned—a table where sinners find forgiveness and broken relationships are restored.

It begins when we gather, break bread, and remember Him.

What Does *Remembrance* Mean?

When Jesus said, “Do this in *remembrance* of me,” He wasn’t simply asking us to recall a distant moment in history.

Remembrance isn’t about nostalgia. It’s about bringing us back together, as one body.

Have you ever stood in church, singing the words on the screen, but the lyrics catch in your throat? Everyone around you looks so put together, but inside, you wonder—*do I still belong here?*

Maybe it's a harsh word you regret saying, a relationship left in tension, an apology you've held back for too long, or the forgiveness you can't quite bring yourself to offer.

You wrestle with a quiet fear: *If they knew the real me, would they still accept me? Would Christ?*

The weight you feel—it's more than guilt; it's alienation.

Sin separates us from God, and it drives a wedge between *us*—by dividing and fracturing our relationships.

The opposite of remembering isn't forgetting; it's *dis-membering*. And that's what sin does—it dismembers the body of Christ, separating us from one another.

In Communion, Jesus offers a way to put us back together. He *re-members* us—reuniting His body through His mercy and forgiveness.

Remembrance isn't just bringing His sacrifice to mind; it's participating in His work of reconciliation. We come to the table with our fractured relationships, our sins, and our regrets—and we receive His grace.

It's the lifeblood of the church. Division becomes unity. Brokenness gives way to restoration. Love binds us back together.

This isn't just a theological theory; it's built into the *practice* of Communion.

The early Christians knew, when they gathered for the agape feast, it wasn't just to satisfy their hunger. It was to confess sins, to forgive, and to bear one another's burdens.

The bread they shared wasn't just symbolic; it was a sacramental grace that healed their community.

And it can be the same for us.

The call to 'do this in remembrance of Him' is a call to live as one body—to bring our real, flawed selves to Jesus, and discover that His grace is big enough to hold us all together.

We don't have to pretend. We don't have to hide our brokenness. We don't have to be perfect before we come.

At the Lord's table, the body of Christ is restored and *re-membered*—not by our strength, but by His love. Without this regular rhythm of grace and healing, sin fractures the church.

Communion is not just a personal encounter with God; it is a *communal* act where Christ's mercy stitches us back together in love.

Imagine a church where burdens are lifted, where old wounds are healed, where grace isn't just preached, but shared. Picture friends, families, and strangers gathering—not just for a meal, but to become united in Christ.

This is what happens when we 'do this in *remembrance* of Him.' And there's a seat waiting for all of us.

Are you willing to bring your brokenness and find healing in His grace?

What is Communion?

Since Communion is such a key idea, let's explore what it means in the Bible—what it calls us to do, how it calls us to belong, and how it transforms us from the inside out.

Let's look at four Biblical expressions of Communion: the Lord's Supper, breaking bread, *koinonia*, and the Eucharist.

Communion is Something We Do

Jesus gave His disciples a command: "Do this."

He didn't leave them with mere words or a magic formula—He gave them bread and wine, physical signs of His grace that nourish our bodies, souls, and communities.

Communion is active, calling us to eat, to share, to connect, and to open our hearts—to Christ and to one another.

The Lord's Supper

At the Last Supper, Jesus reclined at the table with His friends. He broke bread, poured wine, and drew them into one of the deepest conversations about God ever recorded.

Jesus promised:

"Where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them."⁴

When we gather in His name—whether in a sanctuary or around a dining table—we step into that kind of fellowship.

Communion draws us into the sacred rhythm of being together in Christ. It involves our hands, our voices, and our presence.

Can you imagine if the church felt less like a formal assembly and more like a family dinner—less like an obligation and more like a homecoming?

That is part of what Communion is.

Breaking Bread

In the Scriptures, the phrase "breaking bread" appears on the road to Emmaus, in Acts 2, and during Paul's visit to Troas—each time signifying a communal meal where people were united in Christ.

But "breaking bread" also carries the deeply practical meaning of *companionship*.

The word *companion* comes from the Latin *com* (with) and *panis* (bread)—literally, "one who shares bread." As Christians, we are called to be companions—'bread-sharers'—just like the early church was.

True companionship begins with bread. Picture a table where food is passed, stories are shared, and moments of grace unfold naturally.

It doesn't require perfection or grandeur—just an open door, an extra chair, and a willingness to say, "*You are welcome here.*"

People today are hungry for more than food; they are craving connection—places where they can bring their joys, struggles, and feel truly cared for.

Communion is Something We Belong To

Communion is not a solo sport; it's a shared identity.

We don't come to Communion as individuals, performing an act of personal devotion. We come as part of a family, united by Christ's love—a community woven together by grace.

Paul wrote:

“Though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body.”⁵

Koinonia

The early church called this *koinonia*—which means something like *fellowship*, *solidarity*, or *to act in common*.

Koinonia is an unbreakable Communion, rooted not just in shared belief, but in shared belonging, mutual care, and unity in Christ.

In the third century, Cyprian of Carthage put it this way: “The sacrament of unity, the bond of peace, the inseparable tie of love—this is what the Lord’s table offers to those who approach it with sincere hearts.”⁶

Imagine a group of friends who gather every Friday night, calling it simply: *The Table*.

They share their lives and pray for one another. Someone tears the loaf and says, “*This is Christ’s body, broken for us.*” Then they pass it around—not just as a ritual, but as a declaration of common unity.

This is *koinonia* in action. It reminds us that our faith isn’t about *me*—it’s about *we*.

We carry each other’s burdens. We share in Christ’s mission. We extend His love to the world.

We are a family—past, present, and future—held together by the relentless love of Christ.

Communion is Something That Transforms Us

The Lord's table is not a place of striving but of receiving. We are changed—not by our own efforts, but by God's grace.

Communion is an act of gratitude. The very word *Eucharist* means *thanksgiving*. And it calls us to approach the Elements with hearts full of wonder and awe.

The Eucharist as Worship

For centuries, believers have gathered around the Communion table as the centerpiece of their worship—a reminder that Christ is not distant but present, inviting us to taste and see that He is good.

The Eucharist is more than a symbol; it is a sacramental encounter with Jesus, where we receive His body and blood. These are no ordinary elements but a divine mystery—an invitation to partake of Him and be nourished by His real presence.

This sacrament is something you can only receive in the church. It's not something you can replicate on your own—not even at an agape feast.

However, while the agape feast cannot replicate the Eucharist, it can reflect it—as an outpouring of the hospitality and welcome we first receive from Christ. Both point to the same reality: God's desire to draw us into deeper Communion with Himself and with one another.

The grace we receive at the altar overflows into every part of our lives, transforming how we love, serve, and share with others. When our hearts are filled with Eucharistic grace, every table becomes an extension of the Lord's table. Every meal becomes an opportunity to share His love.

Communion invites us to carry the grace we've received at church into our homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods, even beyond Sunday mornings.

The Invitation Is Open

Imagine if every home became an outpost of Christ's love, and your dining room became *holy ground*.

Whether in a sanctuary or around your own table, we can ask ourselves: *Who needs an invitation? Where can I extend grace? How can my table reflect His?*

Reviving your table as a place of Communion is central to Christ's vision for His church. Every shared meal becomes a step closer to His vision—as His people become united in faith, love, and hospitality.



How the Table Changed the World

Can the agape feast change the world? Absolutely! It did once, and it can do it again.

After Pentecost, Jesus' followers built the church by setting tables—breaking bread, sharing wine, and practicing Communion through ordinary hospitality.

This launched a movement that turned the Roman empire on its head.

In a Roman world obsessed with power, status, and control, the agape feast was an act of defiance. Christians rejected these worldly values—and, instead, welcomed the marginalized, honored the poor, and gave generously to those in need.

At the center of this revolution was the selfless, sacrificial love of Christ for the world.

The Roman empire, built on excess and hierarchy, could not comprehend the simplicity and equality of the Christian feast. Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor, once puzzled over these gatherings, reporting that Christians met “to partake of a meal—but of an ordinary and innocent kind.”⁷

Roman banquets were typically lavish status symbols, where the rich feasted while the poor remained outside. But the Christian feast? It was a gathering of equals, where the only status that mattered was being *in Christ*.

The Christians themselves described their meals in terms of generosity and sharing. Justin Martyr wrote: “They who are well-to-do and willing give what each thinks fit... and what is collected is given to orphans and widows and those in need.”⁸

A humble meal may sound harmless, but in truth, it subverted the very foundations of Roman society—replacing power with equality, status with humility, and self-indulgence with sacrificial love.

In a society where rank defined everything, the Christian feast was truly revolutionary—a place where slaves sat alongside their masters, where the outcast found honor, and where societal divisions of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women dissolved in the presence of Christ.

Rome built itself on conquest, but Christians built the church on Communion.

They built a new kind of society—one that united all people into a single family. Their hospitality launched an extraordinary movement of grace. What began as a small community grew into a church that outlasted an empire.

It didn’t happen overnight. But bit by bit—one meal, one prayer, one relationship at a time—it changed everything.

How the Agape Feast Could Change the World Again

Today, we live in an age of self—self-fulfillment, self-promotion, self-preservation.

We measure our worth in 'likes' and followers, curate our profiles to project success, and chase goals that promise significance but leave us empty. Status is flaunted in highlight reels, wealth in designer labels, and accomplishments in perfectly polished résumés.

We've built a culture of hustle and achievement, where individualism reigns supreme, competition crushes collaboration, and self-sacrifice is seen as weakness.

But beneath the surface lies a quiet desperation—a soul-ache. Loneliness gnaws at us, disconnection isolates us, and our curated lives often feel hollow.

In the pursuit of self, we've lost each other.

Just as it did in the first century, the table of Christ offers an alternative vision of life. The agape feast whispers a countercultural truth: that our worth isn't found in what we achieve, but in the God who loves us and the family He's placed us in.

What if dinner became our act of quiet resistance to the self-centeredness of our time?

Imagine placing our phones aside, sitting face to face, and exchanging stories and laughter. No one has to prove their worth—because this is a place where burdens are shared, grace is abundant, and hearts feel at home.

In a world fractured by division and greed, the simple act of gathering around a table isn't just a quaint tradition—it's a spiritual revolution, wrapped in something as ordinary as bread and wine.

Welcoming a neighbor, sharing a meal, listening to a friend—these things can change lives, heal communities, and remind us all of the radical love of Christ.

It is the countercultural rhythm of God’s Kingdom breaking into our hurried, fragmented lives.

The world tells us to climb ladders, but Christ invites us to come for dinner.

Just like the early church, our impact won’t come through power or platforms, but through steady, faithful acts of love. The answer to a disconnected world isn’t found in a bigger platform; it’s found at a smaller table.

It won’t be immediate, but over time, opening our homes and hearts will weave together something extraordinary. You may not see it right away, but you could be part of a quiet revolution that changes everything.

What small step can you take today—to invite someone in, share what you have, and be a companion?



Reviving the Agape Feast

Today, the agape feast might look like a few friends squeezed around a cluttered table, or neighbors sharing pizza on paper plates.

It could be as simple as soup and conversation, or as intentional as a potluck where everyone brings a dish and a story. The food is just an excuse; the real feast is found in fellowship.

Consider Dinner Church in Fort Meade, Florida, born out of the Fresh Expressions movement—a network of churches reimagining community and outreach.

In a town scarred by segregation and distrust, something unexpected happened—people of every race, background, and story sat side by side, sharing meals and sharing life.

What began as a gathering to reach those disconnected from traditional church grew into a thriving family. The marginalized found belonging, racial divides softened, and children were embraced as part of the family of God.

One leader put it plainly:

“We realized people didn’t need another service; they needed a place to sit, eat, and talk. The food opens the door, but the relationships keep them coming back.”

Just like the early Christians, this small church is discovering that the simplest acts of hospitality—sharing food and stories—can bridge the deepest divides and heal fractured communities.

The agape feast isn’t about hosting picture-perfect dinner parties. It’s about rediscovering the church’s true calling—to be a family united by love and grace. Communion takes shape when the hungry are fed, the lonely are welcomed, and the outcast find a place to belong.

The agape feast can do more than nourish bodies; it can renew the church and heal a world starving for community through Christ’s boundless love.

This isn’t just about reviving an ancient tradition; it’s about reigniting the very heartbeat of the church.

A Revolution at Your Table

Close your eyes. Can you see it? Homes glowing with warmth, the smell of freshly baked bread wafting through the air, the murmur of voices blending with bursts of laughter.

This is the vision Jesus gave us when He said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

The Communion Revolution is a call to return to the basics—to eat, to commune, to grow together in faith. The table isn’t just a place to eat. It’s a place where Christ’s love takes shape, where wounds mend, and where a broken world begins to heal.

What if your home became a place like that? It could heal the world—beginning with yours.

Start With Prayer

Hospitality requires intentionality.

Take a moment to think of five people you’d like to connect with—whether it’s a neighbor, a coworker, a friend you’ve lost touch with, or someone who might need encouragement. Write their names down, and pray for each of them.

Ask God to guide you and to open the right door at the right time—maybe, just a simple invitation to coffee, a shared meal, or even a thoughtful message.

Trust that He will move through your small acts of love to create something beautiful.

5

THE AGAPE FEAST GAME PLAN

HOSPITALITY: WINNING THE WAR AGAINST LONELINESS

God places the lonely in families.

Psalm 68:6 NLT



What Does the Spiritual Formation Movement Need?

My nephew is earning a Master's in Spiritual Formation at BIOLA. He shared with me how transformative his program had been for his faith—incorporating practices like prayer, Sabbath, and contemplation.

“Honestly,” he said, “I love what I’m learning. It’s been life-changing. But... I have no idea where to go from here. I can’t find a single church that practices this stuff. So, for me, it just stays in the classroom.”

I nodded. “Why do you think that is?”

“I asked one of my professors,” he said. “He told me churches are afraid to try. They worry that adding practices like silence and solitude or spiritual direction might drive people away, to more familiar churches—so pastors stick to the status quo.”

He sighed. “But isn’t this what the church is supposed to do? Help people grow deeper in their faith?”

I know this feeling very well. I’ve also struggled to find a church that ‘gets it.’ The spiritual disciplines, which shaped my faith, feel out of place in the programs and performances that dominate Sunday mornings. Sometimes, I feel like an outsider, longing for a church family where spiritual formation is part of its DNA.

Many of us feel the ache for something deeper. Whether inside or outside the church, we long for an authentic connection with God—a place where it isn’t just theory but a lived experience in community.

But, like his professor said, many churches hesitate to embrace these practices—because our church culture doesn’t reward it. When it’s offered, people leave.

“I think it’s like what Jesus said,” I replied.

“No one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the wine would burst the wineskins, and the wine and the skins would both be lost. New wine calls for new wineskins.”¹

That's what I think the agape feast is—a **new wineskin to hold the new wine of spiritual formation.**

Contemplative spiritual formation is not a new Gospel. It's ancient—but it's something that's been largely forgotten by the modern church.

However, to see a fresh movement of contemplation, we need fresh spaces. Places where performative religion gives way to something relational and organic.

Reviving the agape feast is not about replacing or re-inventing the church—but about creating new contexts around tables, where the Holy Spirit can move in ways the typical, modern church structures can't contain.

“The table is where discipleship and spiritual formation thrives,” I told my nephew.

“What you're looking for is the agape feast—a place to slow down, break bread, and share life like a family. And you don't have to leave your local church to add that into your life.”

In this chapter, we'll explore how the agape feast is a place where people have life-changing encounters with God and others—around their kitchen tables.



Why Does Hospitality Matter?

My nephew's frustration isn't just about the church; it's about our world. Whether in a pew or scrolling on your phone, the issue is the same—our culture isolates us.

But God created us for community, and isolation breaks something deep inside us.

That's why hospitality matters. The agape feast is way more than a meal; it's a spiritual weapon against loneliness.

By eating with others like Jesus did, we create spaces where people can find the family they've been longing for. Christ's love is shared with every prayer and every bite of bread.

He uses the hospitality of Christians to gather the lost into a spiritual home.

It's how God fulfills His promise in Psalm 68:6.

“God places the lonely in families.”²

Hospitality is Spiritual Judo

Against loneliness, hospitality is a bit like judo—a Japanese martial art where you try to redirect your opponent's momentum to your own advantage.

Here's an example of spiritual judo: the Devil uses money to create greed and division, and Jesus even said, “You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.”³

But instead of condemning money, Jesus redeems it by flipping the script:

“Use your worldly resources [i.e. money] to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.”⁴

This is spiritual judo—transforming money from a tool of greed, as the enemy intended, into a means of generosity that blesses others. It’s about aligning your heart in such a way that the Devil’s temptations are redirected to glorify God.

In the same way, when the Devil tries to isolate us and trap us in loneliness, the agape feast is a powerful way to counteract his efforts and turn it around for good.

If someone feels alienated, it’s an opportunity for Christians to extend an invitation to community. We can defeat the Devil by opening our homes, setting our tables, and offering friendship.

With a posture of hospitality, the harder he drives people into loneliness, the greater your chance to respond with welcome.

Loneliness may feel like a dark and unbeatable enemy, but it’s no match for Christlike hospitality. Each shared meal becomes a triumph over the darkness.

Have you ever thought about it that way?



How Do We Actually Live This Out?

Imagine it’s Friday evening. Your home smells of fresh bread and soup. The table is set—not perfectly, but with love. There’s mismatched plates and extra chairs at the table, ready to welcome your agape feast family.

The first guest arrives with a casserole, another with a store-bought pie. Soon the room buzzes with laughter and conversation as people find seats, pour drinks, and sneak bites of dessert while you finish preparing dinner.

When the meal begins, the table becomes more than a place to eat. As bread is broken, stories are shared. Conversation starts light—work updates, funny moments with the kids—but deepens as the evening unfolds.

A friend's mom is in the hospital. A cousin lost his job. But it's not all bad news: someone else just got engaged! And the room celebrates for them. There's room here for every part of life.

After dinner, someone reads from Scripture—nothing formal, just a word of encouragement. The group shares prayer requests, sharing the burdens and joys of life. Everyone helps clean up, and people linger over dessert, laughing and enjoying each other's company.

By the time everyone leaves, your heart is full. This wasn't just dinner; it was real community.

It was Communion.

Vision of the Agape Feast

At its heart, the agape feast is about creating a spiritual family around a shared table. It isn't complicated—just a regular gathering to center our lives on Christ.

It's not about process or programs; it's about people. Sharing a meal breaks down barriers, opening the door for deeper connection. The walls of isolation crumble, and Christ's love fills your hearts.

As my spiritual director says, "*Christianity is at its best when we eat together.*"

This is how loneliness is defeated. The table becomes holy—because of the love that connects people and the God who meets them there.

Key Features of an Agape Feast

This vision might sound wonderful, but what does it take to actually make it happen?

Hosting an agape feast is simpler than you might think—it starts with these five key elements:

1. A Shared Meal

- The meal doesn't have to be fancy. Think bread, soup, casseroles, or salads—simple dishes that are easy to share. A potluck format works beautifully, as it invites everyone to contribute without feeling pressure to impress.

2. A Welcoming Space

- The setting doesn't have to be perfect. In fact, it's better to be relaxed, where people can let their guard down and feel like they belong. It's about invitation and warmth—so welcome people from all walks of life: friends, neighbors, coworkers, church members. The agape feast is for everyone.

3. Centered on Christ

- While the meal is casual, the focus is spiritual. This isn't just dinner; it's communal discipleship—a chance to grow together in faith, as a community. A simple Scripture reflection, a brief prayer, or a shared testimony can bring Christ into the center of the gathering.

4. Relational

- The beauty of the agape feast is in the relationships it nurtures. Whether you're laughing over a funny story or listening as some-

one shares a burden, the table becomes a place where authentic friendships deepen.

5. **Organic**

- Whether weekly, biweekly, or monthly, consistency allows relationships to grow over time. No one has to force anything—through shared meals and shared lives, the community develops and deepens naturally.

Practical Guidance for Hosting an Agape Feast

Now that you've seen what makes the agape feast unique, here's some tips to help you get started. Keep in mind—every agape feast will look a little different depending on your group, space, and community.

Who Is the Agape Feast For?

The agape feast is versatile and can flourish in almost any context—whether among families, friends, small groups, or neighbors.

- **Families:** Gathering for meals with other families creates space for connection and shared faith. Imagine as kids laugh and play, while parents swap wisdom and encouragement. A simple question like, “What’s one thing your family is thankful for this week?” can spark conversations that draw everyone closer—to each other and to Christ.
- **Small Groups:** The table offers a deeper relational atmosphere than a book study, and it fosters trust and vulnerability in a different way. Incorporating a meal helps discipleship happen naturally.
- **Church Leaders:** For pastors and ministry teams, agape feasts can extend fellowship beyond Sunday. Midweek meals or potlucks help build community, especially for those who feel disconnected during

formal services.

- **Individuals and Neighbors:** If you're single or living alone, agape feasts are a powerful way to build a spiritual family—even if it starts small, as a coffee with a coworker or a meal with a neighbor, it can grow into a larger gathering.

Wherever God has placed you, the agape feast is adaptable to your situation.

Size: How Big Should an Agape Feast Be?

Aim for a group size that's lively yet personal. Anywhere from 10–15 people is ideal, though it could range from as small as 3 to as large as 50.

- **Smaller Feasts (3–15 people):** These feel like intimate family dinners. Everyone gets a chance to share, and relationships tend to get deeper quickly.
- **Larger Feasts (15–50 people):** These feel more like celebrations. The energy is inspiring, but for meaningful conversations or prayer, consider breaking into smaller groups for part of the evening.

As your group grows, you'll naturally reach a point where sending out someone to lead a second feast becomes a blessing—not a division but a multiplication of God's work. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you, when the time comes.

Frequency: How Often Should You Meet?

Choose a rhythm that works for your group and stick with it. Consistency helps build trust and connection.

- **Weekly:** Creates a steady rhythm, but may require sharing the hosting duties to prevent burnout.
- **Biweekly:** A great balance between regular connection and busy

schedules.

- **Monthly:** Less frequent, but still meaningful, especially for larger groups or beginners.

Whatever rhythm you choose, consistency is key.

Roles: Who Does What?

The agape feast is not a one-person show. Everyone contributes to create a shared, communal atmosphere.

- **The Host:** Opens their home and sets a welcoming tone. It shouldn't be overwhelming—be assertive and ask others to help with setup, cleanup, or tasks like bringing extra chairs.
- **The Facilitator:** Gently guides the group's spiritual focus, ensuring Christ remains at the center of the gathering. This might include reading a short Scripture, asking a meaningful question for discussion, or leading a prayer. Rotate this role to give everyone a chance to grow in spiritual leadership.
- **Everyone Else:** Bring a simple dish to share. Pitch in wherever needed. Keep contributions relaxed but make sure to leave the host's home tidier than when you arrived.

By sharing responsibilities, your agape feast will reflect the life of the early church, where everyone contributed their spiritual gifts to the community.

For a brush up on spiritual gifts, read Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12—and remember, Paul was writing these letters to the agape feasts in those cities.

What About Kids?

Kids are a joyful part of any agape feast!

Jesus said:

"Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children."⁵

Encourage them to participate in age-appropriate ways, such as setting the table, saying grace, or passing out napkins. If needed, include simple activities—like coloring pages or a short Bible story—while adults share in deeper discussions.

What About Inviting New People?

The agape feast isn't meant to be a closed circle; it's a place of welcome.

As your community grows, look for ways to extend your invitation to others: neighbors, friends, or anyone who might not feel comfortable in a traditional church setting.

Let the Spirit guide your invitations, and always keep an extra seat ready. Sometimes just being welcomed can be life-changing.

Your Table is Waiting

Whether you have a large dining room or a small apartment, whether you cook or order takeout, the agape feast is a powerful way to grow your faith—gathering people, centering on Christ, and building meaningful relationships.

Think about your table—who could you invite? A coworker, a neighbor, or a friend who's been feeling lonely? You don't need to have all the details figured out, just take the first step.

Send a text, extend an invitation, and trust God to meet you there.



Hospitality Changes Lives

Isaac wasn't the kind of person you'd expect to show up at an agape feast. He was quiet and reserved, and kept mostly to himself.

When his coworker invited him to dinner, Isaac almost didn't come. Holding a bag of potato chips—his contribution to the meal—he hesitated at the door, debating whether or not to turn around. But his friend's genuine invitation, "We'd love to have you there!" gave him the courage to ring the doorbell.

When the host opened the door, Isaac felt out of place—until he heard his friend's warm greeting: "Isaac! I'm so glad you came. Come grab something to eat!"

Slowly, he started to relax.

Dinner was simple—soup, salad, bread, and, of course, potato chips. But the atmosphere was extraordinary. People shared openly. They laughed until tears streamed down their faces. No one was trying to impress or in a rush to leave.

After the meal, the group prayed, lifting up one another's burdens and joys to the Lord. No one had ever done that for Isaac before. By the end of the night, something had shifted—maybe it was how they truly listened when he opened up about his dad, or how they prayed for him with genuine care.

Whatever it was, Isaac found himself saying, "This was really nice. Thanks for inviting me. I'd love to come back again sometime."

He didn't realize it yet, but the walls around his heart—of fear and distrust—were beginning to crack, letting in a new light.

Knocking Down the Gates of Hell

The walls around Isaac's heart weren't just emotional defense mechanisms; they were spiritual strongholds, built to keep him trapped in isolation, bitterness, and despair.

Jesus made us a promise:

"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."⁶

What do the 'gates' and 'keys' represent?

The *gates of hell* could be thought of as the walls people build around their hearts for protection. Often these are constructed out of fear, pain, and sin, keeping you trapped inside and cut off from the love of God and others.

But, through hospitality, we hold the *keys of the kingdom* that can unlock these gates. Kindness and welcome can cause these strongholds to crumble, as trust grows, and hearts connect.

Every invitation to the table—every shared meal and listening ear—can be part of Christ's promise that the *gates of hell* shall not prevail. In fact, the gates of loneliness and fear—barriers the Devil thought were impenetrable—can be knocked down easily by something as simple as dinner.

Hospitality may seem like a small thing, but it's a mighty weapon in the hands of God. The gates of hell can't be defeated by force or power—they're conquered by love, humility, and welcoming people like Isaac to your table.

Isaac didn't have a dramatic conversion that first night. But what he experienced was the love of Christ made tangible through the kindness of ordinary people. It became a place where his defenses dropped, and for the first time in years, Isaac felt safe enough to find hope.

He started coming regularly. And over time, the warmth of the community softened his heart. He went from being a reluctant guest to an eager participant.

He opened up about his story, asked deeper questions about faith, and eventually decided to get baptized—all because someone invited him to come for dinner.

Communal Transformation: A Shared Mission

His transformation didn't just change his life; it rippled outward.

He started bringing friends, saying, "You've got to come. It's not churchy. It's just good people, good food, and great conversation." Soon, others followed, and Isaac began to give back—cleaning up after meals, praying for others, and inviting new friends to the table.

As the group grew, they found ways to serve their neighbors—organizing a meal train for a mom recovering from surgery, pooling resources to help a family with rent, and hosting a block party to meet more neighbors and invite them to the table.

For Isaac, what began as one dinner invitation grew into a Kingdom movement. Christlike hospitality spread outward, sweeping him up into a culture of generosity, compassion, and belonging.



We Are Called to Be a Kingdom of Priests

The agape feast isn't just about building community—it's about advancing God's Kingdom.

Every meal, story, and prayer declares that Christ's love is stronger than loneliness, that community is stronger than isolation, and that the gates of hell cannot withstand God's people when we're united in love.

Hospitality is spiritual warfare—a countercultural act against the individualism and disconnection of modern life.

Isaac's story is only one example of what's possible when we open our homes and hearts. At the table, walls fall, strongholds break, and lives transform.

A simple dinner invitation can spark a wave of God's love that changes everything.

A Challenge to You

Who needs a seat at your table? A lonely neighbor, a struggling coworker, or a friend longing for connection?

You don't need a spotless house, a gourmet meal, or all the answers. All you need is an open heart, an open door, and a willingness to let God work.

This is the beauty of Christlike hospitality: when we gather around the table in His name, Jesus shows up.

And when He is at the table, lives are transformed.

Looking to Jesus' Example

Jesus is our ultimate model of hospitality. Whether dining with sinners, feeding the hungry, or breaking bread with His disciples, Jesus used the table to reveal the heart of God.

In the chapters ahead, we'll explore ten stories of when Jesus practiced hospitality—meeting people in their loneliness, seeing their deepest needs, and welcoming them into God's Kingdom.

Let these stories inspire your next steps. Your table could be the place where someone encounters Christ's love and begins to see their life transformed.

Who will you invite? The ripple effect starts with you.

6

PART 2

COME FOR DINNER WITH JESUS

When the time came, Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table.

Luke 22:14 NLT



Come for Dinner with Jesus

In Part 1, we explored loneliness, Communion, and the agape feast.

In Part 2, it's your turn to come to the table with Jesus as one of His disciples.

Imagine sitting with Jesus as He tells stories of the Kingdom. See Him gently listen to Mary and Martha, reach out to Zacchaeus, and multiply loaves and fish

for a crowd of thousands. Watch Him break bread with tax collectors, welcome sinners, and extend grace to the broken-hearted.

At these meals, He revealed God's heart—overflowing with radical love, boundless grace, and open arms.

With every meal, Jesus is teaching us a new way to live, rooted in the Kingdom. Through hospitality, He is proclaiming the Good News and pointing to His ultimate act of welcome.

On the Cross, He did what we could never do—paying the price for our sins, reconciling us to God, and opening heaven's banquet table to us.

Jesus offers us forgiveness, freedom, and eternal joy—inviting us to receive salvation as He shares the Bread of Life.

And when we open our homes, we embody the Gospel.

The Father's heart is open wide, and you are welcome to come in.

Join us for ten meals—each a story of Communion with God.

You'll learn how to reflect Jesus' love through simple acts of faithful hospitality and discover what true community looks like.

As you journey through these stories, you'll begin to reflect the heart of the Savior who welcomes all to His banquet.

He's waiting to show you how.

7

BREAKFAST WITH PETER

BECOMING JOYFULLY POOR IN SPIRIT

“Now come and have some breakfast!” Jesus said. None of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. Then Jesus served them the bread and the fish.

This was the third time Jesus had appeared to his disciples since he had been raised from the dead.

After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.”

“Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him.

John 21:12-15 NLT



Staring into the Mirror of Contemplation

Everyone who endures to the end will be saved.

Matthew 10:22 NLT

Imagine standing before a mirror that reflects not just your face, but your soul—the messy, unfiltered, and vulnerable core of who you are.

What would you see?

Not the version of yourself you show to the world: the clean, carefully curated, well-put-together image. But the version that lies beneath: the person you've been avoiding, trying to hide from God, from others, and most of all, from yourself.

Are there hidden regrets? Mistakes you promised you'd never make again but did? Anger, doubts, and insecurities quietly lingering, long after you thought you had outgrown them?

If you could gaze into it, would you dare to look?

Just like a mirror forcing us to face ourselves, Peter faced his reflection on the Sea of Galilee—the weight of shame pulling him under like a heavy anchor. Sitting in his boat, staring into the rippling water—all he could see was failure.

Once, he had been the confident disciple, the one who walked on water and declared Jesus the Messiah. Now, all he could see was the man who had denied his Lord.

When the moment of truth had arrived, he was overwhelmed by fear. And shame whispered lies into his heart: *You're not good enough. And you never will be.*

The distant crow of a rooster still echoed in his memory, pulling him deeper into despair. Peter was ready to give up on his calling, to abandon his mission and return to the life he had known before Jesus—fishing for fish, not for souls.

He didn't know it yet, but the weight of his failure was about to be transformed into the foundation of a new strength—the kind that's built when you finally understand that God's grace is all you need.

But first he had to learn the truth—Christianity isn't about *proving* or *perfecting* yourself; it's about *enduring* yourself, trusting the Holy Spirit to shape you into the person God desires.

Fr. Josiah Trenham, an Orthodox priest, gives this advice to new converts:

“The most difficult Christian behavior is learning to endure yourself.”¹

He explains that Jesus praises the virtue of *ypomoni*—patient endurance.

This virtue isn't about gritting your teeth and muscling through your failures. It's about staying committed to prayer, repentance, and the church, even as you stumble forward.

The goal is to endure your weakness, knowing that Christ's mercy never runs out.

This is the path to spiritual maturity—not through flawless moral performance or endless spiritual knowledge, but through learning to embrace your limitations with joy and trusting that God's grace is sufficient.

This is what Peter discovered that morning when Jesus ate breakfast with him after his long night at sea. And it's what we're invited to discover, too, when we dare to look into the mirror of contemplation.

Because when you look closer, something else emerges—a reflection not of judgment, but of love. It's not just your brokenness staring back at you. It's the eyes of a Savior, seeing who you really are yet still calling you *beloved*.

Will you dare to look?

Shame: Facing the Enemy of Your Soul

Peter couldn't silence the sound of the rooster crowing—it replayed in his mind on a loop. He remembered the moment he locked eyes with Jesus and the bitter tears that followed.

He didn't see his denial as a mistake. He saw it as *the* mistake, the one that disqualified him forever.

But Peter isn't the only one who's wrestled with shame.

This battle is as old as humanity itself. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, shame was their first reaction. They stitched fig leaves together to cover their nakedness and hid among the trees when they heard God approaching.

Before their disobedience, they walked with God freely, unafraid. But shame warped their vision. They no longer saw a loving Father—they saw a judge. Their instinct was to hide, to shield their brokenness from His gaze.

We all know what it's like to hide. When we fail, when we don't measure up, when the weight of who we *should* be crashes into who we *really* are, we retreat in fear. We hide behind busyness, excuses, silence—anything to keep from being seen.

Shame whispers its familiar lies: *You're unlovable. If people see the real you, they'll reject you.*

I know that voice well.

When I went through bankruptcy, it wasn't just financial ruin—it felt like the unraveling of who I thought I was. I had built my identity on being the provider, the leader, the one who could hold it all together.

Until suddenly, everything fell apart.

The shame was suffocating. I didn't just feel like someone who had failed—I felt like a failure. I avoided conversations, dodged questions, and tried to keep my brokenness hidden. I couldn't bear the thought of being seen as weak, as less than the man I believed I *had* to be.

But here's the truth shame doesn't want you to know: God doesn't meet you with condemnation when you fail. Neither does He stand at a distance, waiting for you to clean up the mess.

He draws near. He comes looking for you, even when you're hiding from Him. Not to scold you, but to heal you. Peter didn't know this yet—but he was about to find out.

Just like God pursued Adam and Eve after the Fall, Jesus was pursuing Peter on the shores of Galilee.

And the grace that Peter found in Him is the same grace available to us today.



The Dark Night: When Your Expectations Shatter

For Peter, the shame of denying Jesus wasn't the whole weight he carried. Beneath the sting of failure lay the wreckage of his expectations—shattered like glass.

He had expected more from himself. He was supposed to be the *rock*—the disciple who stood firm when others fell away. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you,” he had declared.²

But Peter had proven not to be the man he thought he was. The weight of failure crushed him, and when shame strikes, it doesn't just target your actions—it attacks your identity.

Peter assumed that if he couldn't live up to his expectations of himself as a disciple, he had no business trying to follow Jesus at all. But he was measuring himself by the wrong standard.

Sometimes, churches do this. They can become places where people feel pressure to maintain an image of spiritual perfection. Instead of being sanctuaries of healing, they risk becoming stages where people perform their faith while hiding their struggles.

But the church isn't supposed to be a museum for flawless saints. It's a hospital for sinners—where shame is disarmed, wounds are tended, and mercy flows freely.

Peter's wound went deeper than personal failure, though. It wasn't just his expectations of himself that had shattered—it was his vision of the Kingdom.

Peter had followed Jesus, believing He was the conquering Messiah, the One who would overthrow Rome and restore Israel's glory. In Peter's mind, following Jesus meant victory, power, and a triumphant march to the throne.

Instead, Jesus had been arrested, beaten, and crucified like a common criminal.

Peter hadn't fully understood Jesus' mission. When the Crucifixion happened, it wasn't just unexpected—it felt like the collapse of everything he had believed in.

The Kingdom Peter thought he was building had collapsed, and his confidence crumbled with it.

This kind of disillusionment isn't unique to Peter. We also build expectations about how God works and what faithfulness will bring us: *If I pray enough, my marriage will be healed. If I serve faithfully, I won't face hardship. If I obey, I'll be spared suffering.*

But sometimes, it's not that easy. What happens when God doesn't meet your expectations? When your prayers go unanswered, when losses pile up, or when the life we thought we were building crumbles?

What happens to our faith when we think we've failed—or that maybe God failed us?

Like Peter, we'll be tempted to give up. He did what many of us do when disillusionment sets in—he went back to what was familiar. "I'm going fishing," he said.³

The cool night air clung to him as he stepped onto the boat, seeking comfort in the rhythm of casting nets—hoping to forget, if only for a while. But he caught nothing.

The nets stayed empty, as did his heart. Returning to the sea couldn't fill the void left by broken dreams. The life he was trying to reclaim—the simple, burden-free life of a fisherman—no longer fit the man he had become.

That night, Peter wrestled with God, much like Jacob wrestled the Angel. And just like Jacob's limp became a mark of his blessing, Peter's brokenness would become the foundation of his calling. He just didn't know it yet.

What he couldn't see was that this dark night wasn't the end of his faith; it was the beginning of something deeper. His expectations had to shatter so he could finally see what Christ had been building all along—a Kingdom of mercy and grace.

Jesus hadn't come to establish a Kingdom of earthly power, and He wasn't asking Peter to be strong. He was only asking him to trust in God's strength, made perfect in weakness.

What felt like the final blow—Peter's denial of Christ—was actually a turning point. Only when everything fell apart could he see that following Christ wasn't about triumph or achievement—it was about surrendering to God's will.

Jesus never expected Peter to be perfect; He just needed him to know that His grace was enough. What looked like failure was actually preparation.

Peter wasn't meant to be the disciple with all the answers; he was meant to be the one who had been broken and remade by grace.

That's why he was qualified to become the leader of the church—not through his strength, but through Christ's mercy that held him together when everything else had fallen apart.



Jesus Meets Peter: A Deeper Reflection

After a night of fishing, Peter stood in his boat with empty nets, as dawn stretched over the water. Then he heard a familiar voice carrying across the waves.

“Fellows, have you caught any fish?”

“No,” they replied.

Then He said, “Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you’ll get some!”⁴

With a shrug, they obeyed, tossing the nets overboard, and within moments, they overflowed. The haul was so heavy they couldn’t lift it.

Peter froze, yet his heart raced. He had seen this before. It was the same miracle from the day Jesus had called him to leave his boat and fish for men.

“It’s the Lord!” John cried.⁵ Without a second thought, Peter plunged into the water, splashing toward shore. Desperation fueled him—he had to get to Jesus. Not to prove himself. Not to explain. But just to be near Him.

With every stroke through the water, memories of what he’d done returned—the rooster, the gaze, the tears. What would Jesus say when he reached the shore? Would He even want to see him?

As Peter drew near, Jesus was tending a small fire with fish sizzling over the coals. The smell mixed with the salty sea breeze, grounding Peter in the strange, beautiful reality of this moment—the Lord he had betrayed was making him breakfast.

They ate in silence at first. No lectures. No judgment. Just the sound of the crackling fire and the gentle lapping of waves. But Peter knew the conversation was coming, and it did.

After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter replied. “You know that I love you.”

“Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him.

Jesus repeated the question: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter said. “You know I love you.”

“Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said.

A third time he asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”⁶

Peter’s heart shattered. Three times. One for each denial. The pain of that night, the sound of the rooster, the look on Jesus’ face—all of it came flooding back.

Peter’s voice cracked. “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.”⁷

Jesus wasn’t ignoring Peter’s answers. This wasn’t an interrogation; He was helping him reflect more deeply, asking the question once for each denial—not to reopen Peter’s wounds but to heal them.

Jesus wasn’t asking Peter to prove himself. He wasn’t tallying his failures or holding his betrayal over his head. Each confession of love uprooted the shame that had taken root in his soul, making room for mercy to pour in and restore what had been broken.

And Peter began to understand—his calling had never been about his strength or loyalty; it had always been about Christ’s love and mercy. Filling the nets with fish wasn’t just an echo of his first calling. It was a sign that even after failure, God’s abundant love still overflows.

Jesus never stopped loving Peter, and Peter’s calling was never taken away from him, even though he failed—his purpose had never been revoked; his mistakes hadn’t disqualified him.

Peter came to Jesus with empty hands and a contrite heart—and that was all Jesus wanted. His failure had burned away his pride, leaving him with a new, humble heart—open and ready for grace.

On that shore, Peter learned that following Christ wasn't about earning God's love—it was about receiving it, and then sharing it with others. Letting go of shame and placing his faith back in a loving God.

As the sun rose higher over the Sea of Galilee, Peter rose too—no longer defined by failure, but by forgiveness. He had been restored, and soon, he would lead others to the same grace that had saved him.

Because that's what it means to be a fisher of men. Not to be perfect, but to cast the net of mercy wide. Trust God to fill it with souls as broken—and as loved—as Peter.



Being Joyfully Poor in Spirit: The Key to Christian Maturity

At breakfast, Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” three times.

The first two times, Jesus used *agape*—the Greek word for unconditional, sacrificial love. But Peter, humbled by failure, could only respond with *phileo*—the love of a close friend. He couldn't claim to unconditionally love the One he had betrayed.

Phileo was the only love he felt worthy to offer—but it was enough.

Jesus met Peter where he was, not where Peter wished he could be. By the third question, Jesus switched to *phileo*, accepting the friendship Peter offered.

Faith doesn't demand flawless devotion. It only asks for honest love—the kind that says, “*I don't have much, Lord, but what I have is Yours.*”

This is what it means to be *poor in spirit*.

It isn't to feel bad about yourself or to wallow in self-pity. It's to recognize, with joy, that everything you need flows from God's mercy. You have nothing to earn or to lose. Dependence on Him isn't a burden—it's freedom.

Peter's Pride Burned Away

Peter's life began to change the moment he accepted his weakness. When he had been young and brimming with zeal, he believed discipleship meant being strong, brave, and ready to conquer the world for Jesus.

But Jesus knew that before Peter could lead others, he would first have to be broken—and then remade. This is the path of mature faith: surrendering control, trusting God to lead you even when the road takes you where you don't want to go.

As Jesus said:

“When you were young, you did what you wanted. But when you are old, others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go.”⁸

At first, Peter's weakness felt like failure. His denial of Jesus had crushed him. But in the hands of Christ, failure became fertile soil where grace took root.

Peter found out that he could do nothing apart from God—and that realization set him free.

We don't need to be perfect—because God's love for us isn't based on our performance. When we embrace our limitations, we stop striving for approval and instead rest in the joy of being fully known and fully loved.

The secret to becoming a mature Christian is to live imperfectly, yet with great delight.

This is why Peter could go on to lead the church—not because he was flawless, but because he had learned to lead from a place of humble reliance on grace. He didn't point to his own strength; he pointed others to Christ's mercy.

As Paul wrote, *"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."*

Peter's life wasn't a monument to his successes but to the God who met him even in his failures.

The Spiritual Discipline of Patient Endurance

In the Christian tradition, the virtue necessary for full maturity is *ypomoni*—patient endurance.

Peter learned to stay in the struggle, even when he stumbled. His encounter with Jesus taught him not to let shame drive him away and to trust that God's love isn't fragile—it doesn't shatter under the weight of our sins.

Patient endurance is necessary for us to stay faithful even when we're disappointed with ourselves. It means bringing our weaknesses to God, day after day, and trusting Him to do the deep work inside our hearts.

Peter didn't overcome his failures by trying harder. He let grace do the work. His role wasn't to fix himself but to stay close to the One who could.

When we embrace patient endurance, we stop being surprised by our flaws. Instead of panicking when we fall short, we learn to say, "Here I am, Lord, with all my weaknesses. I still need You."

There's great freedom in this virtue. We don't have to earn God's love. We don't have to impress Him or pretend we have it all together. It's the freedom to stop hiding from your mistakes.

God isn't looking for perfect followers—just those willing to follow, even when they're flawed.

Contemplation: Looking Into the Mirror of Grace

Contemplation invites us to gaze into the mirror of our souls, confronting the flaws and regrets we often try to ignore. But when we look deeper, past our brokenness, we find something unexpected—Jesus is gazing back with mercy, not condemnation.

Through contemplation, we remember that our worth doesn't come from our achievements but from God's love.

Try this: Sit in silence and bring to mind your failures, your fears, or the parts of yourself you wish were different. Instead of pushing them away, welcome them. Then imagine Jesus sitting beside you, saying, *"I know. And I love you."*

This is where spiritual maturity begins—not when we conquer our weaknesses, but when we surrender them to God's grace.

Peter discovered this. What once felt like it had disqualified him became his greatest testimony to Christ's mercy. His calling wasn't to prove himself worthy but to share the grace that had been given to him.

And that's our calling too: to lead not from perfection, but from the humble, joyful knowledge that we are loved beyond measure, no matter what.



Leading with Grace: Feeding Christ's Lambs

After restoring Peter, Jesus didn't give him a checklist or strategy for leadership.

He gave him a simple command:

*"Feed my sheep."*¹⁰

Peter's leadership wasn't built on perfection but on grace. And that's the foundation of any healthy community.

When we accept our poverty of spirit, we're freed to lead others with the same mercy we've received. This creates spaces where people feel safe to be vulnerable and honest—bringing their flaws without fear of rejection.

Leading an agape feast isn't about hosting a flawless event; it's about creating a table where grace flows freely through shared meals, conversations, and personal presence. Just as Jesus nourished Peter by the sea, we're called to nourish others by creating spaces where they can encounter God's love.

Here's how you can build a grace-filled community through your agape feast.

Set a Table of Welcome, Not Performance

The goal isn't to impress—it's to invite. Whether it's a potluck or a simple dinner, the focus should be on relationships, not presentation. Perfect food and spotless homes aren't the point.

Let people share their joys and burdens freely. Be the one who listens with compassion, offering your own vulnerability as an example.

Feed Christ's Lambs, Literally

Sometimes, the most spiritual thing you can do is feed someone. In a world where many are hungry—not just for food but for belonging—your table can be a place of nourishment and grace.

Invite the lonely, the forgotten, and the weary to your table as a reminder that they are seen, loved, and welcome.

Lead Through Vulnerability

Peter wasn't redeemed through his strength, but through his weakness. If you want to create a community rooted in grace, lead by example.

Be honest about your struggles and how God's grace met you there. Vulnerability isn't weakness—it's a bridge that helps others take off their masks and experience the love of Christ.

Build Moments of Contemplation into Your Gatherings

End your agape feast with quiet reflection or prayer. After the meal, invite everyone to sit silently and reflect on where they need God's grace. Close by reminding them that His love meets them right where they are.

Or make contemplation a personal practice—regular silent prayer will deepen your awareness of grace and naturally overflow into your leadership.

Your Table is Holy Ground

Peter's restoration happened over a simple breakfast. In the same way, your table—whether filled with laughter or quiet conversations—can be a place where grace takes root and lives are changed.

The Christian life isn't about avoiding failure—it's about enduring it patiently, trusting that grace will transform you eventually. Jesus isn't asking you to be perfect. He's asking you to be present.

When you lead with grace, you create a community where shame is disarmed, mercy flows, and souls are fed. As you feed His sheep, don't be surprised when you find yourself nourished too—because grace doesn't just flow through you; it fills you.

Open your home. Set the table. Welcome others as they are.

Watch as Christ's love transforms them.

WEDDING AT CANA

GOD'S ABUNDANCE AT THE TABLE

The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration.

The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." When the jars had been filled, he said, "Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies." So the servants followed his instructions.

When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. "A host always serves the best wine first," he said. "Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!"

This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

John 2:1-11 NLT



Facing the Giant of Unbelief

I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven's Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

1 Samuel 17:45 NLT

Day after day, Goliath stepped forward, mocking and taunting Israel. The Israelites stood paralyzed, their hearts pounding with fear. King Saul, their leader, sat frozen in doubt, his hopelessness spreading like a fever through the ranks until no one dared believe that God could act.

Doesn't this feel familiar?

Like Saul's army, today's church faces its own giant—the giant of unbelief. We've begun to believe a story of defeat: that we're powerless, God no longer moves among us, and the church's best days are behind us.

Churches are shrinking, culture feels more hostile than ever, and God's power seems absent. Like Saul's army, many of us feel stuck—overwhelmed, uncertain, and desperate for God to act.

Like the couple who ran out of wine at the wedding in Cana, today's church feels dry and out of hope. But Cana reminds us: Jesus meets us in our emptiness and fills us with new life.

Looking for God in the Wrong Places

Unbelief isn't always outright denial of God; it often sneaks in as misplaced faith—when we stop expecting God to act and turn to worldly solutions for spiritual problems.

Instead of trusting God, many churches turn to quick fixes—political activism, consumer programs, or chasing dramatic signs—forgetting the battle belongs to the Lord.

Some are waiting for a sweeping revival—a Great Awakening or second Pentecost—to miraculously turn things around, convinced the solution must be big and dramatic.

But no matter what we try, the revival never comes. We feel like we're spinning our wheels, and wondering why nothing works. The longer we wait, the more it feels like God has abandoned us. Will He ever move powerfully among us again?

While we've been searching for revival, we've overlooked the answer right in front of us: Communion—a practice as ancient as the church itself.

A Church That's Run Out of Wine

When we rely on quick fixes or worldly solutions, we end up dry and empty—like the couple at Cana, whose celebration fell apart when the wine ran out.

In that culture, running out of wine wasn't just inconvenient; it was a social disaster. The shame could follow them for generations, tarnishing their family's reputation.

Imagine the sick feeling in the pit of their stomachs as they realized the wine was gone. What should have been the happiest day of their lives—a celebration of love and joy—was about to end in lasting humiliation, with no way to fix it.

This is how many Christians feel about the church today—like we've run out of the *spiritual wine* that once brought energy, joy, and life. Churches feel dry and empty, their bright light dimmed throughout the world, with no clear way to rekindle the flame.

Like the couple at Cana, we feel stuck and helpless. We've tried everything, but nothing works. Many of us are starting to believe this is just how things are—this is a 'post-Christian' world now.

Looking for New Wine

What if God hasn't abandoned us but we're just looking for the wrong thing? We've been waiting for a dramatic revival—hearts on fire, people rushing to the altar, waves of renewal sweeping through our churches.

But maybe the *new wine* doesn't look like that at all. What if the new wine is already here—at the Communion table—but we've been too blind to see it?

It's the joy and unity of living in Communion with Christ and one another. It's the steady transformation that comes through personal love, service, and community.

For so long, we've focused on personal revival, asking God to ignite individual hearts. But what if God is calling us to a *communal* revival—an outpouring of His love around the Lord's table? It's a Communion revival.

When the church lives in true Communion, it proves that God is alive and at work. Our love for each other becomes a powerful testimony for Jesus, silencing the giant of unbelief.

And this chapter will show that Jesus has already given us the new wine we need.

You Already Have the New Wine

Christians don't need to wait. The Holy Spirit has already given us all the power we need to love deeply, serve faithfully, and live in true *koinonia*.

The new wine is here—literally—at the Communion table. The Spirit of God is present in the act of gathering to break bread and drink wine in Jesus' name.

The question isn't if God will move, but whether we'll act in faith with what He's already given us.

Like Mary and the servants at Cana, our role isn't to perform the miracle but to bring what we have to Jesus, trusting Him to transform it.



Finding Jesus at the Wedding at Cana

The bride sat nervously as her groom paced near the kitchen door, his face pale. Servants whispered, "There's nothing left."

The wine was gone. They had bought all they could afford, but it wasn't enough. This wasn't just an inconvenience—it was a disaster.

She glanced at the guests—still laughing, still celebrating—for now. Soon, someone would notice. The joy would sour. The humiliation would follow. And there was nothing she could do about it.

Her stomach sank. "This was supposed to be the happiest day of our lives. Now it's ruined," she thought.

Then, across the room, she saw Mary—her mother's dear friend—whispering to her son, Jesus, and speaking with the servants. The bride couldn't hear what they said, but for the first time, she felt a faint glimmer of something unexpected: hope.

Just when the couple's problem seemed beyond their control, Jesus stepped in.

Approaching Jesus in Our Distress

The miracle at Cana wasn't just about saving a wedding. It was a glimpse of how Jesus works in our lives and churches when we feel empty and out of options.

Jesus calls us to approach Him in faith, trusting His power and acting on His Word.

Ephesians 3:20-21 reminds us of this truth:

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations."¹

Let's use this passage to reflect on the progression in Cana's story—and in our lives—step by step.

Step 1: "Now to Him..."

The miracle at Cana began with ordinary people turning to Jesus in faith. Mary and the servants show us three key ways to approach Him in times of spiritual dryness: *faith*, *prayer*, and *obedience*.

Faith: Mary's Confidence in Jesus

Mary noticed the problem before anyone else, and her first instinct was to bring it to Jesus.

She didn't know how He would solve it, but she trusted that He would.

His initial response seemed like a refusal, "My time has not yet come."² Yet her faith didn't waver. Confidently, she told the servants, "Do whatever He tells you."³

Revival begins not with human effort, but by coming to Jesus in faith, trusting He can work where we cannot. Faith doesn't require all the answers, but it's about turning to Christ with expectancy, even when the outcome is unclear.

Like Mary, we need the courage to bring our need to Jesus, trusting Him to act in His time and way. Renewal begins when the church stops relying on human strategies and fully trusts Jesus to work through us.

Prayer: Mary's Intercession

Mary's faith moved her to action. She interceded for the bride and groom, bringing their burden to Jesus. Her selfless act of love shows the power of carrying others' needs to His feet.

Intercessory prayer is a powerful act of love. By praying for our church, community, or neighbors, we invite Jesus to work in situations beyond our control.

Do you know anyone who needs you to bring their situation to Jesus? A struggling friend, a stuck church, or a grieving family member? Prayer changes everything.

A close friend of mine once battled alcoholism, drifting far from God. His father prayed daily, interceding with love and faith. Over time, God answered, restoring his sobriety and drawing him back to Christ.

My brother-in-law was in the final stages of cancer with no medical options left. Our community prayed, and God performed a miracle—he was completely healed.

God delights in answering faith-filled prayers. Revival begins when the church becomes a house of prayer—not just for individual needs, but for the burdens of our community and world. And your house could be a house of intercession, whenever you gather for an agape feast.

Intercessory prayer shifts our focus from our limitations to God's power, reminding us that the battle belongs to the Lord.

Obedience: The Servants' Faith in Action

Jesus' instructions must have sounded absurd to the servants. He said, "Fill the jars with water."⁴

The problem was a lack of wine—so why did He ask for water? Yet, the servants obeyed, filling six jars with 180 gallons, all the way up to the brim, despite not fully understanding why.

Obedience turns faith into action. You show true faith when you obey Jesus, even if you don't fully understand Him. The servants didn't see the wine until after they filled the jars and drew it out—they acted in obedience before the miracle was revealed.

Is God calling you to take a step of faith that doesn't yet make sense to you? Perhaps He's nudging you to forgive someone, to serve outside your comfort zone, or to welcome a lonely neighbor into your agape feast.

Like the servants, we're called to act even when the outcome isn't clear. Faith requires stepping out before seeing the full picture, and it's in those steps that God's power is revealed.

Jesus has called His church to love, serve, and share the Gospel. When we take those steps in faith—even without seeing immediate results—we make room for God to work powerfully.

Faith, Prayer, and Obedience Lead to Miracles

Mary's faith brought her to Jesus, her intercession invited His power to act, and the servants' obedience was the catalyst for His miracle. Together, faith, prayer, and obedience show us how to approach Jesus in times of need.

When we bring our needs to Him, intercede for others, and step out in faith, we create space for Jesus to work beyond what we can imagine—bringing joy, abundance, and a glimpse of His glory, just as He did at Cana.

Step 2: "who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think..."

When Jesus turned water into wine, He didn't just provide *more*; He provided the *best*.

The master of the banquet was astonished: "A host always serves the best wine first," he said, "then, when everyone has had plenty to drink, he brings out the cheaper wine. But you've saved the best until now!"⁵

This miracle wasn't just about solving the couple's problem—it revealed who Jesus is: the true Bridegroom who provides with super-abundant generosity. He

doesn't give the bare minimum; His provision overflows far beyond what we could ask or imagine.

A Foretaste of Even Greater Wine

The wine at Cana was only a glimpse of the *greater* wine Jesus offers His bride, the church. Today, the best wine isn't in stone jars—it's His own blood in Holy Communion.

When we drink the wine of Communion, we receive more than a symbol—we receive His grace, forgiveness, and eternal life. Just as the wine at Cana brought joy to the wedding, the wine of Communion fills us with blessings, abundantly.

Every time we come to the table, Jesus invites us to taste the best wine—His sacrifice, poured out for us on the Cross. It's more than we deserve and beyond what we could imagine.

Like the banquet master, we are invited to marvel at Christ's generosity, meeting us in our need with His overflowing grace.

Will you come and receive the best wine, which He still offers?

Step 3: “according to the power at work within us...”

Turning water into wine isn't a small adjustment of a substance—it's a complete transformation of it!

This miracle at Cana reflects what the Holy Spirit does in our hearts, turning what is broken and sinful into something whole and holy.

The Holy Spirit's Transforming Work in Us

Before the Spirit works in us, we're ruled by selfishness and fear. But He doesn't just help us 'try harder'—He changes us, producing good spiritual fruit in

our lives, such as: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”⁶

This isn’t self-improvement—it’s transformation. The Spirit doesn’t just make us *better*; He makes us *new*. He replaces anxiety with peace, bitterness with kindness, impatience with gentleness, and selfishness with love—shaping us to reflect Christ’s love and grace.

It may not be instant or dramatic, but over time, it’s miraculous.

You Already Have His Power at Work Within You

If you are in Christ, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you.

His power isn’t distant or conditional—it’s already at work, equipping you to live in holiness and Communion with God and others.

Revival doesn’t depend on waiting for something external—a dramatic event or miraculous moment. It begins with a humble willingness to let the Holy Spirit work in your heart right now. The Spirit empowers you to love the unlovable, forgive the undeserving, and serve even when it’s inconvenient.

Are you waiting for something dramatic to happen before you start living as someone filled with the Holy Spirit? God has already given you everything you need to love and build community.

Revival begins when you step forward with the Spirit’s power already at work within you. You can stop waiting and start living by faith today. If you want to experience revival, simply start loving your neighbors, and you’ll be revived!

Let Christ transform your heart, fill you with His fruit, and enable you to love your neighbor as yourself. Just as Jesus turned normal water into the best wine, the Spirit can take the ordinary—like inviting a lonely neighbor for dinner—and make it extraordinary.

Through His power, your life can overflow with love, joy, and grace—a living testimony that God’s transformative work didn’t end at Cana; it’s alive in you today.

Step 4: “to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations.”

The miracle at Cana wasn’t just about saving a wedding. “This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”⁷

In the same way, our transformed lives and the way we live in Communion with one another glorify Christ. When we love and serve one another, the watching world sees this unmistakable truth: Jesus is alive, and His Spirit is at work among us.

Jesus said, “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”⁸

Communion isn’t just a meal or tradition—it’s a glimpse of God’s Kingdom: a people united by love, sharing life, and caring for one another sacrificially.

You might not feel like your life reveals God’s glory, but every act of love and service done in Jesus’ name reflects His character. When people see the love you give, the peace you carry, and the joy you share, they see proof that God is real and at work.

Jesus called this being *‘a light on a hill’*—a life so filled with His love that it draws others to Him. He said, “Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”⁹

Living for God’s glory isn’t about perfection—it’s about letting His love flow through you in ways that lead others to Him.

Imagine a church where people gathered around the Lord's table—offering forgiveness, sharing burdens, celebrating joys, and meeting each other's needs. In a world of division and isolation, wouldn't that kind of community shine like a light in the darkness?

You are the sign the world is looking for. When people see your love, they catch a glimpse of God's heart. Sometimes, it's as simple as inviting a friend to dinner.

Will you let your life shine with His glory? Will your love for others be the proof that Jesus is alive and working through His church? It can all start with a meal.



Defeating the Giant of Unbelief

Many Christians today feel stuck, wondering why revival hasn't come. Like Saul's army, we stand frozen before the giant of unbelief, listening to its taunts that God no longer works through His church.

Here's the truth: We already have everything we need. Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit, empowering us to love our neighbors and build communities that reflect His glory.

Revival doesn't have to start with dramatic interventions—it can start with faithful acts of prayer and obedience.

David defeated Goliath not with Saul's heavy armor or impressive weapons, but with a slingshot, five small stones, and faith in God's power.

In the same way, your kitchen table may seem unimpressive, but when offered in faith, it becomes a weapon against unbelief. Hospitality is like the slingshot

God has given you, and every meal shared in Christ's name is a stone hurled at the enemy's lies—breaking through doubt, loneliness, and despair.

The Power of True Communion

Imagine a church alive with the joy of true Communion: sharing meals, carrying burdens, and celebrating victories around the table. This is the revival we've been praying for—not a fleeting event, but the Spirit transforming lives through love, unity, and a shared life. When we live this way, we become a testimony of God's power and glory.

God has already given you the power to love, serve, and build community. Your table can be the place where faith is rekindled and lives are transformed.

What's stopping you? Will you take up your slingshot and face the giant of unbelief with Christlike hospitality?

It doesn't take much—just an open heart, a willing spirit, and a meal shared in Jesus' name.

Like David, you're not going into this battle alone. The same God who empowered him to defeat Goliath is with you.

He can take your simple act of hospitality and use it to transform lives and reveal His glory.

MARTHA AND MARY

LISTENING AT JESUS' FEET

As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.

Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing.

She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me."

But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42 NLT



Dispelling the Shadows of Discord

You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

James 1:19 NLT

Our house church was once a place of true friendship and fellowship, where spirits were lifted, and hearts deeply connected. For a season, it felt like the Holy Spirit was moving powerfully among us.

But as the group grew, cracks began to form. Anxiety crept in subtly, showing up in small ways—one person felt unnoticed for his contributions, another worried her ideas weren't supported. Misunderstandings went unspoken, and assumptions filled the gaps where communication was missing.

I remember an evening when we gathered to plan a community outreach event. Tension filled the air, but no one acknowledged it. People avoided eye contact, staring at their notes or coffee cups.

Finally, the member who had taken on most of the organizing snapped: "*It feels like no one else cares about this but me!*" His voice was sharp with frustration, and everyone froze.

After a long silence, another member muttered, "*I didn't realize this was your show.*"

The room erupted—not in shouting, but in sharp, cutting remarks disguised as "honest feedback." One accused others of not pulling their weight, while another pointed out how critical the leader had been lately.

The meeting ended with apologies—some sincere, some forced—but nothing was resolved. Everyone left feeling unappreciated or unfairly criticized, spilling their frustrations into our WhatsApp group.

People began pulling back. One member stopped volunteering, while others stopped showing up entirely. What was once a joyful community became weighed down by unmet needs and clashing personalities. Slowly, bonds that had once felt unbreakable began to weaken.

Eventually, we drifted apart—too hurt and tired to address the real issues. A once vibrant community dissolved under the weight of anxiety and unresolved conflict.

What went wrong? How could something so good fall apart so quickly?

Fear and insecurity had taken root, fueling misunderstandings, distrust, and discord. But here's the good news: anxiety doesn't have to destroy community. There's a way to protect the unity and peace of your agape feast—if you do what Jesus tells you to.

In this chapter, we'll learn to recognize discord before it takes root and explore one powerful tool to keep anxiety at bay—**listening**.



The Roots of Discord: Anxiety

Before we explore how listening transforms communities, we must understand what causes cracks to form. At the heart of many conflicts is anxiety—a subtle force that fuels fear, mistrust, and discord.

The story of Martha and Mary shows how anxiety doesn't just trouble an individual; it disrupts relationships and fractures peace.

Martha Was Worried About Many Things

Imagine Martha, bustling in the kitchen—chopping, stirring, and setting the table, her mind racing: *“Will this meal be good enough? Will Jesus notice how hard I’m working? Why isn’t Mary helping me? Does anyone care how much I’m doing?”*

Her frustration grows. She glances at Mary, still sitting at Jesus’ feet, unbothered by the demands of the moment. Anxiety tightens its grip, turning Martha’s service into resentment. Her thoughts sharpen: *“Of course Mary isn’t helping. She never does. I’m always the one carrying the weight.”*

Finally, Martha can’t hold it in. She bursts into the room and says, “Lord, doesn’t it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.”¹

To Martha, her outburst likely felt justified—she was doing the work, and no one seemed to notice. But Jesus gently pointed out the real issue: “My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details!”²

Martha’s problem wasn’t her desire to serve; it was the anxiety beneath her actions. Her fear of being unseen and unappreciated distracted her heart, stealing her joy and clouding her connection with Mary and Jesus. What began as love had turned into resentment, pushing others away when she needed them most. Doesn’t this feel familiar?

Anxiety creeps into our hearts and communities, turning small concerns into big conflicts. It’s the group member who feels unappreciated or the quiet frustration of someone asking, *“Does anyone even care?”*

Anxiety whispers, “*What if this doesn’t work out? What if no one notices me? What if I’m not enough?*”

In response, we often try to control others or situations, believing that working harder or pushing people will make everything okay. Grasping for control rarely leads to peace. Instead, it twists good intentions into manipulation, creating discord and driving others away.

Unchecked, anxiety can harm even the healthiest communities, turning small worries into mistrust, resentment, and division.

While some anxiety is normal and can motivate responsibility, unmanaged anxiety erodes relationships and trust. For Martha, it disrupted her relationship with Mary, disturbed her home’s peace, and robbed her of the chance to enjoy Jesus’ presence.

It’s vital to recognize anxiety’s effects—not just in ourselves, but in our communities. Understanding how anxiety works allows us to respond with the kindness Jesus showed Martha. Instead of reacting harshly, we can see that anxious people aren’t trying to be destructive; they’re often just afraid.

What does this look like in real life? Let’s explore how anxiety plays out in relationships and quietly tears apart communities.

Martha’s Three Missteps

Martha’s story shows how anxiety can strain relationships in three common ways: *triangulating*, *herding*, and *scapegoating*.

Triangulating: Dragging Others into Your Conflict

In a Bible study group, Michael often dominated conversations. Frustrated, Sarah vented to another member: “Does Michael always have to take over?”

Instead of addressing Michael directly, her complaint created tension in the group. When Michael heard about it, he was left hurt and confused, and the group dynamic began to fray.

This is called **triangulation**—bringing a third party into a conflict instead of addressing the issue directly with the person involved. Triangulation often stems from fear of confrontation or rejection. While it can feel like a way to process feelings, it actually makes conflicts harder to resolve.

Have you ever experienced it? Maybe you've vented to someone instead of addressing the person directly—or been caught in the middle of someone else's conflict.

Martha made this mistake. Instead of speaking directly to Mary, she involved Jesus: "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work?" Rather than simply asking Mary for help, Martha sought an ally in Jesus, escalating her frustration instead of resolving it.

Jesus offers a better way to handle conflicts in Matthew 18: "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense."³

His words remind us that healthy relationships are built on honesty and direct communication. While uncomfortable, addressing issues directly is the first step toward resolution and healing.

Triangulation may feel easier in the moment, but it causes lasting damage. Healthy communities are built on courage over gossip, trust over fear, and openness over avoidance.

Herdling: Forcing People to Conform to Unspoken Expectations

Rachel hosted her first group dinner with a simple meal: spaghetti, salad, and store-bought rolls. But when her guests arrived with elaborate dishes and praised

each other's efforts, she felt overlooked. One comment she overheard stuck with her: "Excellence is just what you do when it's your turn to host."

Next time, Rachel poured herself into an elaborate meal, but the joy was gone. She wasn't hosting to bless her guests; she was just trying to meet their unspoken expectations.

This is called **herding**—the pressure to conform to unspoken rules or to push others to do the same. It often stems from fear of judgment, rejection, or standing out. For Rachel, the pressure wasn't explicit, but the unspoken expectations weighed heavily.

The same dynamic played out in Martha's story. Her anxiety wasn't just about preparing a meal—it was tied to cultural expectations of hospitality. She internalized the belief that hosting was her responsibility as a woman and felt she had no choice but to meet it.

Martha's anxiety turned into resentment, and she tried to impose those expectations on Mary. When Mary didn't conform, Martha lashed out.

That's the danger of herding: feeling pressured to conform often leads us to pressure others.

Psychologists call the ability to resist herding self-differentiation—staying true to your values while respecting others. Mary embodied this by refusing to let Martha's expectations pull her away from what truly mattered: sitting at Jesus' feet.

To avoid herding, we must break the cycle of silent pressure. Acknowledge the unspoken rules driving your actions or expectations of others. Instead of controlling or conforming, choose freedom—freedom to be yourself and to let others do the same.

Scapegoating: Blaming Others for Your Stress

Karen arrived late to small group, visibly stressed. When another member offered to organize the next meeting, Karen snapped: “Why does this always feel so disorganized? Can’t we plan better?” The room fell silent.

Later, Lisa gently asked if she was okay. Karen broke down, admitting her frustration wasn’t about the group but a fight with her husband and a stressful day. Her stress had spilled into the group, creating discord.

That moment gave the group a chance to pray for her and reminds us how often unresolved emotions cause us to lash out unfairly. This is called **scapegoating**—blaming others for frustrations and stress they didn’t cause. Instead of processing her emotions or asking for help, Karen projected her frustration onto Lisa, leaving the group tense and confused.

Martha did the same, lashing out at Mary and even Jesus. Her frustration wasn’t about Mary but the weight of her own unmet expectations. Overwhelmed, she let her unprocessed emotions spill over as blame instead of pausing to reflect or calmly asking for help.

Scapegoating misdirects stress. Instead of pointing fingers, we can pause and ask, “What am I really feeling? What’s the true source of my frustration?” Taking responsibility for our own emotions fosters connection and replaces blame with grace.

A Better Way Forward

No one is entirely free from anxiety, but unchecked, it can destroy even the strongest relationships. Martha’s story reveals how fear and insecurity can lead to manipulation, pressure, and blame—slowly eroding trust and unity.

This is exactly what happened in my house church. Anxiety crept in through misunderstandings and unspoken expectations, creating tension that eventually

tore us apart. Like Martha, we were “worried about many things” but didn’t know how to address our fears in healthy ways.

But Mary shows us a better way. Instead of being driven by anxiety, she chose to sit at Jesus’ feet, listening with a calm and open heart.

Let’s explore how Mary’s posture of listening can transform our relationships and help us build communities grounded in peace and unity.



Listening as Transformation: Learning from Mary

Listening—both to Jesus and to others—is one of the simplest yet most transformative acts of love. It breaks the cycle of anxiety, restores peace, and creates space for God to move.

When Martha, overwhelmed by her busyness, complained about her sister, Jesus gently replied: *“There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.”*⁴

What was Mary doing that Jesus praised? She was listening—fully present and attentive, making space in her heart for His words. Listening to Him brought peace—not just to herself, but to the community around her.

Martha, by contrast, let her need for control create tension in her home. Consumed by expectations, she grew frustrated and resentful, missing the chance to simply be with Jesus and Mary. Martha’s anxiety brought distraction, but Mary’s listening brought connection.

Why Does Listening Matter?

Listening is more than hearing words. It's about making others feel seen and valued. True listening creates a safe space for others to share their burdens, joys, and fears.

I experienced the power of being listened to during a spiritual retreat while navigating a dark night of the soul, filled with sadness, confusion, and deep questions about my life.

At a time when I desperately needed someone to listen, I met a spiritual director named Rita. She spent an afternoon with me—not offering advice or quick fixes, but simply letting me share my story. She didn't interrupt or judge, but her kindness and patience made me feel truly seen and loved.

Near the end of our conversation, Rita introduced me to St. Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* and encouraged me to read it. Months later, after finishing the book, I found a small stone and wrote "Mansion 7" on it as a way to remember what Rita shared. I've kept that stone—not for its beauty, but because it reminds me of her.

Rita often says: "To truly listen is an act of love, for the two are inseparable—and it is love that heals."

Hospitality Means Creating a *Listened-To* Space

Most people think of hospitality as simply providing food, drink, or shelter. But as a spiritual gift, hospitality means more than that—it's about offering others your attention and care, primarily through listening.

Prioritizing listening at your agape feasts builds trust and creates spaces where people can open up and connect as friends. A beautifully set table and delicious

food are nice, but without genuine connection and attentive listening, they lose their meaning.

Sharing the Gospel With Your Ears

Traditionally, Christians share the Gospel in three ways: proclaiming the Word, teaching, and bearing witness through testimony. But there's a fourth, often overlooked way—listening.

When people ask about the Christian faith, they're often asking, "*What does the Bible say about this topic?*" Clear, truthful answers from Scripture are essential.

But often, beneath the question is a deeper, unspoken one: "*Does Jesus really love me?*"

This second question can't be answered with polished arguments or eloquent reasoning alone—it's answered through the kindness, patience, and understanding of a hospitable listener. When someone feels truly heard, they experience the love of Jesus in a tangible way.

Here's the connection—faith comes by hearing the Word of God, but trust often comes by being heard.

Listening doesn't just help people understand God's love; it helps them *experience* it. By creating a safe space for others to share their burdens and fears, we become vessels of Christ's compassion, reflecting His heart.

This is where hospitality and the agape feast come in. Hospitality isn't just about serving a meal—it's about creating a space where people feel listened to. Conversations become moments of grace, which create deeper connections.

We reflect Christ's love not just in what we say, but in how we make others feel.

Imagine a table where everyone felt truly heard. That's what the agape feast is meant to be. It's a foretaste of the Kingdom—a place of *koinonia* and Communion.

The Parable of the Good Host

A man moved to a new city and decided to attend church. After the service, three people invited him to dinner.

The first host spent the evening talking about the church's needs, subtly encouraging the guest to volunteer. Though well-meaning, the guest left wondering if the invitation was an offer of friendship or simply for recruitment.

The second host worked hard to prepare an elaborate meal with a perfectly set table. But her focus on perfection kept the conversation shallow, leaving the guest feeling less like a priority and more like an audience to impress.

The third host, however, kept the meal simple and focused on the guest. He listened attentively, without interrupting or judging, creating a space where the guest felt free to share his thoughts. By the end of the evening, the guest, who had come as a stranger, left feeling like a friend—seen, valued, and deeply cared for.

Which of these three hosts showed true hospitality? The answer is clear: the third host.

He created a space of belonging and connection by simply listening. His example shows that hospitality isn't about what you serve for dinner—it's about how present and attentive you are.

Listening is the heart of true hospitality.



Learning How to Listen Well: Three Spiritual Disciplines

Listening—whether to yourself, others, or God—takes practice and intention. In our noisy, distracted world, it’s hard to slow down and truly pay attention.

In this section, we’ll explore three prayer practices—Examen Prayer, Group Spiritual Direction, and Centering Prayer—that help you grow in listening and creating spaces where others feel truly cared for.

The Examen Prayer: Listening to Your Own Heart

To offer the gift of attentive listening, you must first attune to your own heart. Anxiety, distractions, and unprocessed emotions can block your ability to listen well.

Rooted in St. Ignatius of Loyola’s teachings, the *Examen Prayer* is a simple daily practice to reflect on your day, notice God’s presence, and bring your emotions—both joys and struggles—before Him. It helps you discern what’s stirring in your heart, so you can approach relationships with clarity and peace.

The Examen takes about ten minutes and fits easily into daily life. For a guided version, download the *Hallow* app, which offers helpful resources to begin or deepen this practice.

Group Spiritual Direction: Listening to Others

Listening to others means being fully present to their hearts. Group spiritual direction fosters this deep listening in a prayerful, structured way. In groups of three, participants share their stories, reflect together, and discern God's presence.

How It Works (Repeat for Each Person – Set a Timer for Each Step):

- **Sharing (20 minutes):** Invite one member to share what's on their heart while the others listen prayerfully. Resist the urge to comment or interrupt—just listen, silently.
- **Prayer (2 minutes):** Pause for silent prayer, reflecting on what was shared and inviting God to guide the conversation.
- **Questions (15-20 minutes):** Allow the listeners to ask open-ended questions to help the speaker reflect more deeply and grow in awareness of God's presence in their story.
- **Debrief and Prayer (2 minutes):** Debrief and close in prayer, then invite the next speaker to share.

Helpful Guidelines for Questions

When starting out, stick to these open-ended questions to avoid diagnosing or problem-solving.

You're not a therapist—just a loving friend.

- Can you say more about that feeling or sensation?
- How does your body react to that feeling?

- What feelings have you noticed as you think about this?
- Where have you sensed God's presence (or absence) in this situation?
- Do you sense an invitation from the Lord in any of this?
- Is there anything more?
- Would you mind if we sat in silence with this for a few minutes?

These questions provide guardrails, keeping the group focused on listening and allowing speakers to share freely. For the first few sessions, stick to these questions. As you grow comfortable, gradually expand to other open-ended questions.

For more information, you can read Alice Fryling's book "Seeking God Together" or sign up for the Abide Course (described in the Manifesto).

Centering Prayer: Listening to Jesus

If the Examen helps you listen to your own heart, and group spiritual direction teaches you to listen to others, Centering Prayer invites you to listen to Jesus.

It involves sitting quietly for 15-20 minutes, letting go of distractions, and resting in God's presence. You aim to quiet your thoughts and return to the center of prayer by repeating a sacred word, such as 'Jesus' or 'mercy.'

It's harder than it sounds. Thoughts will inevitably arise—what Thomas Merton called "jumping monkeys." Don't fight them or engage with them. Simply let them pass and gently return to your centering word.

The goal isn't to achieve anything or be productive. It's simply to be with the Lord, much like sitting in comfortable silence with a close friend. In this stillness, you create space to hear God's voice—not audibly, but in the silence of your heart, like Elijah.

Silent prayer teaches you to be present with God without filling the space with noise or words. It carries over to your agape feast, helping you approach conversations with calm, attentiveness, and a listening heart—like Mary rather than Martha.



Practicing the Art of Listening in Community

I often wonder how different things might have been if our house church had truly listened. What if, during that tense meeting, we had paused—not to accuse or defend, but to understand? What if we'd heard the leader's exhaustion or the fears hidden behind that cutting remark?

What if we'd created a space where everyone felt safe to share their burdens and joys? Misunderstandings could have become moments of grace. Hurt feelings might have turned into opportunities for connection. Instead of falling apart, we could have grown stronger—united by trust and love.

It's not too late to create that kind of community. Listening isn't just a practical skill—it's an act of love and evangelism. When you listen, you embody Christ's compassion, presence, and healing, inviting others to experience His love.

How? Start with yourself. Practice the Examen to quiet your anxieties and align your heart with God's peace. Sit with Jesus in silence through Centering Prayer, letting His love ground you.

Then make listening the heart of your agape feast. Prioritize connection over perfection. Ask meaningful questions, resist the urge to fix or fill silences, and give the gift of your full attention.

By making listening a priority, you invite the Holy Spirit to work through you in powerful ways

Who in your life needs someone to truly listen right now? How can you create a space for them where they feel safe, seen, and valued?

Listening is the indistinguishable from love, and it's the very heart of hospitality.

Will you take the time to create that space for someone this week?

10

FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND

GOD'S PROVISION MULTIPLIED

Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted.

John 6:11-12 NLT



Bridging the Abyss of Meaninglessness

But Jesus said, “You feed them.”

Luke 9:13 NLT

Have you ever felt like you’re standing at the edge of a deep, dark hole, peering into a void where hope and meaning seem to vanish?

Picture a young man, hunched over on the edge of his bed, his head in his hands, feeling the weight of the world pressing in as the walls seem to close around him.

That was me in 2014—thirty years old, married, and a father of four. On the outside, life seemed normal, but inside, I was crumbling under the pressure of being the sole provider, barely scraping by. The goals I once dreamed of felt impossibly out of reach, like a canyon I couldn't cross.

Despite doing everything I thought I was supposed to—working, going to church, caring for my family—none of it felt like it mattered. I felt alone, with joy slipping away. Even things I once loved—like golf or taking my kids to the park—felt meaningless. Some mornings, just getting out of bed felt impossible.

The voices in my head kept saying: You're a failure. You've wasted your potential. You'll never amount to anything.

A few days after my 30th birthday, I was in a corn maze with my wife and kids, pushing my youngest in a stroller. It should have been a joyful moment, but I felt numb, moving through life on auto-pilot. Dark thoughts crept in: What if I just disappeared? Would anyone even notice?

That's the grip of depression—it doesn't just make you sad; it convinces you the emptiness is permanent, that you're too weak to escape, and no one could possibly understand. At my lowest, I wasn't sure I'd ever find my way out.

But I've learned that God provides the bridges we need to cross those dark chasms—faith and community. Those two bridges carried me from hopelessness back into life.

Bridge # 1: Faith

At my lowest, I thought I had to do something to fix my life—work harder, be better, achieve more. But the harder I tried, the more exhausted I became.

That's when I realized the truth: God doesn't ask me to carry life's weight alone or to try to fix myself. Jesus says,

“This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.”¹

Faith is all God asks for. It's not about proving yourself; it's about trusting God to do for you what you cannot do on your own.

Bridge # 2: Community

In my depression, my instinct was to isolate myself. I didn't want to burden anyone with my problems. But the more I withdrew from people, the deeper I sank into hopelessness.

What saved me were the people who reached out—the friends, family, and mentors who reminded me that I wasn't alone and that God was still at work in my life, even when I couldn't see it.

Community shows us God's love in tangible ways. When we're weak, they lift us up. When we struggle to believe, they walk beside us.

Jesus modeled this by building His ministry around community—not just preaching to crowds, but walking through life with His disciples personally.

The Bridges God Gives Us

If you've ever felt the weight of hopelessness, know this: God doesn't ask you to find your own way out of the darkness. He's already provided the bridges you need.

Faith connects you to God, reminding you of His presence, love, and plan for your life. Community connects you to others, offering support, encouragement, and love to keep you going.

This chapter is about developing a faith that builds community and a community that strengthens faith. Together, they form the foundation of a life filled with purpose and hope.



Faith: Trusting God With What You Have

Faith begins with trust that God can work through even our smallest offerings. The story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand beautifully illustrates this.

When we feel overwhelmed or inadequate, Jesus doesn't ask us to figure it all out. He simply asks us to trust Him with what we have.

Philip and Andrew: The Weight of Grief and Exhaustion

Even the disciples, who walked with Jesus, knew what it was like to feel overwhelmed. The news of John the Baptist's death had shaken Philip and Andrew to their core.

Before meeting Jesus, John had been their teacher and guide, the one who first pointed them to the Lamb of God. Now he was gone—brutally executed by Herod. Grief weighed heavily on their hearts, and unanswerable questions filled their minds: *If John—the greatest prophet—wasn't spared from suffering, what did that mean for them?*

But there was no time to grieve. Crowds followed Jesus everywhere, desperate for healing. And in His endless compassion, He never turned them away.

When Jesus led the disciples to a remote place, Philip and Andrew felt a flicker of relief—finally, a moment to mourn and be alone with their Teacher.

But as they reached the wilderness, their hearts sank. A massive crowd stretched before them—over 5,000 men, plus women and children. Exhausted and burdened by grief, they wondered, *How could they possibly find the strength to serve with so many pressing in on them?*

Then another problem arose—the people were hungry. They had followed Jesus far from home, with no place to buy food.

Jesus turned to Philip and asked, “Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?”²

The question felt impossible. Philip looked at the massive crowd and quickly calculated—it would take more than six months’ wages to feed them all! His practical mind saw only one solution: “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves.”³

Meanwhile, Andrew searched for any scrap of food he could find and found a boy with some bread and fish—a poor man’s meal, barely enough for one person, let alone thousands. Still, he brought the boy to Jesus and said, “There’s a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?”⁴

Both disciples had seen Jesus perform miracles—calming storms, healing the sick—but grief and exhaustion clouded their faith. Logic told them there was no way forward.

What they didn’t realize was that Jesus wasn’t asking them to solve the problem. He was inviting them to trust Him.

This wasn't a test of their *abilities*; it was a test of their *faith*. Jesus wasn't shaming them for their lack but showing that His grace is more than enough. Their limitations weren't barriers; instead, they were the stage for His power.

The Boy's Faith: Offering What You Have

In the crowd, a young boy overheard Andrew asking for food. He looked down at his bundle. It wasn't much. For a moment, doubt crept in. *What's the point? This won't help. What if Andrew brushes me off?*

Then he glanced at the hungry crowd—mothers cradling babies, fathers searching for shade, elderly men sitting in the dust. Something stirred in his heart: *Maybe it's not how much I have but just offering what I do have.*

Hands trembling, the boy stepped forward and offered his food to Andrew, who looked at the small bundle with doubt but brought him to Jesus anyway.

The boy hesitated. But then he saw Jesus' warm, kind smile, as if He was saying: *Thank you. This is enough.*

With newfound courage, the boy handed over his lunch.

Jesus: The Miracle of Abundance

Jesus took the loaves and fish, gave thanks, and had the disciples distribute them. Basket after basket overflowed until over 5,000 men, plus women and children, were fed. When everyone had eaten their fill, twelve baskets of leftovers remained—far more than they started with.

This wasn't just a miracle of provision; it was a sign. Jesus was showing everyone that He is the Bread of Life. He wasn't just satisfying their hunger; He was pointing them to the ultimate answer for their hopelessness, longing, and need—Himself.

Planting Your Mustard Seed

Have you ever felt like what you have to offer is too small to make a difference? Like the needs around you are so overwhelming that it's easier to do nothing at all?

Maybe you feel like Philip and Andrew, exhausted and unsure where to start. Or maybe, like the boy, you're holding something small and wondering: *Will this even matter?*

It's easy to think: *I can't fix my family. I can't save my friend. I can't solve the world's problems—so why try?*

But the beauty of this story is that Jesus didn't need the disciples to have the answers or the boy to bring enough for everyone. He isn't asking you to save the world—He already did that.

He's simply inviting you to trust Him and bring Him what you have. When you do, He can take what little you give Him and turn it into abundance.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand shows us this—it's not about how much you have; it's about offering it to Jesus by faith, trusting Him to do the rest. Even the smallest act of faith can spark something miraculous.

Mother Teresa said, "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love."⁵

A small act of faith is like planting a seed. It may seem insignificant, but in God's hands, it can grow into something far greater than you imagine.

Jesus said,

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet

when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

Something as simple as inviting someone to dinner can grow into something extraordinary. Your home could become like that tree—a place where people find rest, belonging, and renewal.

Faith is the first bridge out of hopelessness. It’s about trusting God with what you have and taking a step forward, no matter how small.

What small step of faith is God calling you to take today? Whatever it is, trust that in Jesus’ hands, even the smallest act can lead to something miraculous.

Plant your mustard seed. Start your agape feast. Let God use your step of faith to build His Kingdom and bring hope to the world.



Community: You Are Not Meant to Face Life Alone

In the Feeding of the Five Thousand, Jesus didn’t just feed a crowd—He brought them together. He turned a crowd of individuals into small, close-knit groups where they could experience real connection and belonging.

From Crowds to Community

Among the multitude, voices rose and fell like waves as strangers jostled shoulder to shoulder. Some exchanged polite nods, but most avoided eye contact—isolated in the sea of people.

A child tugged at her mother's robe, whispering, "I'm hungry." The woman sighed, brushing dust from her face. "I know, sweetheart. Just a little longer."

Nearby, a man murmured to his wife, "Do you think He'll do something?" She hesitated. "I heard He healed a blind man," she said, though her voice carried more doubt than hope.

No one wanted to leave. There was something about Jesus—something in His words and the stories they'd heard—that kept them there, waiting for more.

Jesus stood on the hillside, gazing at the crowd that stretched endlessly across the wilderness, restless and weary under the heavy heat. But Jesus didn't see a *crowd*—He saw potential *communities*.

To others, they might have looked like a nameless, faceless mass. But to Him, they were people who could know, support, and share life with one another.

Turning to His disciples, Jesus said, "Tell them to sit down in groups of about fifty each."⁶

The disciples obeyed, weaving through the crowd with the message: "Everyone, gather into groups of fifty! Sit together where you are. Join a group."

At first, there was confusion. "Why is this necessary?" someone muttered. "Why can't we just stay where we are?" grumbled another. But as the disciples gently urged them, people began to move, shuffle, and settle into groups, following Jesus' instructions.

A man hesitated, glancing at the strangers around him. “What’s this about?” he asked, lowering himself to the ground. His neighbor shrugged but smiled. “I guess we’ll find out together.”

For the first time, they exchanged words—a small connection, a tiny bridge between two lives.

What had been an overwhelming sea of nameless faces began to take shape—small groups of fifty, sitting together, sharing space, exchanging glances and conversation. The noise of the crowd softened, replaced by the quiet hum of connection. No longer lost in the crowd, people began to feel like they belonged.

As the disciples moved among the groups, they marveled at the change. The restless crowd had become a gathering of neighbors.

Now the people were prepared to witness a miracle—not from a distance, but up close, together.

Community in the Early Church

Jesus didn’t organize the crowd into groups of fifty just for logistical reasons. He was teaching us the power of community. In small groups, personal connections form—strangers become neighbors, and neighbors become friends.

The early church understood the power of small, close-knit gatherings. Though thousands were added daily, they didn’t rely on large, impersonal meetings. Instead, they met in homes, sharing meals around tables.

These agape feasts were intimate communities—often about the same size as the groups Jesus formed in the wilderness.

Modern-Day Application

Today, we're surrounded by *crowds*—on social media, in megachurches, at work, or the mall. Yet, despite all the activity, many of us feel more isolated than ever. Have you ever sat in the back of a large church, entered a crowded room, or scrolled endlessly through social media—and felt completely alone?

Now, picture yourself in a living room with ten or, perhaps, as many as fifty people, sharing a meal. There's laughter, conversation—this is where faith comes alive and miracles happen.

Jesus' approach speaks directly to our deep need for spiritual connection. He doesn't see a faceless crowd; He sees people created for community, meant to share life and support one another. That's why small gatherings matter. The agape feast is a simple way to build that kind of connection.

Can you imagine the joy of welcoming someone who feels unseen? You don't have to imagine it—just do it. Invite a neighbor for dinner. Share a meal. Share your stories.

You were made for more than being lonely in a crowd. You were made for community. Jesus calls us into smaller groups so we can truly know and be known.

If you're feeling isolated, take the first step. Start an agape feast or join one. It doesn't have to be big or perfect—just done with faith.

The connection you've been longing for might be waiting for you there, at your own table.



The Two Bridges to Meaning

Faith and community are the two bridges Jesus gives us to lead us from isolation to connection, from despair to hope, and into a life full of purpose and belonging.

A Faith That Builds Community

Like the boy with the loaves and fish, faith calls us to take a small step, even when what we have feels insignificant. When we trust God with even a little—our time, our table, our kindness—He can multiply it into something far greater.

Hospitality is one of the simplest act of faith, planting seeds for a community to grow. You don't need to start big. Community begins with small steps—inviting a neighbor, sharing a meal, or gathering a few friends.

A Community That Strengthens Faith

When we take that first step, community becomes a space where faith comes alive—where struggles are shared, burdens are lifted, and doubts are met with encouragement.

Community reminds us we're not alone. It strengthens our faith, even in life's hardest moments. In these spaces, faith becomes more than a belief—it's something we live and experience together.

What small step of faith can you take today? Can you open your table, invite a neighbor, or reach out to a friend?

Combined, these two create something beautiful when they grow together.

Faith compels us to build a community, and that community, in turn, sustains us on our journey of faith.

Try it, and trust God will use it.



Finding Meaning at the Table

In the depths of my depression, going to church felt like going through the motions. I was surrounded by people but felt completely invisible.

One Sunday, my pastor, Robb, pulled me aside. “I’m starting a group at my house—a ‘missional community,’” he said with a warm smile. “It’s about sharing meals, growing in faith, and living the Gospel in everyday life. I’d love for you to join us.”

I almost said no—I felt like I had nothing to offer. But something in his voice made me say yes. I had no idea that simple yes would change my life.

It didn’t happen overnight, but that group became a lifeline. We shared meals, carried each other’s burdens, and found simple ways to love our neighbors. Slowly, I began to think of church differently.

Around that table, I discovered what Robb meant by an “agape feast lifestyle.” The Gospel wasn’t just something we talked about—it was something we lived. We laughed, prayed, and celebrated together.

In those moments, I wasn't just receiving love; I was learning to give it. Faith and community became real, tangible, and life-giving. We were living in Communion, not just receiving it at church.

Looking back, saying yes to Robb's invitation wasn't just a step out of isolation—it was a step into the life Jesus calls us to live.

In fact, without that small yes, this book might never have been written.

The Communion Table Is Where Faith and Community Come Together

When Jesus took the loaves and fish, gave thanks, and multiplied them, He revealed Himself as the *Bread of Life*. And here's the amazing part: the miracle didn't end on that hillside. It continues today.

Every time we come to the Lord's table for Holy Communion, Jesus still offers Himself as the Bread of Life. In the Eucharist, He nourishes our souls, strengthens our faith, and unites us as one body.

Holy Communion is where faith and community come together. At the table, we place our trust in Jesus and share that sacred moment with others.

The Gospel isn't just about our relationship with God; it's about the family He's creating through His sacrifice on the Cross. And just as Jesus multiplied the bread on the hillside, He continues to multiply His grace through the bread and wine we share today.

The Eucharist nourishes us and sends us out, calling us to share the grace and mercy we've received from Jesus with the world.

Every time you invite someone to your table, every act of hospitality, every agape feast is an extension of the Lord's table—a way of saying, "Come and taste the Bread of Life. Come and find connection, hope, and healing."

Like the boy who offered his lunch or the disciples who passed out the loaves, you don't need all the answers or resources. Jesus simply asks you to give what you have by faith.

The miracle is still happening, and Jesus is inviting you to be a part of it.

Will you say yes?



Taking the First Step

No matter how small your faith feels, Jesus invites you to trust Him and take the first step. What does that look like? Something small.

Offer your lunch

Like the boy's bread and fish, what can you offer today—a few hours for meaningful conversation? A simple act of kindness for a friend? It may not seem like much, but if you do it by faith, it's enough.

Open your table

Who needs an invitation—a neighbor, a friend, a coworker? Hospitality opens space for connection and love.

Start your agape feast

Gather a few friends, share a simple meal, and invite them to start this new thing. It can be small—just trust God to work through it.

When you take that faith-step, you're not just helping others—you're stepping into the life God designed for you. A life of purpose, connection, and hope, where faith and community work together to transform despair into meaning.

Jesus doesn't ask you for perfection, just faith. And He invites you to offer whatever you have.

SIMON THE PHARISEE

GRACE THAT BREAKS THROUGH JUDGMENT

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn’t offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn’t greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.

“I tell you, her sins – and they are many – have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.” Then Jesus said to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven.”

The men at the table said among themselves, “Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?”

And Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Luke 7:44-50 NLT



Storming the Fortress of Judgmentalism

“When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.”

Titus 3:4,5 NLT

Imagine walking into church for the first time. Everything feels warm and inviting—laughter hums, smiles greet you, and the air smells of coffee and flowers. It’s like stepping into a friend’s home.

But as you look closer, something feels off. The warmth seems rehearsed, the smiles too practiced. Behind the friendly façade, you sense something colder—walls not of stone, but of judgment.

Now imagine this: A man walks in, disheveled and worn, his thin jacket no match for the winter cold. The smell of alcohol lingers as his tired eyes scan the room, searching for someone.

Conversations stop. Smiles fade. Eyes look away. The warmth that greeted others moments ago is replaced by stiff, uncomfortable silence, as people feel uneasy and unsure how to respond.

He hesitates, realizing he doesn't belong. What should be a sanctuary of grace feels like a fortress of condemnation.

Instead of offering healing and love, the church becomes a place where this broken man is met with suspicion, coldness, and rejection. Judgment built barriers, keeping out the very people Jesus calls us to love.

What would it take for us to tear down those walls and make the church a place where everyone—no matter their past—could find grace and belonging?

That's the question this chapter explores. As followers of Christ, we're called to do more than attend church—we're called to embody His radical love and grace.

The church doesn't have to be a closed-off fortress. It can be a sanctuary of grace, a refuge where the hurting find healing, acceptance, and belonging.

A World Where the Love of Many Has Grown Cold

On a scorching summer day, a teenage boy stood at a busy intersection, holding a worn cardboard sign: "Hungry. Please Help."

The light turned red, and cars lined up. The boy shuffled between them, his tattered sneakers scuffing the hot pavement.

Melanie noticed him from her car, her kids chatting in the backseat, as the AC hummed softly. She tightened her grip on the wheel. *It's a dangerous world*, she thought, as she locked her doors.

She stared straight ahead, avoiding eye-contact. Excuses filled her mind: *I don't carry cash. What if he uses it for drugs? Shouldn't he be in school? Someone else will help him.*

The light turned green, and Melanie drove off, leaving the boy behind in her rearview mirror. *There's nothing I could've done anyway*, she told herself.

That evening, while scrolling on her phone, she mentioned the homeless boy to her husband. “It’s just so sad to see this in our neighborhood,” she said, shaking her head. “Kids these days. Where are their parents?”

Her husband nodded without looking away from the baseball game. “The system’s broken. But what can you do? You can’t help everyone.”

A Growing Callousness

Judgmentalism doesn’t just show up on street corners; it’s woven into our everyday lives.

A shy young girl with hand-me-down clothes sits alone at lunch, drawing sketches no one’s ever seen. Classmates almost don’t even notice her, and no one asks her name.

A new family of immigrants moves into the neighborhood. As their kids are playing quietly in the yard, neighbors glance out their windows but don’t step outside to say hello. “*Hopefully, they’ll just keep to themselves,*” someone mutters.

These aren’t rare moments; they happen everyday. For most of us, low-status people are easy to overlook. We’re busy. We don’t know what to say or do. And sometimes, we think to ourselves: *They’re in this situation because of their own choices.*

It’s easy to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of problems like homelessness, addiction, and social isolation. How could one person possibly make a difference?

We tend to protect ourselves and create distance, thinking: *It’s not my responsibility.* Over time, that attitude hardens into a cool indifference. If you’ve ever looked away or made excuses, you’re not alone—I’ve done it too.

But here’s the good news: Jesus can show us how to love not just our neighbors, but even our enemies. He can transform our hearts to love as He loves.



Two Types of Hospitality: Christ vs. the Pharisees

Our callousness often reflects the world's values, where status and self-interest come first. But Jesus calls us to a different way of life—one that values people over appearances and love over judgment.

Christ's approach to hospitality was radically different from the norms of His time—and from many of ours.

In Jesus' day, the Pharisees practiced hospitality to gain status, inviting people to their tables not to serve but to advance. Isn't that still common today? We often host to impress, fit in, or climb the social ladder.

It's easy to fall into this trap—making hospitality about appearances, self-interest, or entertaining instead of genuine love. But this kind of hospitality rarely changes lives.

Jesus shows us a better way. He didn't seek out the powerful or influential—He ate with people *below* Him on the social ladder: tax collectors, prostitutes, and lepers, even welcoming outsiders like the Samaritan woman at the well.

His hospitality was radical—aimed down, not up. It wasn't about gaining anything for Himself but about giving: offering healing, forgiveness, and love.

Unlike the Pharisees' performative gatherings, Jesus' table truly changed lives. Outcasts found belonging, sinners found grace, and the broken found restoration. This is how He created a new kind of community: the church.

If Jesus welcomed outcasts and sinners, why do our churches often feel like Pharisee-style gatherings, where only certain people feel welcome?

What would it be like if Christians followed Christ's example, offering hospitality not to impress, but to create sacred spaces where people encounter God's love and grace? This is what He calls us to do.

But first, we must tear down the walls in our own hearts—through repentance.

A Heart Issue, Not a Policy Issue

As Christians, are we practicing Pharisee-style hospitality, welcoming only those who benefit us? Or are we following Jesus' example, tearing down barriers of judgment and inviting those in need of God's love?

The real problem isn't just broken social systems; it's the callousness in our hearts. This is a spiritual issue, not just a policy one. How we treat the poor reveals the state of our hearts.

Jesus challenges us to see people as God sees them—worthy of dignity and compassion. His hospitality flowed from a heart of love, humility, and grace. Social programs can help, but only Christ-like love has the power to truly transform.

To create communities of mercy, we must first ask God to soften our hearts through repentance.

What small step can you take today to reflect Jesus' radical love? Maybe invite someone outside your usual circle to dinner, or listen to someone who feels unseen. Even small acts of kindness can make a big impact, changing the atmosphere of your community.



Dinner at Simon the Pharisee's House

Jesus' radical love often clashes with our instinct to judge and exclude.

In Luke 7:36–50, Jesus dines at Simon the Pharisee's house—a seemingly perfect setting for a teacher like Him: respectable, orderly, full of people eager to discuss the Law.

But what unfolds around the dinner table exposes something wrong about Simon's heart.

Simon's Stone, Cold Fortress

Simon's house was outwardly impressive, but inside it felt more like a courtroom than a home.

He hadn't invited Jesus to honor Him but to interrogate Him, treating the dinner as a chance to judge, not to welcome. Would Jesus measure up to the Pharisees' rigid standards?

To Simon, religion was about rules: staying ritually clean and keeping others in line. Purity and control, not love and grace. He saw himself as the gatekeeper of holiness in the community.

But each rule he kept was like another brick in the wall around his heart. He believed his religious walls protected him from sin and shame. This prideful attitude only isolated him from God and others, blinding him to his own need for grace.

Even with God incarnate sitting at his table, Simon's pride kept him from experiencing the beauty of true Communion.

As host, he ignored even the basic acts of hospitality—no water to wash Jesus' feet, no kiss of greeting, no oil to anoint His head. It wasn't just an oversight; it was a deliberate snub.

Then something happened that left Simon and his guests stunned.

The Sinful Woman's Repentant Heart

As they reclined at the table, a woman known in the town as a sinner entered uninvited. Something about Jesus had drawn her there.

Kneeling before Jesus, she wept—her tears washing the dust off His feet. She let down her hair—a scandalously intimate act, reserved only for private moments—and dried them. Then she broke an alabaster jar of perfume, pouring it over Him. The room filled with its fragrance, as everyone stared in stunned silence.

Unmoved by judgmental stares, she defied every social norm to show her love for Jesus—boldly reminding us that grace is worth pursuing, no matter the cost. As St. John Chrysostom said, “Be ashamed when you sin. Do not be ashamed when you repent.”¹

But Simon was appalled. To him, she wasn't just an interruption; she was a scandal. *If this man were a prophet*, he thought, *He would know what kind of woman is touching Him. She's a sinner!*²

Simon's thoughts revealed his blindness. He didn't see a person—only a problem. All he could see was her sinful past. But Jesus saw what Simon couldn't—the woman's heart, full of love and repentance.

In truth, we're all more like Simon than we want to admit. We may not say it out loud, but in our hearts, we often judge others while ignoring our own need for grace.

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever

This reminds me of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* and the Herdmans—wild, messy kids who crashed the church's Christmas pageant.

They weren't what anyone would call "church material." They broke rules, misbehaved, and seemed like a disaster waiting to happen. To the respectable church members, the Herdmans were a problem.

But by the end, it was the Herdmans—not the "proper" people—who understood the true meaning of Christmas. Like the sinful woman in Luke 7, the Herdmans knew what it meant to need grace. They didn't pretend to have it all together; their hearts were raw and ready to receive.

Meanwhile, the respectable church members—like Simon the Pharisee—were so focused on appearances and rules that they missed the beauty of grace unfolding right in front of them.

Like the Pharisees, our walls of pride and judgment cut us off from both people and God. But Jesus invites us to tear down those walls through repentance.

Repentance: The Door to Grace

Breaking the silence, Jesus told Simon a parable: Two people owed money—one a small amount, the other a much larger debt. When neither could repay, the lender forgave them both.

"Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" Jesus asked.

Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the bigger debt."

“That’s right,” Jesus said.

Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn’t offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn’t greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.”

“I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.”

Then Jesus said to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven.”³

Mercy, not judgment, transformed her heart. And the woman understood.

Repentance opened the door of her heart to God’s love, allowing her to receive His grace and share it.

But Simon remained trapped in his pride. He, like the other Pharisees, saw no need for repentance, rejecting John the Baptist’s call to return to God. His closed heart left no room for love to enter.

The woman, fully aware of her sin, came to Jesus with a contrite heart. Her tears weren’t just sorrow; they were *tears of repentance*, signs of a soul returning to God. Through these tears, Jesus washed away her guilt and filled her with His transforming grace. They were a stream of living water refreshing her soul.

Mercy unlocked her capacity to love deeply and forgiveness set her free. But Simon’s pride kept his heart closed and his love shallow.

Jesus Loves People, Not Things

Simon cared deeply about *things*, like appearances, status, and reputation. But Jesus cared about *people*, even the broken, sinful, and messy ones. Where Simon saw a sinner, Jesus saw a child of God in need of grace.

Simon's love of status and propriety cost him the chance to truly know Jesus. Judgment blinds us to the work of God. It focuses on people's flaws, builds walls of exclusion, and keeps us from seeing the person Jesus died to redeem.

But the sinful woman, through bold repentance, received the grace and love she needed. His forgiveness frees us to become who we were meant to be

This is the Gospel. Though we are sinners, Jesus loves us so much that He died in our place—a gift we receive by faith.

Jesus calls us to see others through God's eyes—not as problems interfering with our goals, but as people worthy of love, no matter how messy their lives. True religion means loving others with the same grace Jesus shows us.

Are we building walls of exclusion, like Simon? Or are we embracing people, seeing them as worthy of love, no matter their past?

Hospitals of Hospitality

Judgment builds walls that isolate, but repentance tears them down. But Jesus doesn't just call us to remove walls—He invites us to build homes that feel like hospitals, where people can come as they are and find healing through His mercy.

Christlike hospitality means opening our tables, homes, and hearts to reflect God's Kingdom, where no one is excluded, and grace abounds.

For Jesus, hospitality wasn't about appearances; it was a way to redeem lives by creating space for people to experience God's love.

What if we lived like that? What if our homes became sanctuaries of grace and our tables places of healing and belonging?

In the next section, we'll explore how to build this kind of community—where hospitality turns judgment into mercy and walls of exclusion into bridges of grace.



Hospitality That Heals

True hospitality, as Jesus practiced, isn't about perfection; it's about creating spaces where grace thrives and people feel seen, loved, and valued.

Take Miranda's story. Raised in an atheist home, she grew up without knowing God. At 19, after a toxic breakup, she found herself in a dark season, questioning everything.

That's when her coworker, Ashlyn, invited her to an Alpha Course at her house. The relaxed, judgment-free atmosphere felt like hanging out with friends. Week after week, as Miranda kept coming back, God began "connecting the dots" in her mind. For the first time, the Gospel made sense, and she began to believe.

If Ashlyn's heart had been closed off, Miranda might never have received the life-changing invitation. It wasn't perfection or polished words that drew her; it was Ashlyn's choice to practice hospitality and create a welcoming space for her co-worker.

Ashlyn's invitation to Miranda wasn't unlike what Jesus did at Simon the Pharisee's house: creating a space where His grace could transform a life. But Ashlyn's story also shows us that hospitality doesn't have to be extravagant—just faithful.

This is the power of true hospitality—that starts with us tearing down walls of judgment and opening our hearts to those around us. So, what walls have you built up? How can you let go of your pride and let God transform your view of others?

Take a small step today—ask the Holy Spirit to soften any callousness in your heart. Then extend kindness to someone in need, invite someone new to your table, or create a space where grace and belonging can grow.

Practical Steps

Here's how you can create spaces of healing and belonging—places that reflect the radical hospitality of Jesus and embody His Kingdom values:

Create a Culture of Repentance

Hospitality begins with a change of heart. Ask God to reveal any walls of judgment. Acknowledge your need for grace, and encourage others to do the same. Repentance softens our hearts and creates space for God's love to flow through us.

Include Outsiders

Seek out those who may feel unseen—people on the margins or with broken pasts. Invite them into your space with genuine love, making it clear they are valued. Jesus didn't limit His table to the *right* sort of people, and neither should we.

Add Rituals of Grace

Incorporate simple acts that reflect God's love—like starting your meal with a prayer or lighting a candle to represent Christ's presence. Small gestures like these create spaces where grace is at the forefront.

Encourage Vulnerability

True connection grows in safety and trust. Share your own faith journey—including struggles and doubts—to create space for others to open up. Vulnerability deepens relationships and allows grace to thrive.

A World Where Grace Flows Freely

Remember the disheveled man walking into church? Imagine he's not met with cold stares, but with open arms, invited in as a guest of honor. Picture the church, not as a fortress of condemnation, but as a hospital for souls—a place where broken hearts are healed, and all are welcome at the table of grace.

The world is full of walls of judgment and exclusion. But what if we lived like Jesus? Imagine a table where neighbors, strangers, the broken, and the hopeful gather for meals, stories, and grace.

When our homes become sanctuaries of grace and our tables places of belonging, lives are transformed by the radical love of Jesus flowing through ordinary people like you and me.

By breaking down walls and building bridges of hospitality, you reflect God's heart and invite others to experience His love.

Who will you invite to your table this week? What barriers will you tear down to create a space where grace and love can thrive?

12

LEVI, THE TAX COLLECTOR

DRIVING OUT THE SERPENT OF ACCUSATION

Later, as Jesus left the town, he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.

Later, Levi held a banquet in his home with Jesus as the guest of honor. Many of Levi's fellow tax collectors and other guests also ate with them.

But the Pharisees and their teachers of religious law complained bitterly to Jesus' disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with such scum?"

Jesus answered them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent."

Luke 5:27-32 NLT

* Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17



Crushing the Serpent of Accusation

Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

Romans 8:33-34 NLT

Have you ever felt crushed under the weight of accusation? Sometimes it comes from others—a cutting remark or a judgmental glance—but often, it's the inner voice whispering: *You're not enough. You've failed. You don't deserve God's love.*

I remember the day I finally confessed my years of guilt, regret, and shame that I had kept buried deep inside me. I sat down with my spiritual director, Rita (yes, her again!), my prayer journal trembling in my hands.

Three or four pages were filled with everything I thought disqualified me from God's love. As I read aloud, my voice cracked. It was terrifying. Part of me wondered if Rita would see me differently after hearing it all.

"Thank you for sharing that," Rita said, gently. "That must have been so heavy to carry alone. Matt, your sin doesn't define you. You are a beloved child of God, and you are forgiven."

When I left her office, I realized something profound: God didn't see me the way I saw myself. The shame I thought was too big to overcome was no match for the size of His love.

Accusation is one of Satan's oldest tricks. But Romans 8 reminds us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

Jesus isn't our accuser; He's our advocate. At God's right hand, He silences every accusing voice and declares us forgiven through His sacrifice on the Cross.



The Broken Man in Capernaum

There was a man in Capernaum, laying on a mat—physically broken and spiritually crushed.

Day after day, he stared at the same four walls, his body motionless, his heart heavy. Once, he could walk, work, and live freely. Now, his life was a constant reminder of everything he had lost.

As the years passed, doubts began to consume him. Was this punishment for his sins—or his parents' sins? He had begged God for healing, but the silence from heaven only deepened his despair. *Does God even care? Why am I being punished?*

Whispers gnawed at his soul: *God has rejected you. You're worthless.*

Heavenly Courtroom: The Accuser Takes the Stage

While the man lay paralyzed, a scene unfolded in heaven's courtroom.

Before the throne of God, Satan—the accuser—stood ready to condemn.

The Lord asked him, “Where did you come from?”

“I’ve been in Capernaum,” Satan sneered, “Have you seen the paralyzed man there? He’s drowning in doubt, convinced You’ve abandoned him.”

The Lord replied calmly, “I have seen him. What do you propose?”

Satan’s voice dripped with venom, “He’s crippled, hopeless, his faith unraveling. Bring him to judgment for questioning You!”

God’s answer was simple but firm, “Very well. Bring him to me.”

The Accuser: How Satan Paralyzes Us

Satan, whose very name means “accuser,” thrives on sowing shame and guilt to alienate us from God.

In our weakest moments, his whispers grow louder: *You’re unworthy, unforgivable. God has turned His back on you.*

These accusations paralyze us, making us believe the lies and forget the truth of Christ’s unfailing love.

Jesus: Our Heavenly Advocate

But Jesus stands as our advocate in the heavenly courtroom. While Satan accuses, Jesus defends. He doesn’t deny our brokenness, but He takes it upon Himself.

Pointing to the Cross, He declares, “I have paid the price. This beloved child belongs to me.”

Christ's victory silences every charge against us, reminding us—and all of heaven—that we are covered by His righteousness.

On Earth: The Advocate Acts

Word spread quickly—a prophet had come to Capernaum! Hearing this, the paralyzed man's friends carried him on his mat to see Jesus. But the house was packed, and they couldn't get in.

Undeterred, they climbed onto the roof, pulled away the tiles, and lowered their friend down—right in front of Jesus. The room went silent. All eyes were on the paralyzed man. What would Jesus do?

Jesus looked at him with compassion and spoke unexpected words: "Be encouraged, my child! Your sins are forgiven."

The Pharisees gasped. "That's blasphemy!" they whispered. "Does he think he's God?"¹

They watched Jesus closely, ready to judge His every word. To them, this was more than bold—it was intolerable. Only God can forgive sins! Who was this man claiming the authority of God?

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus asked, "Is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and walk?'" Without waiting for an answer, He turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!"²

Immediately, the man stood. His legs were strong, his heart felt light, and the weight of his burden was gone. He picked up his mat and walked out, right in front of everyone.

The Pharisees were stunned. Jesus had healed with the power of a prophet, yet He spoke like a heretic—as if He had the authority of God. How could they make sense of this? Why would God allow a deceiver to perform such a miracle?



The Most Sinful Man in Capernaum: A Legal Brief

Satan's case against the paralytic had failed. Seething with rage, he paced before the throne of God.

"You may have forgiven the paralyzed man," he hissed, "but let's see how far Your mercy truly goes. I present a new case: Levi, son of Alphaeus—the most sinful man in Capernaum."

Satan's voice sharpened, dripping with venom as he laid out his accusations.

"Levi is a traitor. He sold his soul for money, collecting taxes for Rome while betraying his own people. Every coin he takes represents another act of greed and injustice, leaving families hungry and desperate.

He overcharges his hardworking neighbors, lining his pockets while calling in Roman soldiers to crush any who resist. His wealth is stained with suffering, and he's despised by everyone—rightly so.

He has no place in the synagogue—he can't even enter the Temple—and he has no hope for redemption, nor a desire to repent. He's beyond saving.

Levi's the worst of the worst—a thief, a traitor, a lost cause. I demand this court condemn him!"

Satan paused, waiting for God's verdict.

Then God replied, calm yet resolute, "Bring Levi to me."

The Proof: Christ's Authority on Earth to Forgive Sins

Levi sat at his tax booth, watching the bustling marketplace. Merchants bartered, children laughed, and fishermen hauled in their catches. But Levi was cut off from the community, surrounded by a wall of hatred.

Sharp glares, muttered insults, and parents pulling their children away, whispering warnings: *“Don’t grow up to be like him.”*

The Pharisees passed by with disdain, treating him as a symbol of everything wrong with society. To them, Levi wasn’t just a sinner—he was beyond redemption.

Levi had hardened himself to the rejection, convincing himself it was the price of wealth and security. But lately, the isolation weighed heavier. Deep down, he wondered: Did God see him the same way everyone else did? Was there any hope for someone like him?

Then Jesus appeared. After healing the paralyzed man, He had made a bold promise: “I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins.”³

And now, He was about to show it.

The crowd hushed as Jesus approached the tax booth. Levi panicked, his hands hovering over the coins. No one came to him without anger in their eyes—what could this rabbi possibly want?

Jesus stopped in front of him, His gaze steady and piercing, but not condemning. Levi braced for rebuke, but instead, Jesus said the last thing anyone expected Him to say: “Follow me and be my disciple.”⁴

Levi froze, stunned. For a moment, he wasn’t sure if he heard Him right. Surely this was a mistake. But when he looked into Jesus’ eyes, he felt something he hadn’t felt in years—hope.

Then without hesitating, Levi stood and followed Jesus, leaving behind the coins on the table. The greed, betrayal, and isolation that had weighed on him for so long fell away. He didn't fully understand it yet, but in that moment, those two words—*Follow me*—marked the beginning of a brand-new life.

Jesus didn't view Levi as a greedy tax collector or a traitor; He saw a man ready for redemption. If He could save Levi, He could save anyone. What greater proof of His authority could He offer?

Radical Grace Defies Expectations

To the people in Capernaum, Levi was worse than just a sinner. Yet Jesus extended radical grace to him, challenging us to reflect on our own heart. Do we see others through the lens of accusation or the eyes of grace?

Consider Corrie ten Boom, a Holocaust survivor, who shared this powerful story of forgiveness:

After the war, while speaking about God's love, she was approached by a man she immediately recognized—a former Nazi guard from Ravensbrück, where she and her sister Betsie had been imprisoned, and where Betsie had died. The man, now a Christian, extended his hand and asked, "Will you forgive me?"

Corrie froze as memories of the camp's horrors overwhelmed her. Anger surged, and forgiveness felt impossible—until she prayed, "Jesus, help me. I can lift my hand; You supply the feeling."

As she took his hand, she felt God's love flood her heart. "I forgive you, brother," she said. "With all my heart."

Corrie's forgiveness defied all expectations, proving that God's grace doesn't just forgive—it can transform even enemies into family. Both Levi and the guard found new life through God's radical mercy.

Levi: Disciple of Christ

Calling Levi as a disciple was more than shocking; it was scandalous. Gasps rippled through the crowd as they whispered, “Does Jesus not know who Levi is?”

The Pharisees, their eyes narrowed with suspicion, watched from a distance. To them, Jesus’ actions defied logic. How could a man claiming to represent God associate with someone like Levi?

Yet Levi’s transformation was as obvious as it was immediate. The man once defined by greed and betrayal opened his home to Jesus—and he threw a banquet, inviting everyone he knew to meet Him.

The house was filled with tax collectors, outcasts, and sinners, all seated at the same table with Jesus. This was more than a meal; it was a picture of grace in action.

Levi, now practicing radical hospitality, wanted others to experience the same mercy that had changed his life.

Who Were the Accusers?

To the Pharisees, the scene at Levi’s house was outrageous. Jesus, who had already offended them by claiming to forgive sins, was now sharing a meal with tax collectors and sinners—the lowest of the low in their eyes.

As Jesus reclined at the table, the Pharisees stood outside, their indignation growing. Peering through the windows, they saw not grace, but sacrilege. Finally, they confronted His disciples: “Why does your teacher eat with such scum?”⁵

Their words dripped with the venom of accusation, quick to condemn others while blind to the darkness in their own hearts. The Pharisees were furious about Levi’s repentance, like Jonah in Nineveh.

For them, Levi was defiled, and sharing a meal with him was unthinkable for anyone claiming to be holy. Jesus was crossing an unforgivable line, associating with a man they believed deserved condemnation, not forgiveness.

But Jesus saw what they couldn't—the potential for redemption in every person, no matter how far they had fallen—so He didn't care about their rigid expectations about purity.

When the Pharisees questioned Jesus, He responded directly: “Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do... I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”⁶

With these words, Jesus exposed their pride and lack of mercy, revealing they were just as sinful and in need of forgiveness as the people they condemned. They claimed to teach God's ways but failed to grasp His heart: “I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.”⁷

This wasn't just a rebuke; it was an invitation to embrace the grace the Pharisees so desperately needed.

From Accused to Advocate

Levi's transformation sent shockwaves through the community. Once a symbol of greed and betrayal, he became a living testament to grace and redemption.

In the same way Jesus defends us in heaven's courtroom, we are called to advocate for others at the table, like Levi did—silencing the voice of accusation with radical hospitality.

Levi's home became a place where people could encounter the same life-changing grace he had received—a powerful witness to the words of Jesus: “Follow me and be my disciple.”

That same invitation is extended to you today, no matter who you are.



The Spirit of Accusation in the Pharisees

Though the Pharisees saw themselves as protectors of God's law, their zeal blinded them to their own flaws. Instead of embodying God's mercy, they fell into three deadly traps we need to watch out for: **moral superiority, avoiding sinners, and hypocrisy.**

Moral Superiority

The Pharisees prided themselves on strict obedience to the law—fasting, tithing, and following purity codes with precision. In their eyes, they were the gold standard of righteousness.

But their outward actions hid the pride festering in their hearts. Measuring their worth by religious performance, they looked down on others, especially people like Levi. Passing his tax booth, they judged him with glares, thinking: *Thank God I'm not a sinner like him.*

This same mindset is alive today in the form of moral superiority and public judgment, often seen in online "cancel culture." Like the Pharisees, it thrives on pointing out others' faults while ignoring the pride and brokenness in our own hearts.

Blinded by their self-righteousness, the Pharisees couldn't see their own need for grace. They thought their actions brought them close to God, but their pride kept them far from Him.

Avoiding Sinners

The Pharisees equated holiness with separation, avoiding sinners to protect their own “purity.” To them, Levi’s house was a place of spiritual filth, and they couldn’t fathom why Jesus would willingly enter such a den of iniquity.

This mindset persists today when religious communities retreat into safe, comfortable bubbles, avoiding secular society out of fear of being “tainted.” Like the Pharisees, this obsession with staying separate can blind us to God’s mission—to seek and save the lost.

Instead of seeing sinners as sheep in need of a shepherd, they are too often viewed as threats to avoid rather than people to love.

Hypocrisy

The Pharisees claimed to represent God, but their actions told a different story. They were quick to expose others’ sins while ignoring their own, demanding strict adherence to the law yet withholding mercy from those who struggled.

Jesus called them “whitewashed tombs”—outwardly beautiful but inwardly full of death. Their hypocrisy wasn’t just about breaking rules; it was about misrepresenting God’s character. They claimed His grace for themselves while denying it to others, withholding the very mercy God longs to give to all.

Jesus’ Example: Advocacy Over Accusation

Jesus didn’t accuse Levi—He invited him into a new life. Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus extended the grace that led to repentance.

By sitting at Levi’s table, Jesus boldly declared that God’s grace is for everyone—no one is too far gone. Jesus wasn’t afraid of being *contaminated* by

sinners like the Pharisees were; Instead, He knew His presence could make sinners clean.

This is the power of His authority to forgive sins. Jesus doesn't leave us in our brokenness. He restores, redeems, and calls us into new life—not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

Self-Reflection: Are You an Advocate or Accuser?

The Pharisees' mindset didn't vanish with the first century—it's a trap we can still fall into today. If we're not careful, we can become accusers, pointing fingers instead of offering grace.

Take a moment to examine your heart.

- Do you feel morally superior because of your good deeds or religious practices?
- Do you avoid people you see as “sinners,” fearing they might tarnish you?
- Is it easier for you to judge others than to show them mercy?

If you see these tendencies in yourself, don't despair. The same grace that transformed Levi is available to you. Jesus calls us to let go of accusation and embrace advocacy—to pray for others, stand up for them, and love them. Instead of avoiding sinners, He calls us to invite them to the table.

The Pharisees believed they were defending God, but they misrepresented Him. Jesus came to show a better way—a way of mercy, forgiveness, and radical love.

Ask yourself:

- Am I an advocate or an accuser in my community?
- Am I drawing people closer to God or pushing them away with judg-

ment?

Jesus' call to "Follow me" isn't just for Levi—it's for all of us. He's inviting us to leave behind accusation and join Him in the work of redemption. Will you say yes?

Jesus Asks: "Who Do You Say I Am?"

When you imagine God, do you see a strict judge ready to punish sinners, or an advocate using His power to forgive and restore?

When Jesus called Levi, He didn't accuse or condemn him for his greed and betrayal. Instead, He extended a gentle invitation that transformed a despised tax collector into a saint—one who would one day write the Gospel of Matthew.

This is the heart of Jesus' mission—reconciling sinners to God through love and forgiveness. And as His followers, we are called to do the same.

“Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.”⁸

Jesus calls us to silence the voice of accusation and extend His radical mercy to those around us.

Ask yourself: Are you following in Jesus' footsteps, creating spaces where sinners can encounter God's grace?

You could, if you hosted an agape feast.



Building a Table of Mercy

Don't downplay the power of opening your home, sharing a simple meal, a table, and a willingness to connect. It leads to personal transformation. Jesus modeled this at Levi's house, and He calls you to do the same.

Consider Jorge, who immigrated to the country, unable to speak the language. Isolated and overwhelmed, he spiraled into depression and became addicted to pills. But everything changed when a neighbor invited him to church, and he joined a Bible study.

Over meals and conversations, Jorge encountered God's love through the hospitality of the Christians from church. Through it, he found faith—and it saved his life.

Imagine your home as a place where grace overflows—a space where no one is too broken or unworthy to be welcomed. This is what Jesus modeled at Levi's house. It wasn't just a meal; it was a declaration of God's mercy for all.

Here's how you can start.

Invite the Unseen and Unloved

Think of someone in your life who feels excluded or overlooked—someone longing for connection, like Levi. Reach out to them. Invite them to your table, not because they've earned it, but because Jesus first welcomed you.

It could be a neighbor, coworker, or family member who feels disconnected, like Jorge.

Speak Life Over Your Guests

Make your table a place of encouragement. Share stories of God's mercy and speak words that remind others they are seen and loved by Him.

Resist the urge to gossip or criticize. Instead, let your table reflect Jesus' heart—a space where grace is encountered, not accusation.

Pray for Transformation

Before your guests arrive, pray to see them as God does—beloved children with potential for redemption. Pray for healing, reconciliation, and a heart free from accusation, so you can be an advocate of His grace.

Practice Christlike Hospitality

Be generous with your time, attention, and kindness. Listen without judgment, reflecting the heart of Jesus, who welcomed sinners as friends.

Celebrate Stories of Redemption

Levi's first act as a disciple was to share the grace he received. He hosted a feast to introduce his friends to the One who changed his life.

Follow his example. Use your table to celebrate how God is at work in your community. Remind people that the same grace that transformed Levi is available to them.

Saying Yes to Jesus' Call

Jesus still calls us to follow Him, leave behind our past, and build a Kingdom of mercy. Will you follow Him?

Take the first step. Who will you invite to experience God's love?

13

ZACCHAEUS

KEEPING YOUR EYES ON HIS GLORY

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.”

Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled.

Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!”

Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”

Luke 19:5-10 NLT



Renouncing the Grumbling Spirit

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Philippians 4:8 NIV

Elder Paisios once shared a parable about two kinds of people in the world—bees and flies.

Bees, he explained, are drawn to beauty. No matter where they are, they find the flowers, collect nectar, and bring life. They don't waste time on garbage; they're too focused on what's sweet.

Flies, however, ignore the beauty around them and go straight to what's rotten. Ask a fly about the nearest rose garden, and it wouldn't know. It's only interested in what stinks.

This parable offers a simple truth: some people focus on what is good, lovely, and praiseworthy, while others fixate on flaws and shortcomings.

Which are you? A bee or a fly? Do you seek what's beautiful, or fixate on what's broken?

Do you instinctively look for the good in people, or do you catch yourself dwelling on what's lacking, broken, or frustrating in them?

In Philippians 4:8, Paul gives us a blueprint for living in alignment with God's vision for community—a call to focus on what is true, noble, and praiseworthy.

This is the bee mindset.

It's not about ignoring reality or being naïve. It's about choosing to see through the lens of faith, hope, and love—focusing on God's grace rather than the world's flaws.

And here's the incredible truth: **Jesus is the ultimate bee.**

When He looks at you, He doesn't fixate on your failures; He sees who you are becoming—your future glory, not just your present struggles.

If Christ sees us with such grace, shouldn't we do the same for others? What if, instead of being flies that focus on the dirt, we became bees—seeking and calling forth beauty in those around us?

This chapter is an invitation to renounce the grumbling spirit that creeps into our hearts and embrace the bee mindset. It's about seeing others through heaven's eyes, rejecting condemnation, and choosing faith.

When we focus on what is lovely and excellent in others, we honor them and align our hearts with God's.

So, which will you be—a bee or a fly? The choice is yours: seek the good and the lovely, or stay trapped in grumbling.



Seeing Through Heaven's Eyes

One evening, a friend asked me a question that caught me off guard: *"What do you think God sees when He looks at you?"*

I gave the answer I'd always known: "He sees Jesus taking my place." It felt safe and theologically correct.

But my friend pressed deeper, "Is that all?"

I hesitated. Then I realized something—yes, God sees me covered in Christ's righteousness, but He also sees more. He sees who I'm becoming. Not just the person I am today, with all my flaws and struggles, but the masterpiece He is shaping me into for eternity.

Right now, we may feel like caterpillars, far from glorious. But God already sees the butterfly. He knows the metamorphosis that's coming—the beauty that will emerge, the glory we will one day reflect.

He sees the finished work, even when all we see are the rough edges.

As Philippians 1:6 reminds us: "God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."¹

God is the ultimate beekeeper, drawing out the sweetness and potential in each of us. And if He is the Master, then we are called to be His apprentices, learning to draw out the sweetness in others too.

What if we stopped focusing on people's flaws and started seeing them through heaven's eyes? Imagine the impact if we looked past people's shortcomings and glimpsed the person God is shaping them to be—their future, not just their present struggles.

Think about someone in your life you've been viewing through a lens of frustration or disappointment. How might your interactions change if you saw them as the person God is transforming them into?

This perspective isn't about ignoring reality or pretending people are perfect. It's about choosing faith over cynicism, hope over judgment. It's trusting that God's grace is actively at work, even when it's not immediately visible.

When I coach my son's little league team, I don't just see a group of noisy 10-year-olds. I see future husbands, fathers, and leaders in the making. My role isn't just teaching baseball—it's shaping character.

Seeing others through God's eyes takes patience. Transformation is slow, often hidden beneath layers of struggle. But when we stop defining people by their past, transformation can begin.

A few years ago, I tried a simple spiritual practice that reshaped how I see people. For one week, every time I encountered someone—whether a family member, coworker, or stranger on the bus—I silently prayed, "Lord, they're image-bearers."

I whispered it in the grocery store, repeated it in traffic, and even prayed it while scrolling through social media. By the end of the week, something shifted. Strangers were no longer just faces in the crowd; they were reflections of God's creativity and love.

The grumpy cashier? An image-bearer. The person who cut me off in traffic? An image-bearer. The coworker I found difficult to work with? An image-bearer.

I found myself offering more patience and developing a quiet awe at the sheer number of people God created—each unique, valuable, and known by Him.

That simple prayer rewired my perspective. I realized how often I'd seen people through frustration, comparison, or indifference. But when I chose to see them through God's eyes, my heart softened.

Even now, when I feel impatience creeping in, I return to that prayer. And every time, I'm reminded: If God sees them as worthy of love and redemption, so should I.

Jesus modeled this beautifully with Zacchaeus—showing us what happens when we choose to see people through the lens of who they can become, rather than who they are today.

Let's take a closer look at this story.



The Day Salvation Came to Zacchaeus' House

When Jesus entered Jericho, the streets were packed. Crowds pressed in, eager to glimpse the rabbi who healed the sick and spoke with authority. Among them was Zacchaeus—short in stature but towering in wealth and influence.

As chief tax collector, he had built his fortune by collaborating with the occupying Romans, extorting his own people, and taking more than his share. To the people of Jericho, he wasn't just a sinner; he was a traitor.

Despite his riches, Zacchaeus was restless. He had everything money could buy, yet an ache lingered that no wealth could fill. Despised by his community and ashamed of himself, he carried a full purse but an empty soul.

Then, he heard Jesus was coming. Unable to see over the crowd, Zacchaeus did something shocking—he climbed a sycamore tree. A man of his status wouldn't typically do something so undignified, but desperation outweighed dignity. Deep down, something stirred. It wasn't just curiosity—it was the quiet pull of the Holy Spirit, preparing him for a divine encounter.

As Jesus passed by, He stopped, looked up, and met Zacchaeus' gaze. In that moment, Jesus saw more than a corrupt tax collector—He saw a man longing for redemption. While others defined Zacchaeus by his failures, Jesus saw him through the eyes of love and possibility.

That moment—being truly seen—became the turning point of his life.

Then Jesus called him by name, “Zacchaeus! Quick, come down! I must be a guest at your home today.”²

He didn't say, “Repent!” or “Get your life together.” Instead, Jesus led with hospitality and grace.

Before Zacchaeus could say a word, Jesus extended an invitation that shattered the expectations of everyone in town. In that culture, sharing a meal wasn't just casual; it was an act of friendship, association, and belonging. And of all the people in Jericho, Zacchaeus deserved it the least.

Yet Jesus wasn't afraid to be associated with him. Where others saw a corrupt tax collector, Jesus saw a man longing for redemption. Just as “Follow me” changed Levi's life, “I must stay at your house” changed everything for Zacchaeus.

Jesus' response challenges how we see others. Too often, we size people up by their failures, but Jesus sees beyond the surface. Instead of condemnation, He offers Communion. Instead of rejection, He offers relationship.

And He does the same for us. No matter how far we've strayed, Jesus meets us where we are, stepping into our mess with grace and forgiveness.

By entering Zacchaeus' home, Jesus was offering more than a meal—He was offering peace. The same peace He told His disciples to bring into every home they entered: "May God's peace be on this house."³

Who in your life needs that peace? Who might be hiding in their own version of a sycamore tree, wondering if they're too far gone? The way Jesus approached Zacchaeus reminds us that transformation often begins with a simple act of hospitality.

Like Jesus, we are called to extend an invitation—not with judgment, but with open hearts and open homes.

Hospitality as a Path to Transformation

Zacchaeus' life didn't change because Jesus preached at him from a distance; it changed because Jesus sat at his table. It was in the intimacy of a shared meal that Zacchaeus encountered a love that transformed him from the inside out.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, we see how Jesus came to bring salvation.

In Luke 19:10, Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."⁴

But how did He seek after them? He tells us in Luke 7:34: "The Son of Man came eating and drinking."⁵

Jesus didn't rely on sermons alone—He reached the lost by sharing meals with them. He knew that salvation can come around tables, in the context of real relationships.

Our homes can be places of healing and renewal when we create space for others to encounter grace. Whether it's a simple cup of coffee or a meal shared

with intention, hospitality opens doors for God to work in ways beyond our imagination.

Who is God inviting you to welcome? Who in your life needs to experience the radical hospitality of Jesus?

But not everyone will celebrate when grace is offered.

Grumbling Over Grace

When Jesus invited Himself into Zacchaeus' home, the crowd grumbled: "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.⁶

To them, Zacchaeus was beyond redemption—corrupt, compromised, and undeserving. Offering grace to someone like him felt offensive. But Jesus wasn't just extending grace to Zacchaeus; He was challenging their entire way of thinking about who was 'in' and who was 'out.'

They believed that closeness to God had to be earned—reserved for the righteous, those who followed the law. But Jesus shattered those expectations, showing that in the Kingdom, even the most despised sinner had a seat at His table.

The crowd focused on Zacchaeus' past—his greed, his betrayal—but Jesus saw someone in need of grace. And that's the challenge of grace: it disrupts our sense of fairness, welcoming the undeserving, loving the unlovable, and humbling those who think they've earned it.

But Jesus was showing them a new way—God's grace is given freely to people who don't deserve it.

How often do we think like flies?

- *"Why should they get a second chance?"*
- *"Do they really deserve forgiveness?"*

- *“Shouldn’t they have to prove they’ve changed?”*

The crowd in Jericho grumbled at Zacchaeus’ redemption, just like the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

When his wayward brother returned, the older son didn’t celebrate—he sulked, bitter that grace was given so freely to someone who had squandered everything. He focused on fairness, not forgiveness, and missed the joy of a transformed life.

But the father’s response was clear: “We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!”⁷

Grace isn’t about who deserves it; it’s about who needs it—and the truth is, we all do.

The crowd’s grumbling revealed more than their opinions of Zacchaeus—it exposed their own pride and resistance to a mercy bigger than they could comprehend.

What about us?

- Do we withhold forgiveness, waiting for people to earn it?
- Are we more concerned with fairness than celebrating salvation?
- Will we grumble outside the feast, or join in the celebration?

Grace often feels uncomfortable because it challenges our sense of justice. But grace, by nature, is unfair—and that’s what makes it beautiful.

Jesus didn’t let public opinion stop Him from offering grace to Zacchaeus, and neither should we. Instead of standing outside, arms crossed in judgment, He invites us to step inside and rejoice over every soul that comes home.

Welcoming: More Like Jesus

Zacchaeus' story invites us to lead with grace-filled hospitality.

We often wait for people to change before welcoming them in, but Jesus does the opposite—He invites first and trusts God to bring the transformation. Consider this:

- Who in your life is watching from a distance, feeling unworthy of connection?
- Is there someone you can invite for coffee, dinner, or a simple conversation?
- Are you seeing people the way Jesus does?

Who needs an invitation from you today? Don't wait for them to change—take the first step. Like Jesus, let's call them down from their trees and welcome them to the table.

Zacchaeus Became a New Man

Salvation didn't enter Zacchaeus' home through judgment or rebuke, but through the simple act of sharing a meal with Jesus.

Sitting across from his Savior, surrounded by the warmth of hospitality, Zacchaeus encountered a love that softened his heart and stirred a desire to make things right.

Overwhelmed by grace, he stood and declared: "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"⁸

What began as a quiet dinner became a turning point in his life. Zacchaeus' first response to Christ's love wasn't mere regret; it was action. His repentance wasn't

private; it was public and costly. He didn't just feel sorry; he sought to restore what had been broken, heal what had been harmed, and give instead of take.

In Jesus' presence, Zacchaeus was no longer defined by his past failures. He was no longer just a tax collector; he became a man of generosity, integrity, and humility. Where once he saw his neighbors as a means to gain wealth, he now saw them as people to be loved.

His transformation wasn't just about money; it was about a heart made new. The loneliness that came with his old life of greed was replaced with restored relationships and newfound joy in serving others.

Fruit in Keeping With Repentance

True repentance isn't just a private change of heart; it changes how we relate to others, too.

Zacchaeus didn't settle for a quiet apology to God; he took bold steps to make things right. Giving half his wealth to the poor and repaying those he had wronged wasn't an attempt to earn salvation—it was the evidence that he'd received it.

His encounter with Jesus reoriented his entire life, moving him from self-serving to self-giving, from isolation to community, from exploiting others to blessing them.

In Jesus' presence, Zacchaeus discovered that grace doesn't leave us the same. It moves us toward restoration—healing old wounds, mending relationships, and bringing justice where there was once injustice.

As Zacchaeus stood before Jesus, vowing to live with generosity and integrity, Jesus declared: "Salvation has come to this house today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham."⁹

Jesus didn't say salvation *will come* once you've made things right. No, He proclaimed it had *already* come.

Zacchaeus' new identity wasn't something he had to earn; it was a gift received by grace. In Christ, he was no longer an outcast, but a son, welcomed into the family of God.

He went from a man consumed by greed to one overflowing with generosity, from being rejected by his community to embracing his role in it, from chasing wealth to finding true riches in Christ. He gained something wealth never could give—Communion with God and his community.

This is the power of salvation: Jesus meets us where we are, but He never leaves us the same.

From Sinner to Saint

Zacchaeus' story is proof that no one is beyond God's reach. And it all started with an invitation to dinner.

In the end, Zacchaeus chose to become a bee—drawn to the sweetness of Christ's grace. He turned away from the life that isolated him and embraced a life of connection, purpose, and love.

And we are invited to do the same.

What if, like Zacchaeus, we chose to see our lives through the lens of grace and transformation? What step of reconciliation and humility can you take today?

Jesus stands at the door, ready to bring salvation—not just to our hearts, but to our homes, our relationships, and our communities. Are you ready to welcome Him in?



Practicing the Bee Mindset in Your Agape Feast

Jesus used hospitality to create room for grace to take root in Zacchaeus' life, and we're called to do the same. Our tables can become places of redemption where people encounter Christ's love in tangible ways.

But let's be honest—it isn't always easy. Loving others, especially those who have hurt us, takes more than good intentions; it requires faith, patience, and a willingness to see them through heaven's eyes.

Forgiveness sounds simple—until we're faced with someone who has hurt us deeply. Seeing the good in others isn't always easy.

Just as the people of Jericho struggled to trust Zacchaeus, we often find it hard to believe that real change is possible. Even after he repented and made amends, doubt lingered.

Years of betrayal don't vanish overnight, and in our own lives, past wounds can make it difficult to embrace the possibility of redemption.

But Jesus calls us to believe in the power of His grace to bring true change—not just in others, but in our own hearts as well.

Forgiveness isn't ignoring the past or rushing back into blind trust; it's choosing to believe in God's ability to heal and restore.

Who in your life are you struggling to see through heaven's eyes? Take it to Jesus in prayer. He sees what we cannot.

Extending Grace Without Losing Boundaries

Grace doesn't mean abandoning wisdom. Even after someone changes, healthy boundaries are essential.

Jesus acknowledged this when He told His disciples: "If any household or town refuses to welcome you or listen to your message, shake its dust from your feet as you leave."¹⁰

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, some people may reject our kindness, refuse to take responsibility, or continue their harmful behaviors.

In these moments, extending grace doesn't mean tolerating unhealthy patterns—it means trusting God with what we can't control while walking forward in His peace. He gives you permission to 'shake it off.'

Jesus never asked us to force anyone to change—He calls us to offer love and leave the rest to the Holy Spirit.

If someone in your life continues to resist grace, ask God to help you release the frustration and trust Him with the outcome of their story.

A Lifelong Commitment to Grace

Forgiveness isn't a one-time event; it's a lifelong practice.

When Peter asked how often he should forgive, Jesus replied: "Not seven times, but seventy times seven!"¹¹

True forgiveness is ongoing—it's a daily choice to extend grace, just as we have received it.

The more we forgive, the more it shapes us. Over time, grace becomes not just something we offer, but a way of life, transforming us at the deepest level.



Making Your Agape Feast a Place of Salvation

Your table can be a space where grace and forgiveness flourish. Just as Jesus welcomed Zacchaeus, you can extend that same radical hospitality to others.

Here are some ways to make your table a place of grace and forgiveness:

Welcome everyone with open hearts

Hope for the best in everyone. No matter their past or struggles, God is able to redeem their future.

Speak life, not condemnation

Like bees seeking sweetness, focus on the good that God is doing in others. Refuse gossip or negativity—what you nurture will grow.

Create a Bee Challenge

Encourage the members of your agape feast to find three things to praise in someone each day.

Set healthy boundaries with grace

Extend love, but don't allow toxic patterns to take root in your community. When needed, step back and trust God with the process.

Pursue healing and reconciliation

Encourage honest conversations and take practical steps in keeping with repentance, just as Zacchaeus did when he made amends.

Living Like the Bee

Creating an atmosphere of grace at your table opens the door for salvation. Jesus saw Zacchaeus beyond his worst mistakes, and when we do the same, we become partners in God's redemptive work.

Imagine if your table became a place where you choose to see others through heaven's eyes, focusing on their potential rather than their failures.

This week, here's your challenge

- Choose one person you struggle to see with grace.
- Speak life over them—find one way to encourage, affirm, or bless them.
- Invite someone new to your table and offer them the kind of radical hospitality that Jesus showed to Zacchaeus.

The choice is yours—will you be a bee, seeking what is sweet and lovely, or a fly, dwelling on what's broken?

Let's be people who call others down from their trees and welcome them to the table. It starts with hospitality, but it can lead to eternal life.

What do you say? Are you in?

14

GREEDY PHARISEE

OVERCOMING GREED AND SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Then the Lord said to him, “You Pharisees are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and wickedness! Fools! Didn’t God make the inside as well as the outside? So clean the inside by giving gifts to the poor, and you will be clean all over.”

Luke 11:39-41 NLT



Celebrating the Conversion of Ebenezer

Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

Matthew 6:21 NLT

Do You Ever Worry About Money?

Most of us do. It's more than paying the bills—it's deeper than that. Money is tied to so many things: how safe we feel, how we measure our success, even how we value ourselves.

No matter how much you have, money whispers: *Just a little more, and you'll be secure. Just a little more, and you'll be happy.* But the more you chase it, the more restless you feel, as money wraps your heart in fear instead of bringing peace.

I've felt it. A few years ago, my wife and I had what seemed like the perfect life: steady jobs, a comfortable house, four kids, and two cars.

Then we sensed God calling us to something that would require big sacrifices. In faith, we sold everything, quit our jobs, and moved to Australia, trusting God to provide. At first, it felt exciting—like stepping out of the boat to walk on water, just like Peter.

But nothing went as planned. Unexpectedly, shortly after moving there, we had to leave Australia and go back to Canada. Then I started a business that failed. We struggled for a while, going paycheck to paycheck, until we eventually had to declare bankruptcy.

It wasn't the inspiring testimony we'd envisioned. Instead, it felt like everything was falling apart. I constantly worried: *How would we afford groceries? What if something broke down?* The stress was crushing.

But then I realized something: I had always worried about money, even before going on our adventure. Whether we had plenty or barely enough, the fear was always the same.

Yet we always had enough, even when we didn't have much. My anxiety really wasn't about how much money we had—it was about how much power I was giving it over my heart and mind.

I remembered something my uncle said when I was a kid. Driving past a neighborhood of mansions, someone asked: “I wonder who the richest person on this street is?”

My uncle replied:

“The richest person is the one who’s happiest with what they have.”

What Does It Mean to Be Rich?

Being rich isn’t about how much you have; it’s about the state of your heart. The person who has the most joy—not the most possessions—is truly rich. On some level, we all know this. So why is it so hard to live that way?

The world tells us money is the key to happiness. But it’s a lie. Wealth doesn’t guarantee joy. There are plenty of miserable wealthy people in the world. In fact, the more we focus on money, the more anxious we become.

Think about Ebenezer Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*—he had all the money he could ever need, but his greed turned his life into a cold, lonely prison. Only when he embraced generosity did he find joy—not just for himself, but for his entire community.

When you loosen your grip on money and embrace generosity, you’ll free yourself from anxiety. It’s in giving to others that we discover the life we were meant to live.

Breaking Free

This chapter is about breaking the chains of greed and finding freedom through radical generosity. We'll uncover how society's obsession with money enslaves our hearts and how Jesus offers a better way.

Are you ready to let go of money's false promises and discover the key to a truly rich life? Let's dive in.



The Flawed Game of Life

As a kid, I loved playing *The Game of Life*—spinning the wheel, collecting money, a big house, a high-paying job, and even a plastic family. The winner? Whoever had the highest net worth.

It was a playful version of the "American Dream," where happiness came from chasing more. As kids, it was fun. But as adults, society turns this game into a way of life, convincing us that joy is always just one more paycheck or promotion away.

It's the script most of us live by—work hard, buy a house, save for retirement, and accumulate stuff. Success is measured by how much we achieve, how much we own, and how much we're worth. And it's tempting to believe this story.

But no matter how much you have, it'll never be enough. Every milestone—a raise, a dream house, a promotion—only reveals another goal on the horizon. The more we chase it, the more it consumes us. The problem is, this lifestyle is as hollow as the little, plastic car in the game. Money cannot satisfy your soul.

A False Light

Jesus warned, “Make sure that the light you think you have is not actually darkness.”¹

Society’s obsession with money and status often feels like a guiding light, promising security and success. But what if that guiding light is actually spiritual darkness?

The problem isn’t when you have money; it’s when money has *you*.

It promises to solve problems but creates bigger ones, blinding us to what truly matters. It becomes our priority, consuming our thoughts, leaving us trapped in a prison of greed.

In the end, it takes the place in our hearts meant for God: “Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”²

Jesus didn’t see money as a sign of God’s blessing, but as a potential trap. When it becomes our focus, it distracts us from our true source of joy—faith, love, and community.

So, how do we break free from this trap? When Jesus went for dinner with some greedy Pharisees, He told us how:

“Clean the inside by giving gifts to the poor.”³



The Five Lies of Greed

When Jesus dined with the Pharisees, He didn't hold back: "You Pharisees are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and wickedness!"

The Pharisees prided themselves on outward displays of righteousness, but Jesus saw their hearts were enslaved by the same temptations we face today—wealth, status, and control.

Jesus' words were sharp but filled with purpose. He wasn't trying to offend them; He was inviting them to find freedom and the fullness of joy.

The same lies of greed that ensnared the Pharisees continue to entangle our hearts today. Let's look at these lies, one by one.

Greed Makes You Calculating

Jesus said to the Pharisees:

"You are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore justice and the love of God."⁴

The Pharisees appeared generous—they calculated every tenth of their income down to the smallest sprig of mint. But their giving wasn't motivated by love; it

was driven by obligation and self-interest. They cared more about keeping their wealth than using it to love others or pursue justice.

This is one of the ways greed traps us: it makes us calculating.

Instead of giving freely, we turn generosity into a transaction, focusing on what's fair or what we're willing to part with—and rarely more.

Have you ever split a bill with friends and felt annoyed if you paid more than your share? Or hesitated to give generously out of fear of what you'd have left? Greed shifts your focus from blessing others to protecting what you have.

As St. Thérèse of Lisieux put it: “Calculation is the opposite of love.”⁵

Love doesn't keep score or question whether someone “deserves” your generosity. Love gives freely. Greed, however, always keeps a tally.

Greed Makes You Prideful

Jesus continued:

“You love to sit in the seats of honor in the synagogues and receive respectful greetings as you walk in the marketplace s.”⁶

The Pharisees weren't just greedy for money; they also craved status and recognition. Their self-worth was tied to the admiration and praise of others, rather than to who God said they were.

Greed inflates our ego, making us seek validation from others. In today's world, it often plays out on social media—posting a photo of a fancy meal, new car, or vacation just to collect likes and compliments.

When greed takes hold, it's not just about having things; it's about showing them off. Pride whispers that our value comes from others' approval. But the more we chase validation from others, the emptier we feel.

Jesus warned that chasing status is a dead end. True worth can't be found in others' praise—it's only found in knowing who we are in Christ.

Greed Makes You Exploit Others

Jesus said:

“You crush people with unbearable religious demands, and you never lift a finger to ease the burden.”⁷

The Pharisees used their social power to benefit themselves, burdening others while refusing to help. Greed often works this way. It makes us willing to exploit others to get ahead, prioritizing our own comfort and success over the well-being of our neighbors.

Jesus modeled a different way:

“Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave.”⁸

Jesus, who had every right to use His power for Himself, chose instead to serve.

True greatness comes from lifting others' burdens, not from taking advantage of them. When we follow His example, we break free from greed's chains and begin to love as He does.

Greed Breeds Hostility

Jesus warned the Pharisees:

“You stand as witnesses who agree with what your ancestors did. They killed the prophets, and you join in their crime by building the monuments!”⁹

Their greed made them hostile to anyone who threatened their position. When it rules your heart, it breeds defensiveness and suspicion, producing fear, anger, and a thirst for control.

This isn't just an accusation about past events. Jesus was warning the Pharisees that their greed would lead to hostility—and eventually violence, just like it did with their ancestors.

And He was right. The Pharisees rejected Jesus' warning. In fact, instead of listening, they proved Him right by plotting to kill Him.

Greed doesn't just harm you; it causes you to harm others, making it impossible to love as Jesus commands.

Greed Locks You Out of the Kingdom

Jesus said:

“You remove the key to knowledge from the people. You don't enter the Kingdom yourselves, and you prevent others from entering.”¹⁰

This is the greatest danger of greed. It leads you astray, and causes you to drag others away with you.

The Pharisees, meant to guide people to God, became stumbling blocks—pointing people toward wealth and status as signs of God’s favor, instead of to God Himself.

These worldly distractions kept people from what truly mattered—entering the Kingdom of God.

Greed whispers that wealth or power can replace God’s love, but they can’t. When your heart clings to material things, it locks the door to God’s Kingdom.

Jesus is the Key

The good news is that Jesus doesn’t leave us locked out. Where greed shuts the door, Jesus opens it. He says:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”¹¹

Unlike the Pharisees, whose hearts were ruled by greed, Jesus’ heart was full of self-giving love. He gave everything—even giving His life on the Cross—for our sake. This is the exact opposite of greed.

Greed says, “Hold on to what you have,” but Jesus says, “Give it away freely.” While greed isolates and enslaves, Jesus gives sacrificially and liberates.

His love, shown on the Cross, opens the door to true joy, freedom, and abundance.



Breaking Free Through Generosity

On one fateful Christmas Eve, Ebenezer Scrooge was confronted with the consequences of his greed. Given a chance to repent, he took it.

By Christmas morning, he was a transformed man—not because he earned more money, but because he gave it away.

His newfound generosity broke the chains of greed, opened his heart, restored his relationships, and filled his life with joy. Scrooge’s redemption shows us the truth—generosity sets us free.

When you give, it doesn’t just help others—it cleanses your soul, shifting your heart from selfishness to love.

True righteousness doesn’t come from outward appearances but from a heart transformed by giving to those in need. Generosity is what it means to be godly.

Mitch: A Modern-Day Ebenezer

Mitch was a successful businessman with wealth, influence, and a comfortable life, but inside, he felt empty. He went to church occasionally, but his heart was consumed by greed, and he was always chasing more, never feeling satisfied.

One Sunday, a sermon convicted him deeply. The pastor preached on Luke 11:41: “Clean the inside by giving gifts to the poor, and you will be clean all over.”

Mitch realized his wealth wasn't bringing him closer to God; it was keeping him away.

Soon after, Mitch went on a mission trip to Haiti, where the extreme poverty challenged everything he believed about success and happiness. When he returned, he knew he couldn't go back to his old ways.

Mitch began using his resources to serve others—teaching business skills to inmates, supporting vulnerable communities, and volunteering at a homeless shelter. He discovered that giving was far more fulfilling than anything he had ever earned.

Mitch's life changed, not just outwardly but inwardly. He was no longer driven by greed or fear but filled with peace, joy, and purpose.

Abundant Life, Spiritual Liberty, and the Pursuit of True Happiness

Like Mitch and Scrooge, we find true happiness not in hoarding, but in giving.

Generosity doesn't just bless others—it transforms us. It is the key to spiritual freedom. It breaks greed's grip, opens our hearts to love, and connects us to God's purpose for our lives.

This should be the real "American Dream."

When we live generously, we follow in the steps of Jesus—who gave everything He could to set us free, even His own life.

In the next section, we'll explore life in the Kingdom of Generosity—a way of living where giving becomes a source of abundance for all.



Life in the Kingdom of Generosity

Imagine waking up like Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas Day—freed from greed and isolation, stepping into a world transformed by generosity.

As the sun rises, you find yourself in a neighborhood where giving isn't rare, but it's how everyone lives. Neighbors care for one another, families share meals, strangers become friends, and no one is left out.

The community reflects Isaiah 58:7: “Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them.”¹²

Here, success isn't measured by wealth but by love and service. The most admired aren't the richest, but those most willing to give to others. Children are cherished, the elderly are honored, and no one faces life's struggles alone.

It's a glimpse of the Kingdom of God on earth—a generous community where neighbors love one another.

Community First! Village in Austin, TX

The Community First! Village in Austin, Texas, is a powerful glimpse of God's Kingdom in action.

What began as a simple ministry delivering meals to the homeless grew into a 51-acre community offering permanent housing and true belonging to the chronically homeless.

At Community First!, residents aren't just given charity; they're welcomed into a family. They find dignity through meaningful work—crafting handmade goods or tending gardens—and experience true belonging through shared meals and relationships. It's a place where generosity isn't just an idea; it's a way of life that restores hope and purpose to the most vulnerable.

This is the power of generosity. When it takes root, it transforms not just lives, but entire communities.

Jesus' Vision for the Kingdom

Jesus described the Kingdom of God like this:

“I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.”¹³

It isn't about wealth, fame, or power; it's about loving the least of these. It's feeding the hungry, welcoming outsiders, and sharing what you have with others.

Living this way is radically countercultural. In a world that values independence and self-interest, the Kingdom of God calls us to Communion and self-sacrifice.

Repenting of the American Dream

What if we flipped the world's values upside-down—celebrating generosity instead of material success and honoring people not for what they own, but for how much they bless others?

John Wesley captured this beautifully:

“Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.”¹⁴

Wesley didn’t condemn wealth, but he believed it came with a responsibility to your neighbors—a resource to be used for good in your community.

Imagine living this way: not clinging to money for security, but using it to bless others. Generosity doesn’t just help the poor; it transforms all of us. It frees our hearts from greed, draws us closer to God, and fills our lives with purpose and joy.

When we willingly choose to give to the poor, no one’s rights are taken away—and everyone benefits.

Living generously goes against the grain of consumerism and self-interest, but it’s the path to true freedom and joy.

So, what will you treasure? Wealth and possessions—or the joy of giving, the beauty of community, and the peace of living for what truly matters?

“Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”¹⁵

On Earth As It Is In Heaven

When generosity defines a community, it becomes a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven—a place where no one is hungry, everyone is cared for, and love drives every action.

You don’t need to be rich to participate in this Kingdom. Small acts of generosity—your time, resources, or hospitality—can transform lives. Imagine going to

bed knowing your life brought joy and hope to someone else. That's the kind of life Jesus invites you to.

What step can you take today? Who can you bless? The Kingdom is at hand; it's closer than you think—just one act of generosity away.



Celebrating Generosity in Your Agape Feast

You don't need to be wealthy to be generous—just willing and open-hearted.

Think of one person who could use a blessing: a struggling friend, a neighbor in need, or someone feeling unseen. Start there.

Letting go of greed and anxiety about money frees you to think generously toward others, which is the key to a rich spiritual life.

Imagine the joy of living generously—free from the stress of chasing money, surrounded by a community that gives out of love, not obligation.

As Scripture reminds us, “God loves a person who gives cheerfully.”

Bringing Generosity to Your Agape Feast

Generosity starts in our hearts but comes to life in community.

Here's how you can practice it in an agape feast.

Celebrate Generosity

Make generosity a central theme. Honor those who give selflessly—whether through time, resources, or encouragement. Share stories of how giving has changed lives.

For example, create a “Generosity Spotlight” during your agape feast, where people can share about how someone else’s generosity—no matter how small—brought joy and blessing to them.

Share What You Have

Turn your feast into a source of provision. Start a meal-sharing program to support struggling families or pool resources into a community fund for urgent needs like rent or medical bills.

By sharing, you reflect the early church: “All the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.”¹⁶

Invest in Relationships

Generosity includes giving your time and care. Use your feast to deepen connections—ask intentional questions, listen to stories, and encourage one another.

Jesus said: “Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, they will welcome you into an eternal home.”¹⁷

The relationships you build through generosity are treasures that last, forever.

Extend Mercy Beyond the Table

Let your feast inspire acts of kindness in the wider community. Organize a neighborhood cleanup, visit a nursing home, or donate supplies to children in need. These small acts of mercy remind others they are seen, loved, and valued by God.

Jesus said: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”¹⁸

Living in the Freedom of Christ

Generosity reflects God’s heart and builds bridges of love in our communities.

What step can you take today?

- Invite someone new to your table.
- Offer a meal to someone in need.
- Share a word of encouragement with someone who feels unseen.

Who will you bless today? What step can you take right now to reflect God’s love?

Don’t wait—the Kingdom is built one open door, one shared meal, and one act of kindness at a time.

JUDAS ISCARIOT

SAVING THE WORLD THROUGH FORGIVENESS

Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, "That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself.

Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

John 12:3-8 NLT

*Matthew 26:6-13



Vanquishing the Wraith of Idolatry

You must not have any other god but me.

Exodus 20:3 NLT

As the streets of Jerusalem swelled with pilgrims preparing for Passover, the Wraith of Idolatry slipped through the shadows, unseen. It stalked its target, one of Christ's closest followers—Judas Iscariot.

It watched from the corner of the crowded room as Mary knelt before Jesus, breaking open her alabaster jar and pouring the expensive perfume onto His feet—to prepare His body for burial. The fragrance filled the air like a sacred offering.

But while others marveled at her devotion, Judas clenched his fists. The Wraith drifted closer.

“This isn’t what you wanted,” it cooed into his heart. *“You were meant for greatness. You were supposed to lead a revolution—not follow a man to His death!”*

Dreams of power and glory twisted within him. He had followed Jesus, not for the sake of humble discipleship, but for the hope of victory—a triumphant Messiah who would overthrow Rome and restore Israel.

But now, as Jesus praised Mary for what Judas saw as a wasteful act, bitterness bloomed in his chest. His disappointment hardened into anger, and his anger calcified into betrayal.

The Wraith of Idolatry grinned. It had found its opening.

Judas' heart, once devoted to Christ, had become fertile ground for idolatry. His dreams of control, success, and recognition had become his master, blinding him to the true mission of Jesus. He no longer saw a Savior—only a failed revolutionary. *"There's still time to get what you deserve,"* the Wraith hissed.

That night, Judas made his choice—he betrayed the One who called him friend, selling his loyalty for thirty pieces of silver.

The Subtle Danger of Idolatry

Judas didn't start out as a betrayer. He had walked with Jesus, witnessed miracles, and shared meals with the Son of God.

But over time, something shifted. His heart, once set on Christ, became consumed by something else—something quieter, more insidious. This is the tragedy of Judas: his downfall didn't happen overnight. It was a slow, creeping poison.

And if we're honest, the same danger lurks within us.

We may not betray Jesus for silver, but idolatry works in quieter ways in our own lives. It slips in through our unmet expectations, our frustrations, and our need for control. It convinces us that God's way isn't enough—that we need something *more*.

More success. More comfort. More validation.

The danger of idolatry is its subtlety. It feeds on good things—dreams, relationships, even ministry—and twists them into ultimate things. James warns us, *"Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away."*¹

It whispers that our desires deserve to sit on the throne of our hearts, displacing God. John pleads with us, *"Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts."*²

Judas didn't realize what was happening until it was too late. Idolatry doesn't steal your heart all at once—it claims it, one quiet compromise at a time.

The good news is, there's a way to escape from the clutches of our idolatry. By naming the idols within us and surrendering them to God, we can break free. We can uproot what's taken Christ's place and restore Him to the center of our hearts.

Let's take a closer look at how idolatry sneaks into our lives—and how we can cast it down before it destroys our devotion to Jesus.



Naming Your Idols: When Good Things Become Ultimate Things

Idols rarely announce themselves. They hide behind good intentions, unmet expectations, or dreams we grip too tightly. But if we look closely, they reveal themselves in the cracks of our frustrations and disappointments.

Unmet Expectations: When What You'd Hoped For Becomes a Trap

I always thought my desire to preach was pure. I wanted to serve God, like Wesley or Spurgeon, standing at the pulpit with a fire in my bones. But the opportunities never came, and that unfulfilled dream hollowed me out.

At first, I wasn't angry—just confused. Frustrated. Stuck. I thought, *"If this is my calling, why is God holding me back?"*

But over time, disappointment hardened into self-condemnation. I felt like a failure. Not good enough for God. Not good enough for anyone.

The truth is, it wasn't that I loved preaching too much—it's that I'd tied my worth to it. My identity wasn't rooted in God's love; it was wrapped around the dream of what I could achieve for Him.

Have you felt this too? Are there unmet expectations in your life that have left you bitter or defeated? Have you clung to a dream so tightly that losing it would make you question who you are?

Negative Self-Talk: The Lies That Idols Speak

Idols don't just sit silently in our hearts—they whisper lies. For years, a voice echoed in my mind: *Unless you achieve your goal, you're not enough. You'll never be enough.*

But that voice wasn't from God.

Romans 8:1 reminds us, "There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ."³

Idolatry uses our failures like chains, convincing us that our worth is tied to what we haven't achieved. But God's voice doesn't condemn—it calls out with grace: *"Come to Me, My beloved child."*

What lies have you believed about yourself? Where do you hear the voice of condemnation instead of the voice of grace?

Surrendering Your Will: What If God Said "No"?

Here's a question to test your heart: What if Jesus said "no" to the thing you've been praying for? The vocation. The healing. The relationship.

Could you still trust Him?

I'll be honest—this question used to terrify me. If Jesus said “no” to my dream of preaching, what would be left of me? Who would I be without it?

If losing something feels like losing yourself, it's not just a goal—it's an idol.

Letting go of an idol feels like dying—because, in a way, it is. You're surrendering what's closest to your heart and sense of self. But this is where God does His best work—in the empty, broken spaces where we can no longer rely on our own strength.

What are you afraid to let go of? What have you placed on a pedestal, thinking it defines who you are?

Abraham's Sacrifice: Defeating the Wraith of Idolatry

On Mount Moriah, Abraham stood ready to sacrifice his son Isaac—the child who embodied every promise God had given him.

The Wraith of Idolatry whispered, *“Isaac is your promised future. Without him, everything is lost.”*

But Abraham lifted the knife anyway—choosing obedience over control, surrender over fear.

God wasn't after Isaac's life; He was after Abraham's heart. He wanted to know if Abraham trusted Him more than the *promise*. And when Abraham surrendered, the Wraith lost its power. God provided a ram, and Isaac was spared.

Abraham's story is our model. Surrendering to God isn't about losing everything we love—it's about trusting that God's plan is better than ours, even when we don't understand how the story will end.

What's your “Isaac”? What are you clinging to that you need to place on the altar?

The Death That Leads to Life

Letting go of an idol feels like the end of yourself—but in God’s hands, it’s the beginning.

When we surrender what we treasure most, the Wraith of Idolatry loses its grip. And what we thought was the death of a dream becomes the doorway to freedom.

Judas clung to his dreams of power—and lost everything. Abraham surrendered his dream to God—and found more than he could have imagined.

Will you cling to what you can’t control, or will you lay it down and trust the God who provides?

The altar is ready. Are you ready to let go?



The Spirit of Judas: When Idols Infect the Church

Judas Iscariot isn’t just a figure from history—his spirit still haunts the church today.

Just as Judas’ personal idolatry led to his betrayal, our unchecked idols have the power to fracture entire communities. The Spirit of Judas isn’t confined to the pages of Scripture—it shows up when our unmet expectations and pride infect the way we view the church.

Judas longed for a Messiah who would rule with power, not suffering. He wanted a political revolution, not a crucifixion. When Jesus spoke of sacrifice instead of conquest, Judas' disappointment curdled into rebellion.

This is how idolatry works—it convinces us that God must deliver on our terms, and when He doesn't, we rebel. The same spirit creeps into churches today, disguised as criticism, division, and self-righteousness.

Idolatry thrives when unmet expectations fester into bitterness, poisoning our faith and fracturing our communities.

Worldliness: Expecting Earthly Rewards

Judas followed Jesus with expectations of power and victory. But when Jesus chose the Cross, Judas turned away—because idolatry always distorts faith. It tempts us to measure success by earthly standards, like status and recognition, and to resent God when His plan doesn't match ours.

We begin to see the church's spiritual work as irrelevant, even wasteful, because it doesn't deliver immediate results. But the Gospel calls us to seek first the Kingdom that's not of this world, even when the rewards seem invisible in this life.

Control: Wanting God on Our Terms

Judas disguised his hunger for control as concern for justice: "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?"⁴

But his words were hollow—he didn't care about the poor; he cared about power.

Like Judas, we often disguise our desire for control as righteous concern. We want the church to function on our terms, and when it doesn't, we grow bitter.

But faith calls us to surrender—not to control outcomes, but to trust that Christ is leading His church, even when we can't see the full picture.

Pride: Believing We Know Better Than God

At the core of Judas' betrayal was pride. He couldn't follow a Messiah who chose a Cross over a crown. He believed his vision of salvation was superior to Christ's. To Judas, the Cross was nothing but a failure.

We fall into the same trap when we elevate our opinions above Christ's authority. Pride tempts us to tear down the church with criticism instead of building it up with love. We demand that the church cater to our preferences, and when it doesn't, we let bitterness fester.

The Spirit of Judas in Church-Bashing

Just as Judas grew bitter when Jesus didn't meet his expectations, many of us grow bitter when the church doesn't meet ours. We see its flaws, failures, and imperfections—and instead of offering love, we let resentment take root.

There's a fine line between constructive criticism and destructive bashing.

Constructive criticism seeks to heal the church from within; destructive criticism tears it down from the outside. The difference lies in the heart—whether we're seeking control or offering grace.

The church is imperfect. Its failures demand accountability. But idolatry twists concern into self-righteousness. It convinces us that the church exists to meet our needs, and when it doesn't, we feel entitled to lash out.

We judge from a distance, treating the church as an institution to critique rather than a body to belong to.

I once asked a Bible study group, "*What do you say the church is?*"

The reactions were bitter:

- *"It's a corrupt business."*
- *It's a system of control with a long history of injustice."*

Their answers revealed wounds—but also pride. The temptation to give up on the church often stems from an idol of self-importance: *The church should cater to me, and if it doesn't, I'll leave.*

But Christ didn't give up on His church. He gave His life for it. If we want to follow Him, we must learn to submit to His leadership, trusting that He's still working through broken people.

The Spirit of Judas in Heresy

Heresy isn't just about false doctrine—it's idolatry in disguise. It happens when we reshape the Gospel to fit our desires, placing ourselves at the center of faith.

Judas' problem wasn't that he didn't believe in Jesus; it was that he believed in a version of Jesus that served his agenda. Heresy does the same. It isolates believers, breeds division, and elevates personal preference over God's revealed truth.

The cure for heresy is the Cross. True doctrine leads to unity, rooted in mutual submission under Christ. At the Communion table, we lay down our idols—our pride, our need for control, our worldly desires—and join in humble fellowship.

The difference between orthodoxy and heresy is the difference between humility and pride. Heresy says, "My way is better." Communion says, *Christ's way is better.*

Overcoming the Spirit of Judas

Judas thought his way of saving the world was better than Christ's. But the Cross teaches us the opposite: salvation doesn't come through control or pride—it comes through surrender to God's will.

We all face moments of disillusionment with the church. But when we embrace the way of the Cross—surrender, forgiveness, and trust—we cast down the idols that pull us away from Christ.

Abraham chose surrender and found freedom. Judas clung to his idols and lost everything.

The cure for the Spirit of Judas isn't perfection—it's Communion. It's kneeling before the Cross and letting go of control, pride, and unmet expectations as we receive Christ's grace.

Judas betrayed Christ because he couldn't submit.

What about you? Are you ready to lay down your unmet expectations, your need for control, and your pride?



Mary of Bethany: A Model of Faithful Submission to Christ

Judas shows us what happens when we set idols up. Mary of Bethany shows us how to tear them down.

Mary was the first disciple to understand that Jesus wasn't headed toward an earthly throne—He was walking toward the Cross. She listened, she believed, and she responded. While others tried to resist this truth, Mary knelt at Jesus' feet, anointing Him with expensive perfume to prepare His body for burial.

This wasn't just a moment of extravagant worship—it was an act of surrender to God's will.

The perfume wasn't just perfume. It was Mary's treasure, her wealth, perhaps even the security for her future. By pouring it out, she was declaring that nothing in her life—no possession, no plan, no dream—would ever be worth more to her than Christ.

Jesus praised her and declared that her act of love would be remembered forever. What Judas saw as wasteful, Jesus saw as worship. Mary's act of surrender would outlast the kingdoms of the world, because what we pour out at Christ's feet is never wasted—it becomes part of God's eternal story.

Judas couldn't comprehend this. Her devotion exposed his arid heart. While she poured out everything, he clung to control. While she surrendered, he resisted.

Faith isn't proven when we agree with God—it's tested when we don't. True submission means following Jesus not only when it's easy but when it's costly. It means trusting Him when His plan leads to places we'd rather avoid.

Mary understood this. Judas didn't.

Surrendering to God by Submitting to His Church

Mary's act of devotion wasn't just about perfume; it was about surrendering control to God's plan. Today, we're called to a similar surrender through our submission to Christ's body—the church.

As Paul writes, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."⁵

At first, I thought surrender meant giving up my personal ambitions and goals. But I've learned that true surrender often involves something harder—laying down my pride and letting the church be the imperfect vessel through which God works.

Submitting to others isn't about losing yourself. It's about trusting that Jesus is leading the church, even when you don't understand every decision. It's about putting the needs of the community above your own and resisting the temptation to withdraw or control when things don't go your way.

Paul reminds us:

“Honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work.”⁶

Do you have attitudes that prevent you from submitting to your church? Have disappointments hardened into distrust or cynicism?

Without submission, real Communion—the kind that heals and unites—can't happen.

Why Forgiveness Is the Foundation of Community

Have you ever blamed the church for your spiritual struggles or felt bitter after being burned out? I have.

It's easy to think, *"I'm the only one trying to do things right."* But those thoughts build walls between us and the community we're called to love. The only way to tear those walls down is through forgiveness—letting go of resentment, bitterness, and the desire to be proven right.

When I first moved to Australia, I didn't want to attend Hillsong Church. I assumed it was a celebrity-driven megachurch with shallow priorities. I judged it before I stepped through the doors.

On my first Sunday, a family invited us to dinner. As we ate, I shared my skepticism about the church. Our host listened patiently and said, *"That might just be something you have to surrender to Jesus, mate."*

His words struck me. My pride had blinded me to what God could do through this community. When I finally let go of my assumptions about Hillsong, I found love, connection, and a place where God could grow my faith.

That experience taught me something essential—you can't love the church while holding it to a perfect standard. If you're waiting for a church that never fails, you'll be waiting forever. Forgiveness is not optional.

This isn't about ignoring faults—it's about releasing them into God's hands. The church isn't perfect, but it's where imperfect people gather to be transformed by grace.

If you want to follow Jesus, you'll have to forgive others. There's no way around it.

The Cross is the Only Path to Salvation

Jesus' plan to save the world is built around the Cross and the Communion table.

The church is Christ's chosen vessel for salvation—where imperfect people gather to be shaped by grace, and through them, God's perfect plan unfolds, even when we can't see it. And there is no backup plan.

The Cross teaches us to give up control, to forgive those who have hurt us, and to trust in God's will, even when it leads through suffering.

When Judas criticized Mary's act of devotion, Jesus said, "Why criticize this woman for doing such a good thing to me?"⁷

He saw through Judas' complaint—it wasn't about the poor; it was about Judas' thirst for control. His grumbling was a symptom of a deeper problem: he refused to follow Christ to Calvary. And that refusal became his downfall.

But Christ did go to Calvary: "He humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."⁸

To follow the crucified Jesus, we have to lay down our pride and stop clinging to the idea that we're better than others. Grace doesn't work that way. It's a gift we can't earn, and no one is more deserving than anyone else.

Communion with Imperfect People

Love isn't proven by how we treat people when they're easy to love—it's proven by how we respond when they mess up.

Forgiving each other and submitting to one another in love isn't weakness. It's actually the foundation of the church's strength.

Forgiveness builds trust. It maintains unity. Without it, community collapses under the weight of resentment. But with forgiveness, it becomes a place where grace thrives.

Jesus said, "You will always have the poor among you."⁹

He wasn't just talking about financial poverty. The church is full of people who are spiritually, emotionally, and morally poor. People like you and me. It's not a 'perfect' place, and it's not meant to be—not yet.

Jesus taught that the church is like a field of wheat and weeds, growing together until the harvest. He promised that He will sort it out in the end, but until then, our task is clear—to forgive.

Here's the paradox: being in a church with difficult people is how God makes you holy.

Because holiness is not about achieving a certain standard of perfection. It's about learning to love as Jesus loves, through forgiving those who hurt or disappoint you. That's all a saint is—someone who has learned from Jesus how to forgive others.

And real faith requires us to love real people, not idealized versions of who we think people ought to be. Can you love Steve when he's late, Mark when he's struggling, or Trevor when he's angry?

A saint doesn't just tolerate people—but loves them, putting forgiveness first, again and again.

The Command to Forgive

“Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”¹⁰

This isn't a suggestion—it's a command. You can't follow Jesus if you refuse to forgive.

Even the Lord's Prayer ties our forgiveness to how we forgive others: “Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.”¹¹

Forgiveness is the glue that holds the church together. Communion can't survive without humility, grace, and the willingness to release other from our grievances.

This is the narrow road to salvation, paved by forgiveness and humility, and it leads to the Communion table by way of the Cross.

Forgiveness is the heartbeat of Christianity. It's the bridge between broken people and a holy God. It's what brings us back to the Communion table, where we remember that grace was never earned—it was given.

Just as Mary poured out her treasure at Christ's feet, we're called to pour out our pride, our grievances, and our need for control. And in return, we receive grace upon grace.



Banishing Idolatry from Your Agape Feast

Judas fell because of pride. Mary triumphed through surrender. One clung to idols and was destroyed; the other poured out her treasure and found life.

Both stories teach us this: idolatry is defeated only through the Cross. And this is where true Communion begins.

Your agape feast can be a place where idols fall and hearts open to God in honest surrender.

Here are some ideas for how to make this happen.

Surrender Your Idols

Reflect on the dreams or desires that may have taken God's place in your heart. Ask yourself, "*What am I most afraid to lose?*" That's where the idol hides. Lay it down at the feet of Jesus, trusting that His plan is greater than your own.

Create a Culture of Forgiveness

Let forgiveness flow like living water through your gatherings. Talk openly about wounds, struggles, and the power of grace. When a community embraces forgiveness, pride has no place to grow.

Practice Mutual Submission

Christ leads His church—even through imperfect people. Submit to one another in love, recognizing that God works through others' weaknesses just as He works through yours. Mutual submission is an act of trusting Christ to guiding the church, even when things don't go exactly the way you wanted.

The Cross calls us to surrender, but it also calls us into Communion. As you break bread with others, let the table remind you that Christ has broken every chain of idolatry and division. Unity begins at the feet of the Savior who poured Himself out for us.

Build a space where grace reigns, forgiveness heals, and idols are laid to rest.

In this surrender, you'll discover the miracle of true Communion—hearts united by the boundless mercy of Christ.

Idolatry has no power where Christ is King.

16

THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

FINDING HOPE IN SEASONS OF DISILLUSIONMENT

As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

They said to each other, “Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem.

Luke 24:30-33 NLT



Rescuing Hope from the Castle of Disillusionment

The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

Psalm 34:18 NLT

You never think it's going to happen to you—until it does.

The dream crumbles. The prayer goes unanswered. The miracle never arrives.

And brick by brick, disappointment stacks itself around you, until you're trapped inside the walls of something you never meant to build—the castle of disillusionment.

It's lonely there. The air is heavy with doubt, and the view from the windows is bleak—unmet expectations, broken dreams, and the haunting question: *Where was God when I needed Him most?*

If you've ever felt trapped there, you're not alone.

This is how it felt on the road to Emmaus.

Cleopas and his friend trudged that path on the first Easter morning, their feet dragging in the dust as their hearts carried the weight of defeat. The man they had staked their hopes on—the one they thought would redeem Israel—was dead, crucified like a criminal.

And with His death, all their dreams died too.

But as they walked, something miraculous happened. They were joined by a stranger who didn't just listen to their grief—He led them out of it.

This is the story of how Christ comes to the rescue when you've lost hope.

Trapped in the Castle of Disillusionment

For my sister, the walls of disillusionment closed in when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at just 23 years old.

At first, she prayed with the kind of faith that's supposed to move mountains. She believed God would heal her, and her friends encouraged her: *If you have enough faith, God will heal you.*

They meant well, but their words became like bricks around her. Heavy ones.

Their words, which once felt like solid ground, began to crumble: *Why wasn't she getting better? Did she not have enough faith? Was she doing something wrong?*

She kept praying. She kept trusting. But the miracle never came.

Instead, she lost more and more mobility until, within a few years, she needed a wheelchair. The dreams she had for her life dissolved, piece by piece.

By the time she passed away at 49, she had spent 26 years wrestling with the tension between her faith and her reality.

And yet, her faith endured—not because she was healed, but because she found something deeper.

I'll share more about that later. But for now, know this—she found hope, even when everything she wanted in life was taken away.

My own castle of disillusionment would be built differently—after our move to Australia. We had believed it was God's plan to go. We prayed, trusted, and took the leap. But when everything fell apart, we returned to Canada in pieces, with nothing to show for the dream we had pursued so faithfully.

I was filled with confusion and doubt: *Had we misheard God? Was He even listening?*

It felt like God had led us into the wilderness and then left us there.

During that season, I discovered that church—ironically—can be one of the hardest places to express pain and doubt. People mean well, but their quick-fix answers land like bricks in the wall:

"Just trust God's plan."

"Everything happens for a reason."

But those phrases don't mend a broken heart. They don't quiet the questions that haunt you in the middle of the night.

Many of us know what it's like to feel trapped in a world of shattered dreams and unanswered prayers. Hope, it seems, buries itself behind those walls, waiting for someone to rescue it.

But here's the good news: Hope doesn't need to be found—it's already here, in Christ.

On the road to Emmaus, hope wasn't waiting at the destination. He was walking beside Cleopas the entire time.

And Jesus is walking with you too.

The journey back to hope begins with honesty: grieving what you've lost, admitting your doubts, and allowing yourself to question.

It's okay if you don't have all the answers right now. Faith isn't the absence of doubt—it's learning to walk with it, trusting that Jesus is closer than you realize.

This is the story of how hope is restored. Are you ready to walk this road?

Come and discover how Jesus walks beside you, even when you can't see Him there.



Walking Away

The road to Emmaus wasn't just a path away from Jerusalem—it was a path away from everything Cleopas and his friend had believed.

They had followed Jesus with hearts full of hope. They watched Him heal the sick, preach to the poor, and raise the dead. They dreamed of the day He would restore Israel and break the chains of oppression.

But their dreams died when He was nailed to the Cross.

So, they walked. Away from the city where their hopes had crumbled. Away from the faith they thought would save them. Step after heavy step, they dragged their grief behind them, their thoughts swirling with doubts.

Was Jesus really the Messiah? Had they been fools to believe? Did God fail us—or did we misunderstand Him all along?

They didn't have answers—only confusion, bitterness, and the haunting fear that maybe the story they had trusted their lives to was just a lie.

The Road of Deconstruction

Their journey mirrors the one many Christians are walking today.

We live in an age of disillusionment—church scandals, rampant hypocrisy, rigid legalism.

Maybe it's personal pain—a tragedy, a loss, or unanswered prayers that seem incompatible with the image of a loving God.

Or maybe it's the friction that comes from life itself.

The church says God answers prayers, but sometimes they remain unanswered. The church says Jesus is the answer, but the questions keep piling up.

Like Cleopas, they walk away—not because they hate Jesus, but because they can't reconcile their pain with their faith.

The Deepest Anxiety: What If God Isn't Who I Thought He Was?

At the heart of disillusionment lies a haunting fear: *What if I've been wrong about everything? What if God isn't who I thought He was?*

This fear doesn't come from rebellion—it comes from longing. Longing for a God who makes sense in the chaos. Longing for a faith that holds up when life falls apart.

The hardest part of walking away isn't the doubt—it's the grief. It feels like leaving behind more than beliefs; you're leaving behind a piece of yourself. The part that trusted God. The part that believed in miracles. The part that saw beauty in the mystery.

The Truth They Couldn't See

Their grief had blinded them to the presence of the One walking beside them. They couldn't see the truth yet, but Jesus hadn't left them—He wasn't distant. He wasn't indifferent.

Christ was right there, listening to their pain and waiting for the right moment to reveal Himself. This is the promise of the road to Emmaus—even when you feel abandoned, Jesus is closer than you think.

Even when you walk away, He doesn't.

His presence doesn't depend on your ability to believe—it depends on His love. When you're walking through doubt, He's walking beside you. When you feel lost, He's the one guiding your steps.

You may not recognize Him yet, but He's there. The question isn't whether He's with you—the question is whether you'll hear Him when He speaks.

And He will speak. Just as He did to Cleopas.

Hope isn't found at the end of the road—He's walking beside you, waiting to be rediscovered.



Jesus: The Restorer of Hope

Cleopas and his friend didn't know it, but their grief had blinded them to the presence of the very hope they thought they had lost.

Jesus wasn't distant—He was walking right beside them.

But He didn't start by giving answers.

He started by listening.

Step 1: Lamenting Pain

Jesus asked, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?"¹

This wasn't small talk. It was an invitation to speak their grief aloud, to voice their shattered dreams—to lament.

Lament is often misunderstood in Christian circles. We think of it as complaining, but lament is actually an act of faith—bringing your pain to God because you trust He's strong enough to handle it.

Cleopas and his friend didn't hold back. They told this stranger everything: the crucifixion, their crushed hopes, their confusion about what to believe.

Jesus made room for their sadness. He didn't correct them or rush to provide solutions. He simply listened. Healing doesn't begin with quick answers—it begins when someone hears your pain.

In our own journeys, lament is essential. Many of us carry silent wounds because we think expressing them means our faith is weak. But lament is how we tear down the walls of doubt and disappointment.

A pastor I know once asked his congregation to write down their heaviest burdens on small cue cards. He was overwhelmed by the response—all the heartbreaks and fears that had never been spoken aloud. The lesson he learned was clear: most of us are suffering silently, waiting for permission to lament.

That's why agape feasts are powerful. Around the table, you can create a safe space where people share their burdens without fear of judgment.

One way is through **group spiritual direction**: break into small groups where each person shares a grief or struggle while others simply listen and pray. Sometimes, the greatest gift you can give is to sit in someone's sadness without offering solutions.

Jesus met Cleopas and his friend in their grief—not to erase it, but to walk them through it.

Step 2: Viewing Suffering through Scripture

After listening, Jesus didn't leave them in despair. He gently reframed their pain by opening the Scriptures.

*"Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."*²

Jesus showed them that what seemed like defeat was actually the fulfillment of God's promises. The Cross wasn't a failure—it was the plan.

We don't know exactly which Scriptures He referenced, but we can imagine.

Perhaps He pointed them to Genesis 3:15, where God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. Or maybe to Isaiah 53, the suffering servant who was pierced for our transgressions.

He could have quoted Psalm 22: "They have pierced my hands and my feet... they divide my garments among them and cast lots for my garment."³

Jesus revealed that their sorrows weren't outside of God's plan—but part of it.

When we face suffering, it's easy to believe we've fallen off God's path. But Scripture tells us otherwise. Joseph found God's plan in the depths of betrayal and slavery. Job met God in the whirlwind.

Throughout Scripture, people encounter God precisely where they thought He was absent.

Christ doesn't save us *from* our suffering, but *through* them.

At an agape feast, reading Scripture together grounds us in this truth. Choose a passage that reflects the group's struggles—perhaps a psalm of lament or a story of redemption. Let the Word speak, and give people time to reflect.

Just as Cleopas and his friend saw their pain through a new lens, we, too, can see that God's silence isn't abandonment—it's the soil where faith grows.

Step 3: Sharing Communion

When they reached their destination, Cleopas and his friend invited the stranger to stay for a meal. As they sat down, something extraordinary happened:

"He took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him."⁴

This wasn't just any meal—it was Communion. When Jesus broke the bread, they saw Him for who He truly was: the risen Christ, the One who had conquered death.

In the same way, Communion is a moment of revelation for us. When we break bread, we don't just remember Christ's death—we experience His presence here and now. The same body that was broken is the source of our healing.

At an agape feast, Communion can flow naturally into the meal. As the bread is broken and the cup is shared, remind everyone: *This is the body broken for you, the blood shed for you.*

Faith is nourished around the table, where heaven touches earth, and broken bread becomes a doorway to hope.

When we eat together, read Scripture, and share our struggles, we begin to see Jesus—not just in the bread and wine but in the faces of those around us.



Living with Enduring Hope

When Cleopas' and his friend's hearts had burned within them as Christ opened the Scriptures, but it wasn't until He broke the bread that hope fully crashed over them like a tidal wave of grace.

They recognized Him—and something was ignited inside.

They didn't stay in Emmaus, savoring their revelation. They ran—back to Jerusalem, back to the city of their deepest disappointment, to declare that death had not won.

Hope restored doesn't sit still—it moves, breathes, and compels you forward.

This is what living with hope looks like—not a fragile wish, but a fierce conviction rooted in the reality of Christ's resurrection. A hope that can endure whatever life throws your way.

A Mission to Share

As they raced back, they weren't armed with perfect explanations or theological proofs. But they carried something more powerful—an encounter with the risen Christ.

They had walked through the valley of grief and doubt, and now they carried the gospel message: *Resurrection!*

All you need is your testimony—the story of how Jesus met you in your pain and walked you back to faith.

Just like Cleopas, your mission isn't to solve people's doubts but to bear witness.

Christ is alive. He walked with me. And He'll walk with you too.

Hospitality of Soul: Welcoming Others as They Are

When you've walked through disillusionment yourself, it changes the way you bear witness to others. It strips away the illusion that you can fix people or offer quick solutions to their pain.

You learn, from experience, that some seasons of life have no easy answers—and that's okay. It creates a deeper kind of hospitality—a *hospitality of soul*.

This kind of soul-level hospitality isn't theoretical—I've seen it lived out through my sister, Kathleen. She embodied it better than anyone I've ever known. Though her body grew weaker with each passing year, her spirit grew stronger, expanding to hold space for other people's pain.

She never rushed to offer explanations like Job's friends. She didn't try to fix anyone's suffering. Instead, she offered something far more powerful—her witness.

When you sat with Kathleen, you felt truly heard. She couldn't solve your problems, but she was always willing to carry them with you—to the Lord in prayer.

Her wisdom wasn't in what she said, but in who she was—a living testimony that faith can endure even when life doesn't go the way you hoped it would.

Kathleen had endured more disappointment than most of us could imagine, yet she always trusted that God was good. And when you sat with her, you couldn't help but trust it too.

Sometimes, the most sacred thing you can do for someone is sit with them in their grief without trying to fix it. That's the kind of hospitality that transforms lives—the kind that says, *"You don't need to have it all figured out to be loved."*

When you welcome others this way, it inspires hope—not because their circumstances change, but because they see that God has carried others before them, and He will carry them too.

Hope That Lasts

Cleopas and his friend returned to Jerusalem, but this time, they weren't carrying the weight of defeat. They were carrying good news. Through Communion, their faith had been refined, strengthened, and reborn. They now had a hope that could last.

Resurrection hope doesn't ignore sorrow—it grows through it. It acknowledges the pain but refuses to let suffering have the final say.

This is the kind of hope my sister Kathleen had as she navigated 26 years with multiple sclerosis. As her body weakened, her faith grew stronger—rooted not in what God could give her, but in who God is.

"I wish I could be healed," she told me once. "But even though it's been hard, I'm thankful. God has used this disease to change me—to make me more like Christ. Without it, I would have been proud. But now, I know how much I need Jesus."

Her hope wasn't tied to a certain outcome—it was anchored in the faithfulness of God. She trusted, even when her prayers weren't answered the way she had hoped, that God was still writing her story with purpose. She could see His hand at work.

That's the kind of faith that lasts—the kind that sees suffering as a refining fire, not as the end of the story. This is the promise that Jesus gave to the pure in heart—they will *see* God.

Kathleen's hope wasn't just about her own journey. What made her faith remarkable was how she carried other people's burdens along with her own. She noticed the pain of others, even when she was in pain herself. Yet she could listen to someone's struggle without diminishing their experience, even though she had endured worse.

She never made you feel small for grieving or doubting. Instead, she inspired you to trust in God's goodness, not by telling you what to believe, but by *living* that belief right in front of you.

Enduring faith isn't flashy or built on perfect circumstances. It's the quiet, steady trust that God is working, even when life feels like it's falling apart. This faith knows that resurrection always comes after the Cross.

It's a faith that remains open to others, even when we've been hurt. It allows us to share hope with those still trapped in doubt because we've walked that road ourselves.

And this is the faith we're called to—a faith that sees beyond broken dreams to the eternal hope of Christ's victory over death.

Let Kathleen's witness remind us: Faith isn't always about getting what you ask for. It's about knowing that God's love is enough.

Run Back, Set the Table, Share the Good News

Cleopas and his friend didn't just encounter hope—they shared it with their community by announcing the good news of resurrection. And we're called to do the same.

Run back to your community. Share your story of how Jesus met you in the places you thought were beyond redemption.

Hope that endures grows in community—over meals, over shared struggles, over broken bread and faith-filled prayers.

As you break bread, as you listen to others, as you share Christ's presence, you'll witness the miracle of resurrection hope. Slowly, steadily, and beautifully, faith will grow.



Rescuing Hope Through Your Agape Feast

Cleopas and his friend didn't expect a life-changing encounter over a simple meal, but that's the beauty of grace. Christ often reveals Himself in the ordinary—in bread, in shared conversations, in quiet acts of hospitality.

Your table can be more than a place to eat—it can be a holy ground. A refuge where pain is spoken, burdens are shared, and hope begins to rise from the ashes.

I remember when our Australia plans were falling apart. We had taken a bold step of faith, trusting it was God's plan for us to move there—but after we realized we had to move back home, our minds were filled with questions and confusion.

I felt like a failure—like I had misheard God, and now we were paying the price. There was no clarity, no resolution, and no sign of what was coming next.

But during that painful season, my friend Cam took me for coffee a few times before we left. He didn't try to fix me or explain away my doubts. He just listened, and he prayed.

And the last time we got together, he said something that has stayed with me: *"I believe God is weaving this into a story that will make sense someday, even if you can't see it now."*

His words didn't solve my crisis, but they gave me courage to keep walking. In that simple moment of connection, hope was sparked—not through answers, but through someone else who had faith on my behalf.

When you gather people—especially those carrying doubts or disillusionment—you're creating a space where lament breaks down walls, where Scripture reframes suffering, and where Communion reveals Christ's presence.

Here's how you can make that vision real.

Welcome Lament

Lament is where healing begins. Don't be afraid of it. Let your agape feast be a place where it's safe to say, "I'm not okay." Create space for people to speak their grief and questions, free from the fear of judgment. When honesty is met with compassion, walls crumble, and seeds of hope are planted.

Reframe Suffering with Scripture

Let God's Word speak directly into the heart of your community's struggles. Read passages that remind you that redemption doesn't bypass pain—it weaves through it. Scripture doesn't erase suffering, but it transforms it, turning crosses into victories and graves into gardens. Let the Word of God be the light that guides you out of the shadows.

Break Bread Together

Communion isn't just a ritual—it's a revelation. When you break bread and share the cup, you're inviting Christ into your midst. His broken body. His poured-out blood. His triumph over death. In that sacred moment, remind everyone that the same Jesus who walked with Cleopas on the road to Emmaus is walking with them now.

Offer Hope through Hospitality

Hospitality isn't about perfect meals or spotless homes—it's about offering a place where people feel seen and loved. Invite those who feel forgotten or out of place. Feed them not just with food but with kindness, patience, and a listening ear. Don't try to fix them. Just walk with them. Hope is served best in simple acts of love.

Set a Table Where Hope is Found

The road to Emmaus isn't just a story—it's a call. Open your table. Welcome the brokenhearted. Share the hope that's been restored in you.

It doesn't take much: a meal, a few open chairs, and the courage to let people bring their real selves. Sit with them in their grief and remind them that Jesus is sitting with them too.

Cleopas was on his way out of Jerusalem—out of faith, out of hope. But Christ met him on the road and walked him back. That's the beauty of grace: it meets us where we are but doesn't leave us there.

Maybe your table will be the reason someone turns back. Maybe it will be the place where doubt transforms into faith, and despair is met with resurrection joy.

Start small. Share a meal. Share Christ.

Invite a neighbor who's questioning—share a meal, open the Bible, break the bread.

Your agape feast could be the moment someone realizes they're not walking alone. It could be the place where they see Christ—not as a distant idea, but as the living Savior walking with them through the valley of doubt.

Because Christ isn't waiting at the end of the road—He's walking alongside you.

And through your table, He'll be walking beside others too.

PART 3

A BOLD VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Looking Back, Moving Forward

In Part 1, we explored how the table has always been central to God's plan—offering connection, belonging, and grace. In Part 2, we saw how Jesus used meals to welcome sinners and transform lives.

Now, in Part 3, it's time to follow His example—making our tables sacred spaces where God's Spirit moves through every meal, conversation, and act of love.

Power From On High At Pentecost

The early church began in an Upper Room with ordinary people—fishermen, tax collectors, and disciples—gathered in prayer. They had no authority or influence, yet when the Holy Spirit descended, everything changed.

They stepped into the streets of Jerusalem with a boldness no one could explain—a *spiritual power without worldly position*.

That day, the church was born—not through force, but through the irresistible power of love and grace. That same Spirit is moving today through small, faithful acts of hospitality.

The Communion Revolution isn't about reclaiming worldly power; it's about rediscovering the Spirit-filled life that first drew the world to Christ—starting at our tables.

The Table as the Center of the Early Church

The early church embodied the Spirit-filled life by following Jesus' example—they ate together. Around their tables, they shared meals, prayed, and cared for one another.

These gatherings became sacred as they encountered Christ—not just in the bread and wine, but in the faces of those they shared it with. Their power wasn't in cultural influence or institutional strategy; it flowed out of how they lived.

The Kingdom of God grew—not from the top down, but from the table out.

Your Table, A Movement

What if a movement of love and belonging could begin right at your table? Imagine strangers becoming friends, the lonely finding connection, and reconciliation taking root—all because you dared to say, "Come for dinner."

The same Spirit who moved in the Upper Room can move in your home.

Sparking the Imaginative Possibility

Many Christians don't practice Christlike hospitality—not out of reluctance, but because they've never considered its importance. You can't act on an idea you haven't had. It's like what Paul says:

"How can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And How can they hear about Him unless someone tells them?"¹

That's why I wrote this book—to tell you about how hospitality can become a place where the Holy Spirit works, breaking down walls and bringing healing to relationships.

Opening your home to an agape feast may seem small, but it has the power to help rebuild the very foundation of the church. And once the idea takes root, it changes everything.

The Communion Revolution: Stepping Into the Story

The Spirit of God is moving—filling tables with life, light, and His Kingdom, one meal at a time. And this book is an invitation to make your table a place of transformation. Now it's your turn.

What if your agape feast inspired others to open their tables, sparking a movement of peace and healing?

In Part 3, you'll follow the journey of someone who opened their table and experienced the Spirit's power in simple acts of love. Their story could be yours.

Let's set the table and see what happens when we say yes to the invitation that once changed the world—and can do it again.

INVITATION

WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME FOR DINNER?

Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Romans 12:13 NLT



Alex stared at the text on his phone, reading it for the third time. It was from Jake, an old college friend he hadn't seen in a while:

“Hey man! I'm hosting an agape feast this Friday—just an open-table dinner with some friends. You should come! No pressure, just good food and conversation.”

“Agape feast?” Alex frowned. The phrase sounded vaguely religious—like something from a sermon he half-remembered from his teenage years at church.

Since moving out on his own, faith had become an afterthought, something to revisit later—when life wasn't so busy. His mom's occasional reminders to "find a good church" were the only nudge he got these days.

"I barely have time for regular meals, let alone something like this," he thought, eyeing the mountain of unread emails on his laptop.

Still, it was Jake. And Jake wasn't the type to host weird church events. In college, they'd bonded over late-night coffee runs and deep conversations about life and faith. If nothing else, it'd be good to catch up.

"Sure," Alex finally replied. "What time?"

It's Time for Dinner

Friday evening arrived faster than Alex expected. He pulled up outside Jake's apartment, staring at the warm glow of the lights inside. Taking a deep breath, he grabbed the bottle of sparkling water he'd brought—unsure if it was the right choice, but better than showing up empty-handed.

Inside, he was greeted by laughter and the rich aroma of something delicious—garlic, maybe rosemary. The apartment wasn't fancy, but it felt inviting. Candles flickered on the table, and the hum of conversation filled the space.

"Alex!" Jake grinned, clapping him on the back. "Glad you made it!"

Alex smiled, trying to ignore his awkwardness as he scanned the room—about a dozen people, some vaguely familiar from college, others strangers. Plates were passed, and conversations flowed naturally, deeper than the usual small talk.

As the meal went on, Alex found himself drawn in. A woman shared how hospitality had changed the way she saw her neighbors. Another man admitted these weekly dinners had eased his loneliness in the city.

"You guys do this every week?" Alex asked.

Jake nodded and handed him a worn paperback, *The Communion Revolution*. “You should check this out. This is what inspired it all,” he said.

Flipping through a few pages, Alex read about Jesus, hospitality, and the power of shared meals. He raised an eyebrow. “So, you’re saying dinner like this is... church?”

Jake laughed. “Kind of. It’s about living like Jesus—being present, eating together, seeing people as family.”

Later, walking back to his car, Alex stared at the book in his hand, the title glowing under the streetlights.

“Could something as simple as dinner really change my life?” He sighed, tossing it onto the passenger seat. *“Guess I’ll find out.”*



Discovering *The Communion Revolution*

The next week, Alex sat in his car outside Jake’s apartment, gripping the steering wheel. He glanced at his phone—6:58 p.m. *“Why am I even here? Still time to bail.”*

All week, he had told himself this dinner was just a casual catch-up, but deep down, he knew it meant more. Ever since that first meal, something had been pulling him back.

With a sigh, he shut off the engine and headed inside.

The apartment felt just as inviting as before—soft lighting, the scent of spices in the air, and the hum of conversation. Jake met him with a grin and a firm handshake: “Glad you came, man. We’re just getting started.”

Alex took a seat, still feeling a bit like an outsider looking in. The atmosphere was casual but intentional. People weren’t just talking; they were listening.

As the meal went on, Alex relaxed. The food was good, the company better. He listened more than he spoke, nodding along as stories were shared—some lighthearted, others surprisingly honest.

At one point, an older woman named Karen shared how hosting these meals had changed her view of faith. “I used to think church was just a place you go on Sundays,” she said, her voice steady. “But now I see it’s more than that... it’s something you live—right here, around this table.”

Alex felt a pang of recognition. That thought had been rattling in his mind ever since he started reading *The Communion Revolution*.

He had picked it up out of politeness, expecting another Christian book filled with abstract ideas and impractical ideals. But instead, it met him right where he was—naming the loneliness, disconnection, and quiet crisis in the church he hadn’t put into words. It confronted a truth he had avoided: faith wasn’t meant to be lived alone.

The one idea from the book that really stuck with him was that *God gave us faith and community as bridges to find meaning in life*. Finding something meaningful to do with his life had been elusive.

As he read, something shifted. The Communion table—once just a solemn church ritual—was being redefined as a way of life and a shared identity.

And he wondered, “If Jesus didn’t build His Kingdom through sermons and temples, but He built it around tables, what if faith and community was actually meant to be simple?”

Back at the table, Alex shifted in his seat, glancing at the faces around him. *"Was this what the book meant?"*

Jake's house was a place where faith felt tangible and shared, not distant and abstract.

His thoughts were interrupted when someone—Tim, he thought—cleared his throat. "I, uh... I've been struggling," he said, staring at his plate. "Work's been tough. I know God's in control, but it's hard."

A silence settled—not awkward, but expectant. Jake put a hand on Tim's shoulder. "We're with you, man. Let's pray."

Alex watched, a lump forming in his throat, as heads bowed and people prayed—simply, honestly, like they were talking to a friend. He didn't pray aloud, but in that quiet moment, he whispered a silent prayer of his own: *"Maybe faith was always meant to look more like this."*

Later, driving home, he reflected on the evening—the laughter, the honesty, the unexpected sense of belonging. His eyes drifted to *The Communion Revolution* on the passenger seat, dog-eared and underlined.

For the first time in a long time, he felt like he was on the right path.

"It starts here. Doesn't it?"

Takeaways

- Who in your life could you invite to dinner this week? Send them a simple message and extend an invitation.
- Pray for courage to step out of your comfort zone and show hospitality, even if your home isn't perfect.
- Reflect: What's holding you back from deeper community? Write down any fears or hesitations and surrender them in prayer.

Here's a simple and adaptable text message that reflects the heart of the vision while keeping things casual and inviting:

Hey [Friend's Name]! I'm hosting a dinner this [day] at [time]—just good food, and good conversation. Nothing fancy, no pressure. Would love for you to come! Let me know if you can make it.

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ABIDE

MAKING YOUR HOME IN CHRIST

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

John 15:4 NLT



The Abide Retreat

A few months after joining the agape feast, Alex found himself saying yes to something he never expected—an 18-month discipleship journey called the **Abide Course**.

Jake had suggested it over coffee one afternoon. “We’ve been doing these meals for a while,” he said to Alex and Tim. “But I feel like we need to go deeper—build something lasting.”

Before Alex could think of an excuse, Jake had already signed them up. “*Classic Jake*,” Alex thought. “*Always pulling me into something before I can say no.*”

Now, as they pulled into the gravel driveway of the retreat center, Alex’s stomach tightened. Towering pines framed a rustic lodge nestled in the woods. It looked peaceful—*too* peaceful, the kind of place where distractions couldn’t exist.

He glanced at the retreat schedule Jake had texted him earlier. Words like *silent prayer*, *spiritual direction*, and *communal meals* stood out in bold print.

Alex sighed, staring at the trees. “*Eighteen months. What did I just sign up for?*”

The idea of an 18-month commitment made him uneasy—sitting in silence, facing solitude, and discussing faith with strangers. He wasn’t exactly the retreat type. Church was something to squeeze into an hour on Sundays, not a deep dive.

Jake grinned, “Welcome to your retreat, man.”

Alex forced a smile. “Yeah, let’s see how this goes.”

Inside, the lodge felt warm and inviting—long wooden tables, the faint smell of fresh bread, and a crackling fire in the main hall. Some people gathered in clusters; others sat quietly, flipping through booklets.

As Alex checked in, James, the facilitator of the retreat, announced, “Dinner will begin in twenty minutes, followed by our opening reflection.”

He took a deep breath: “*Alright. Let’s do this.*”

The Power of Silence

That evening, the group gathered in a dimly lit chapel. James spoke softly, “We’ll begin with **Centering Prayer**—quieting our minds and sitting silently with Jesus. If your thoughts wander, gently repeat His name.”

“I should’ve at least had coffee first,” Alex thought, shifting in his seat. Silence wasn’t his thing. His life was a constant buzz of notifications and meetings.

Sitting still, his mind raced, *“What am I supposed to think about? What am I even doing here?”*

He glanced around—some had their eyes closed, breathing deeply; others looked peaceful.

Frustrated, he refocused, whispering *Jesus* each time his thoughts strayed. Slowly, the noise in his head softened. It didn’t disappear, but for once, he wasn’t filling the silence with more distractions. He was just... present.

After 20 minutes, he exhaled deeply. No grand revelation, but the stillness felt refreshing—like his soul had taken its first deep breath in a long time.

“Maybe abiding isn’t about trying harder; it’s about making space for God,” he thought.

Shared Meals, Unexpected Conversations

The next morning at breakfast, Alex sat with a diverse group—young professionals like himself, an older couple who had hosted agape feasts for years, and a pastor from another denomination.

Conversations flowed over eggs and toast, unhurried and deeper than he expected:

- *“What’s been the hardest part about opening your home to others?”*

- *“How has hospitality changed your relationship with God?”*
- *“What’s something you’re longing for in your faith?”*

Alex hesitated, then admitted, “Honestly? I’ve been treating faith like something to fit into my schedule instead of something that *is* my life.”

To his surprise, heads nodded. No judgment. No advice. Just listening. He wasn’t used to that—faith conversations usually felt like something to defend or explain. But not here.

As the weekend unfolded, meals became more than eating; they were moments of connection, storytelling, and grace. For the first time, Alex wondered—*“Was church always meant to feel like this?”*

Group Spiritual Direction: Being Heard

On the second afternoon, Alex sat with Jake and Tim for their first **Triad** session in **Group Spiritual Direction**.

James explained, “Each person will have 20 minutes to share whatever is on their heart, while the others listen—no fixing, no advice, just listening. Afterward, you’ll pray and reflect together.”

Alex shifted in his chair. *“No advice? No discussion? Just listening?”* That felt... foreign.

When it was his turn, he hesitated. “I guess... I’ve been feeling stuck. I want to go deeper in my faith, but I don’t really know what that looks like.”

Silence followed. At first, it felt awkward, but then something surprising happened—no one rushed to fill the space. Jake and Tim simply listened. Fully, attentively.

Something in Alex's chest tightened. He needed this—a place where he could speak and simply be heard. He realized most conversations felt like people were just waiting for their turn to talk. But here, he felt truly understood. For the first time, he opened up about things he hadn't shared anywhere else.

After the timer went, Tim spoke gently, "Thanks for sharing that. I hear you, man. And I get it. It's not easy stepping into something new."

Jake offered a quiet smile. "Let's sit with that for a moment, then we'll pray."

Alex nodded slowly. For the first time in a long time, he'd been honest without fear of judgment—it felt like holy ground.

The Estuary Meeting: Wrestling With Big Questions

The next day, Alex joined an **Estuary Meeting**—a group of nine discussing what had stirred in them during the retreat. His Triad members were in different groups.

James opened with a simple explanation. "An estuary is a coastal area where freshwater from rivers mixes with saltwater from the ocean, creating a unique and dynamic ecosystem, which nurtures life in a way that wouldn't be possible if they remained separate."

He paused, looking around the room. "A group discussion like this can be a lot like an estuary. Each of us brings our own experiences, perspectives, and beliefs—like freshwater meeting saltwater. If we're open to listening—it's in this blending together that we grow, stretch, and find insights that we couldn't have discovered alone."

Then he asked a question: "What's been stirring in your heart this weekend that you'd like to discuss with the group?"

One by one, people shared. Someone wrestled with balancing a busy life and spiritual disciplines. Another wondered how to take their agape feast deeper into discipleship.

People leaned in, sipping coffee, nodding thoughtfully as ideas wove together in unexpected ways.

When it was his turn, Alex spoke without overthinking. “I’ve been thinking a lot about what it really means to abide in Christ. I used to think it meant adding more to my faith checklist, but now I’m seeing it’s about presence—just like at the table. I don’t want to just go through the motions anymore.”

“A few weeks ago, I would’ve overthought every word. Now, it just feels natural... like I’m just at Jake’s agape feast,” he realized.

A woman across the circle smiled. “I think we all wrestle with that. But maybe abiding isn’t about doing more—it’s about being present.”

Her words stuck with Alex. He’d always thought faith meant trying harder to be a good person, but maybe it was actually about slowing down, paying attention, and creating space for God to work.

Then someone chimed in. “Have you guys gotten into *The Canopy* yet? They’ve got a podcast series on how *The Communion Revolution* is becoming a movement of hospitality—it’s been a game-changer for me.”

Alex made a mental note. He’d never heard of *The Canopy* but was curious. The idea that this was part of something bigger—a growing movement—made him realize he wasn’t alone in his search for a deeper, more connected faith.

The conversation stretched on—deep, honest, full of grace. It felt like a safe place to wrestle with big questions without easy answers.

Departure and Reflection

On the final morning, the retreat ended with Communion. As Alex took the bread and cup, it felt different—less like a symbol, more like an invitation.

Walking to his car, he replayed the weekend: the silence, the meals, the honesty. It had been uncomfortable at times, but also... grounding. He wasn't just leaving with ideas; he was leaving with a plan.

As they pulled onto the highway, a quiet thought settled in his heart: *"Maybe slowing down isn't losing time. Maybe it's making room for something real."* Alex gazed at the passing trees, feeling lighter somehow.

"Let's not let this stay here," Tim said, breaking the silence.

Alex nodded. "Yeah. Let's make it real."

For the rest of the drive, they talked about how to make their agape feast a place like that.

Takeaways

- Set aside 5-10 minutes daily for silence with God. Try Centering Prayer by focusing on a simple word like "Jesus."
- Plan a mini-retreat at home: unplug for a few hours, journal, and seek God's presence.
- Reflect: What distractions keep you from abiding in Christ? How can you simplify your schedule to create space for Him?



The Abide Course: Coming September 2025

The Abide Course is a free 18-month journey designed to help you slow down, root yourself in Christ, and infuse your life with the practices of spiritual formation and hospitality.

We'll guide you through prayer, reflection, and intentional living. Be the first to know when it's ready by signing up for updates!

Join the Email List Now

Let's abide together, and let God transform us from the inside out.

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CANOPY

JOINING THE MOVEMENT

I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

John 17:21 NLT



The Podcast

Alex sank into his couch as the intro music of *The Canopy Podcast* played through his earbuds. The host's voice was warm, passionate, and a little unpolished.

"Welcome to The Canopy Podcast, where we explore how Christlike hospitality can spark a movement of renewal. Whether you're hosting an agape feast, dreaming of starting one, or just curious—you're in the right place."

Alex smirked: *"Alright, let's see if this is actually worth the hype."*

Jake had been on him for weeks, practically shoving a link in his face: "This guy's legit. You'll love it."

Curiosity won out, and soon Alex was listening intently as the host shared his vision—a grassroots movement of agape feasts popping up in neighborhoods, workplaces, and churches. Ordinary people practicing radical hospitality, rediscovering what it meant to follow Jesus.

It wasn't preachy or about big budgets. It was real—filled with interviews from pastors and regular people alike, opening their homes and seeing God show up in unexpected ways.

He clicked to the next episode. And then another.

By the time Jake and Tim came over that evening, Alex was hooked.

Wrestling With Big Ideas

"So, what do you think?" Jake asked, leaning against Alex's kitchen counter.

Alex shrugged, "I gotta admit, it's got me thinking. It's cool hearing about all these agape feasts popping up. Feels bigger than I thought."

Jake grinned. "Told you."

Tim, sitting with his arms crossed, looked skeptical. "It's interesting, but let's be real—half of these ideas never last." He tapped his fingers on the table. In ten years, this'll just be another Christian buzzword, like 'missional community.'" He tapped the table. "Remember how hyped that was?"

Alex laughed. “Yeah, but you’re still listening to the history episodes, aren’t you?”

Tim nodded. “A little. Never heard of Christopher Dawson before, but his take on culture? Solid.”

Jake pulled up his phone. “Did you hear they’re hosting a **Canopy Conference** soon? They’re bringing agape feast leaders together to create a ‘best practices manual’—planting new feasts, working with churches, figuring out this whole Contestant Reformation thing.”

Alex raised an eyebrow. “A conference? Like name tags and breakout sessions?”

Jake shrugged, “Probably more like people eating together and figuring out how to make this movement real.”

Alex thought for a moment, “I’m in if you guys are.”

Tim sighed, “Fine. But if they start selling essential oils, I’m out.”

The Canopy Conference: Casting A New Vision for Community

The conference wasn’t what Alex expected.

Instead of a stuffy hotel ballroom, it was held in a local church, with long tables draped in mismatched tablecloths and the scent of roasted chicken and fresh bread filling the air. Soft conversations hummed beneath the music playing from an old speaker, and string lights crisscrossed the ceiling, casting a warm glow. People milled around—some in deep conversation, others laughing like old friends reuniting.

The host took the stage, microphone in hand, no script—just raw passion. “Friends,” he said, “when we’re leading agape feasts, we’re not just hosting din-

ners. We're reclaiming something ancient, something holy. The table is where Jesus met people; it's where we meet Him too."

Alex glanced around—some took notes, others simply closed their eyes, taking it all in. The room pulsed with something deeper than excitement—hope, maybe.

Then came the first big idea: the **Contestant Reformation**—a fresh reimagining of the Protestant Reformation. The speaker's voice lowered, and murmurs rippled through the crowd. "Christian unity doesn't come by compromising our differences but by embracing them—pursuing humility, holiness, and hospitality with everything we've got."

Tim leaned in, elbows on the table, eyes locked on the speaker, scribbling notes furiously every time names like Christopher Dawson or G.K. Chesterton were mentioned.

During the Q&A, his hand shot up. "So you're saying unity comes not by compromising doctrine, but by pursuing Christ wholeheartedly within our own traditions?" His voice carried across the room.

A few people turned, smiling at Tim's enthusiasm, while the speaker grinned. "Exactly. As each of us draws closer to Christ, we actually draw closer to each other. We should all spur one another on toward holiness, whether we're evangelical, Anglican, Catholic, or Orthodox. We all agree that Christians should live like Jesus did—hospitality should be our posture toward one another!"

A quiet hum of agreement filled the room, and someone behind Alex whispered, "That's good." A knot Alex hadn't realized was there started to loosen.

In another session, they explored the **Hybrid Model of Church**, where agape feasts didn't replace Sunday services but enhanced them—offering a more intimate, discipleship-focused environment while leveraging technology to bring church into living rooms. The hybrid combined the resources and teaching of an established church with the intimacy and community of an agape feast.

Jake was locked in, nodding as the speaker explained how churches could embrace agape feasts without feeling threatened. He flipped through his notebook, jotting down bullet points with such intensity that Alex couldn't help but chuckle.

The session on building a network—the **Canopy**—hit home for Alex. As the speaker described how local agape feasts were joining forces for a shared mission, something stirred inside him. One story stood out—how different groups in a city came together to serve the homeless, pooling resources and multiplying their impact.

Alex glanced around the room—people were leaning in, some wiping away tears, others exchanging hopeful glances. The atmosphere felt electric. He met Jake and Tim's eyes, and they all had the same thought: *We need to do this.*

Between sessions, they met others like them around the tables. Estuary Meetings brought diverse perspectives together, and Alex was struck by how naturally conversations flowed—people from different backgrounds finding common ground in their desire to build something meaningful.

Jake, always the connector, spent the weekend networking and even found two agape feast leaders who lived near his apartment.

By the end of the weekend, Alex couldn't shake the feeling they were on the edge of something big. "This isn't just a podcast or a cool dinner idea," he told Jake and Tim. "This could actually change things."

Organizing an Agape Feast Meet-Up

Back home, Jake gathered their agape feast community in his living room. The place was packed—friends squeezed onto couches, perched on armrests, and leaned against the walls, plates balanced on their laps.

As everyone settled in, Jake stood up. “I think we should host a meet-up,” he said, scanning the room. “We met a few local agape feast leaders at the conference, and I think bringing everyone together could be amazing. Who knows what ideas might come up as we share what we’re learning?”

A murmur of agreement swept through the room. Some nodded thoughtfully, while others exchanged excited glances. “Why not? It can’t do any harm!” Alex agreed.

A week later, they hosted their first **Agape Feast Meet-Up**, inviting the two local groups they’d connected with at the Conference. As they arrived, Alex started to have some doubts, *“What if no one else felt the same urgency? What if it was just a phase?”*

Then, over potluck dishes and coffee, introductions quickly turned into heartfelt conversations. One woman, who had been hosting for a year, shared how their feast had become a refuge for people struggling with loneliness. Another talked about partnering with their church for neighborhood outreach.

As laughter rippled through the room and people leaned in, deep in conversation, Alex stepped back, watching it all unfold—the way strangers were becoming friends, the openness in their conversations, and the warm glow of the candles making everything feel sacred.

A year ago, he would have rolled his eyes at the idea of strangers becoming family over a meal. But now? Now he was seeing it happen right in front of him. He let out a slow breath, feeling something shift inside him: *“This was more than just a casual gathering.”*

The conversations, the connections, the hunger for something deeper—it wasn’t just their group. It was a growing movement, spreading. And they were part of it.

“Are we ready for this?” Alex wondered, *“Is this really what we’re being called to build?”*

Reflecting on the Bigger Picture

Later that night, when it was just the three of them—Alex, Jake, and Tim—sitting on the porch with coffee in hand, they talked about what came next.

“I think we should make these meet-ups a regular thing,” Alex said, running a hand through his hair. “Tonight felt... important.”

Jake grinned. “Told you it was worth it.”

Tim smirked, raising his cup. “And hey, no essential oils.”

They laughed, but beneath the humor, Alex felt it—they were stepping into something bigger than themselves.

Takeaways

- Explore ways to partner with other believers in your city—whether through outreach, prayer, or learning together.
- Reflect: How can your home gatherings complement and support the wider mission of the Church?



The Canopy Podcast: Coming September 2025

The Canopy Podcast will bring you real stories, deep conversations, and practical wisdom from agape feast leaders, pastors, and ordinary people making extraordinary change.

Be the first to hear new episodes by subscribing to our email list.

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Let's explore how we can work together to make the Church known for love, humility, and hospitality. The movement is growing, and we want you to be part of it.

SAUNTERRE

PRAYER WALKS, PARADES, AND GLOBAL WORSHIP

I promise you what I promised Moses: ‘Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you.’

Joshua 1:3 NLT



Alex sat on Jake’s couch, swirling the last sip of coffee in his mug, feeling *off*.

A few months ago, these weekly agape feasts felt electric—every meal brimming with purpose and possibility. But lately, something had shifted. The warmth was still there, but so was a *weight*. People showed up, but they were tired. Life was catching up to them, and Alex felt it too.

Jake, however, didn’t seem to notice. He was already onto the next big idea.

“I think we should start another feast,” he said, eyes bright with excitement. “We’ve got too many people now. Some of us could break off and plant a new one.”

Silence.

Tim leaned back, arms crossed. “We barely have this one figured out. Why rush into another?”

A few murmurs of agreement filled the room, and Alex caught the flicker of frustration in Jake’s eyes.

“Come on, guys,” Jake pushed, “If we stay comfortable, we’re missing the point.”

Alex glanced around. The excitement that once fueled them was starting to feel like an obligation, and he wasn’t the only one feeling it. Lately, he’d been working late, zoning out with Netflix, skipping moments of reflection, and wondering: “*Am I really cut out for this?*”

Later, as Alex helped Jake clean up, he finally voiced what had been gnawing at him.

“Look, I get it,” he said, rinsing a plate. “But maybe we’re not ready for more. People are showing up exhausted. It’s starting to feel like... work.”

Jake sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. “I just don’t want us to stall out, you know? We had so much momentum after the retreat—I don’t want to lose it.”

Alex nodded, but deep down, he wondered if the real issue wasn’t *stalling* out—it was *burning* out.

From across the room, Tim, stacking chairs, chimed in without looking up. “Maybe we already have.”

His usual sarcasm was gone, replaced with something quieter. “I don’t know, man. Some nights, it feels great—like we’re building something real. But other times... it’s like we’re just going through the motions. It’s just harder than I thought it’d be.”

Alex exchanged a glance with Jake, feeling both relief and unease. If Tim was feeling it too, maybe this was bigger than just his own doubts.

Seeking Wisdom

Unsure of what to do next, Jake invited Pastor Greg to their next agape feast. Alex watched him carefully, wondering if he’d actually “get it” or if he’d just start preaching.

Earlier, Tim had voiced what Alex had been thinking. “I know it’s tough right now, but this feels more real than anything I’ve experienced on Sundays. Do we even need church?”

But Pastor Greg settled in easily, grabbing a plate and joining the conversation like an old friend.

As dinner wound down, Jake leaned in. “Pastor Greg, we’re trying to figure out where this is going. We love what we’re doing, but it’s starting to feel like... we’re hitting a wall.”

Tim, arms crossed, added, “Honestly? Sometimes it feels like we’re doing community better than the church. No offense, but people actually talk here.”

A few chuckled, but Greg just smiled. Setting down his fork, he glanced around the room thoughtfully.

“I love what you’re doing,” he said. “This... this is discipleship in action. The way you’re practicing hospitality, building deep relationships, and seeking Christ in everyday life—it’s beautiful.”

Jake let out a relieved breath, and a few people smiled.

“But,” Greg continued, “these kinds of movements—small, intentional communities of faith—start strong, but they rarely last.”

The room fell silent.

Greg leaned forward. “Sunday worship has endured for *centuries*. There’s a depth to gathering in corporate worship, prayer, and the Eucharist that you can’t replicate anywhere else. No matter how meaningful your agape feast is, standing with the broader body of Christ brings something different.”

Alex shifted in his seat. He’d been skipping church more and more, and Greg’s words hit home.

“But,” Greg continued with a warm smile, “this isn’t an *either-or*. The church isn’t competing with you; it *needs* you. Think of Sunday worship as the roots and your agape feasts as the branches reaching into the neighborhoods. We need *both*.”

Tim nodded and asked, “But what if the roots are... dead?”

Greg chuckled. “They aren’t. But you might need to dig deeper to find that out. Let the Eucharist shape your table. Let Sunday prayer guide your gatherings. Keep it *all* united in Christ.”

“But isn’t the church... stuck?” Tim frowned. “What we’re doing here feels more *real*.”

Greg nodded. “I get it. And honestly? I love that you’re bringing this kind of community back to the church. If more people opened their homes like you, discipleship would look a lot different.”

He paused. “But you also need the church—because this isn’t just *your* project. It’s *God’s*. And the Spirit works through the whole body, not just the parts we prefer.”

Jake exhaled, feeling the weight of it. Maybe they weren't meant to figure this out alone.

As Greg stood to leave, his final words stayed with them: "Keep going. But don't do it alone. Stay rooted in the church. And pray—pray like it all depends on God. Because it does."

A Call to Prayer: *Saunterre*

Encouraged by Greg's words, Jake brought up an idea from *The Canopy Podcast*—prayer walking, or **Saunterre**.

"Guys," he said at their next agape feast, "instead of stressing about growth, let's try something simpler. Let's just walk and pray for our neighbors."

Tim groaned. "Prayer walks? That sounds a little... churchy."

Alex smirked. "So is eating bread and drinking wine every week. What's the harm in trying it?"

People chuckled, but beneath it was quiet agreement. Pastor Greg's words had struck a chord—this wasn't their project; it was God's. Maybe they'd been trying too hard to make things happen on their own.

Jake leaned forward. "Greg was right. We need to stop pressuring ourselves to *make* this work. Let's focus on two things for now: prayer and staying connected to the church."

Alex nodded. "Yeah. The church part... I think I need that."

Even Tim, usually the skeptic, hesitated. "I mean... I guess it wouldn't kill us to go more consistently."

Jake grinned. "Alright, Sundays—together."

A few exchanged glances, but slowly, heads nodded. They'd been doing life together for months—it made sense to worship together too.

“And the prayer walks?” Alex asked.

Jake shrugged. “No pressure, no expectations. Just prayer.”

And so they started.

Saunterre: Discovering Their Neighborhood

At first, it felt awkward—wandering through their neighborhood in pairs, whispering prayers, and trying not to look weird. Tim cracked jokes to cover his discomfort, Alex felt self-conscious, and even Jake seemed unsure.

But as they walked, they started noticing things they'd overlooked before—the elderly woman sitting alone on her porch every evening, the single dad struggling with groceries, the graffiti-covered park bench where teenagers gathered late at night.

One evening, a man sitting on his steps called out, “Hey, what are you guys doing?”

Jake hesitated. “Uh... just praying for the neighborhood.”

The man's face softened. “Could you pray for my wife? She's been sick for a while.”

The request caught them off guard. Alex felt something shift inside him: *“How long had they been gathering for dinner without even thinking about the people who lived around them?”* Suddenly, it wasn't just about their small group anymore.

Tim was the first to respond. “Yeah. We'd be honored to.”

Over the next few weeks, something changed. Tim's sarcastic remarks faded, and Alex noticed him looking around—*really* seeing their neighbors. One night, as they passed the park, Tim broke the silence. "I guess I never thought about... actually praying for people outside our group."

Jake grinned. "Crazy how that works, huh?"

Tim smirked but nodded. "Yeah. I guess it is."

Leaning Into the Church

True to their word, they started showing up at church together—and Pastor Greg had been right.

Standing in worship, singing with the congregation, and taking Communion alongside people they barely knew grounded them in a way their agape feast couldn't.

One Sunday, as they lined up for Communion, Alex glanced at Jake and Tim. Tim, for once, wasn't zoning out. Alex smiled to himself.

After the service, they lingered longer, meeting new people and getting plugged in. Jake even signed them up for an outreach project—classic Jake.

Over dinner one evening, Jake admitted, "I used to think church was just... there, you know? Something to check off on Sundays. But I'm realizing it's been holding my faith up all along."

Alex nodded. "Yeah. I didn't realize how much I needed it either."

Even Tim, though he wouldn't say it out loud, had stopped questioning the church's value. Quietly, he found himself looking forward to Sunday mornings.

Joining a Bigger Story: Prayer Parade

As their prayer walks continued, they heard about a citywide prayer parade—hundreds of believers from different churches walking through the city, praying for healing and stopping at key landmarks to intercede for their community.

“This is happening everywhere,” Jake said, showing Alex and Tim a post on his phone. “Major cities, even internationally.”

The morning of the parade, Alex stood in a long line of people—families, students, retirees—each from different churches and backgrounds. The hum of conversation buzzed through the crowd, and he was struck by how big this had become.

Tim nudged him, nodding toward a group of Catholic nuns nearby, rosaries in hand. “Didn’t expect to be walking alongside that.”

Alex chuckled. “Yeah, I guess we’re all on the same team after all.”

Tim was quiet for a moment before saying, “You know, I always thought church was just... a business. But maybe it’s more like a heartbeat. Keeping everything going, even when we don’t see it.”

Alex blinked, surprised. “That’s pretty deep, man.”

Tim shrugged, shoving his hands into his pockets. “Yeah, well. Don’t get used to it.”

Joining a Bigger Story: Global Worship Night

Excitement buzzed through the crowd at the latest announcement—the first-ever **Global Worship Night**.

“Did you hear?” a woman beside them whispered. “Millions of people, same songs, same prayers, all at once. It’s going to be live-streamed worldwide.”

“I saw it on Instagram,” another added. “Churches and agape feasts everywhere are signing up. They’re calling it a *night of unity*.”

Jake’s eyes lit up. “Can you imagine? Worship happening everywhere—homes, churches, parks—all at the same time? We have to do it!”

Tim smirked. “Okay, even I have to admit... that’s kind of cool.”

Alex listened, something stirring deep within him. This wasn’t just their little group—God was moving everywhere, one table, one prayer, one step at a time.

Leaning Into Both Worlds

That night, Alex sat on his balcony, city lights flickering below. He thought about Pastor Greg’s words—staying rooted in the church while growing their agape feast through prayer.

The weight of it all was still there, but it no longer felt like his burden to carry. He whispered a simple prayer—not for success or growth, but for God to keep showing up. And somehow, he knew He would.

Takeaways

- Take a short walk around your neighborhood today and pray silently for the people and places you see.
- Gather a few friends to do a monthly prayer walk, asking God to open doors for connection.
- Reflect: What needs have you noticed in your community? How might God be calling you to respond?



Join the Prayer List and Be Part of the Movement

Prayer has always been the foundation of every revival, movement, and life-changing act of faith. If we're going to spark something as bold as *The Communion Revolution*, we need to pray fervently.

That's why we're building a community of people committed to praying for this vision—praying for agape feasts to flourish, for the lonely to find connection for churches to embrace radical hospitality, and for neighborhoods to experience renewal.

Sign Up Here

When you join the prayer list, you'll receive:

- An invitation to join the 30-Minute Prayer Challenge
- Monthly prayer updates with specific requests from agape feast leaders and churches
- Stories of answered prayers and community breakthroughs
- Resources to help you organize prayer walks and gatherings in your area

Let's walk this journey together, trusting that God will do immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine.

If you're already part of a prayer network, let's team up! Contact me at www.matthewmcperson-author.com.

22

ANGELENOS

A NEW KIND OF HOLY ORDER

He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant.

2 Corinthians 3:6 NLT



Welcome to Bonavista

As Alex's plane descended into Los Angeles, the city sprawled beneath him—streets and lights stretching like pulsing veins. Somewhere down there, Ethan was waiting—his old friend who'd joined an 'urban monastery.'

"A monastery? In LA?"

The idea baffled Alex. Monks chanting in a cathedral didn't sound like Ethan at all. But on the phone, Ethan had seemed different—more grounded and alive.

When Alex stepped out of the rideshare onto the cracked pavement, he wasn't sure he was in the right place. This old shopping mall still bore the scars of its past—faded signs, graffiti, and weeds splitting the concrete. But as he walked closer, he heard sacred music filling the air.

Ethan greeted him at the entrance, grinning ear to ear. He looked different—scruffier, simpler, but with a peace in his eyes that Alex hadn't seen before.

“This is it?” Alex raised an eyebrow. “I was expecting... I don't know, something less—retail?”

Ethan chuckled. “Trust me, it grows on you. Come on, I'll show you around.”

Inside, string lights crisscrossed the atrium where long communal tables had replaced food court booths. A woman harvested herbs from a rooftop garden, and a man read quietly beneath a mural of vibrant, hopeful faces. It was messy, eclectic, alive.

“This place used to be a dead mall,” Ethan said, leading Alex past the murals. “Now it's a hub for renewal—housing, gardens, classrooms, and worship. Part monastery, part community center.”

Alex took it all in, nodding. “So... you're city monks?”

Ethan smirked. “Sort of. Come meet my mentor. He'll explain it better.”

The Angelenos: A New Kind of Holy Order

Anthony, a middle-aged man with kind eyes and a denim jacket, sat with them over tea in one of Bonavista's communal kitchens. His presence was steady—like he belonged here in a way Alex didn't quite understand yet.

“**We're not** monks in the traditional sense,” Anthony said, stirring his tea. “We're urban missionaries—living, working, and praying in the heart of the city, offering hospitality and hope.”

He gestured to the skyline outside the window. “Our ‘cloister’ isn’t behind stone walls; it’s out there.”

Alex frowned. “But why here in LA?”

Anthony smiled. “Because redemption doesn’t happen by escaping the world—it happens by loving it. This city shapes culture. Imagine infusing it with the love of Christ—right in the noise, the chaos, the beauty.”

“And it’s not just for here,” Anthony added. “We believe what we’re building in LA can spread to other cities—places where the need is just as great. We’ve already had conversations about launching similar communities in New York, Chicago, and beyond.”

Ethan chimed in, “We’re not just doing ministry. We run urban farms, educate children, partner with artists, and help the homeless transition into stable housing. The dream is to see Bonavista-style communities all over. If it can work here, why not everywhere?”

Alex raised an eyebrow. “So, you’re saying this could become a movement?”

Anthony smiled. “It already is.”

Alex nodded, intrigued. “And the holy order? How does it work?”

Anthony leaned back. “We’re more like a *holy guild* with three tiers of commitment. *Apprentices*—like Ethan—commit for a year, learning to integrate prayer and mission. *Journeyman*s stay five years, blending study with service, even earning degrees in theology and urban development. The *Masters*? They’ve committed for life—like me.”

“And what’s a typical day like?” Alex inquired.

“Mornings are for prayer, afternoons for serving—feeding the homeless, running job programs, listening to their stories. Evenings, we gather for study and meals. It’s all about presence and relationships.”

A City Transformed Through Presence

Later, Alex followed Ethan through Bonavista's rooftop garden—a lush space overlooking the city. Angelenos tended vegetables and flowers while guests sat in quiet conversation.

Ethan gestured to a few men gardening. “Those guys? They lived on Skid Row. Now, they're part of our community. They tend the garden, pray with us, and some are even apprenticing to become Angelenos.”

Alex watched, something stirring in his chest: *“This is more than just another outreach. I wish Jake was here to see it.”*

That night, walking through downtown LA, they handed out meals and spoke with people experiencing homelessness. Alex met Ray, who shared how he'd lost everything—his job, his family—and how the Angelenos had become his friends.

Ray stared at the steaming bowl in his hands. “Back when I had my own place, I loved cooking for my kids. I forgot what that felt like until the Angelenos came. They didn't just give me food,” he said, wiping his hands on his jeans. “They saw me. They listened. They told me about Jesus. It keeps me going.”

Alex couldn't shake the conversation. He thought about his own life—how easy it was to stay busy, to skim the surface, and never *really* see people like Ray.

Dreaming of Stephen

On his last night in LA, Ethan and Alex sat on the rooftop, looking out over the city lights.

Alex glanced at the cracked pavement below, the flickering streetlights, the distant hum of traffic. Could a place like this really be the setting for revival? It seemed more likely to swallow hope whole.

“So, what made you come here?” Alex asked.

Ethan smiled, running a hand through his hair. “You wouldn’t believe me.”

Alex raised an eyebrow. “Try me.”

Ethan exhaled, eyes fixed on the city. “It started with a dream—not mine. I first heard about it online, but Brother Anthony told me the full story once I got here.”

His voice grew quiet, almost reverent. “The Holy Spirit told our community that saints were waiting to be raised up right off these streets. Hidden in the fentanyl slouch and brokenness, there are men and women God has already prepared to hear His voice.”

Alex pictured the man he’d seen earlier—the hollow eyes, the slow shuffle, the weight of hopelessness.

Ethan continued, “In the dream, there was this one guy—a homeless man, strung out, lost. Brother Anthony called him Stephen.”

Alex blinked. “Stephen?”

“Yeah,” Ethan said, nodding. “In the dream, Stephen’s standing on a street corner, barely holding himself up. But when someone invites him to ‘come and see,’ he actually does. He gets clean, finds community here, gets baptized—and then becomes the greatest missionary to the homeless America has ever seen.”

Alex’s mind reeled. “Wait, you’re saying... a guy off Skid Row? It’s a nice idea, Ethan. But people like Stephen... they don’t usually get happy endings.”

“Yeah,” Ethan said, his voice steady. “But in the dream, Stephen knew exactly where to find people, exactly what to say. He understood their struggles because he’d lived them. He didn’t just bring a few people to Christ—he baptized *tens of thousands*. Brother Anthony says it reminds him of King David’s mighty men—who came in desperation but became warriors.”

Alex sat in stunned silence. "So, this place exists to find Stephen?"

"Sort of," Ethan continued, eyes shining. "They say that one day, after he's gone, they'll build a cathedral right in the middle of Skid Row. *St. Stephen's Church of the Holy Cross*. It'll be massive—like St. Peter's or Hagia Sophia."

Alex let out a low whistle. "That's... wild. A cathedral on Skid Row." He tried to imagine it—prayers echoing through stained glass, icons painted with faces like Stephen's.

He hesitated. "I mean, it sounds amazing, but what if it's just wishful thinking? What if it all burns out in a few years?"

Ethan grinned. "Maybe. But imagine it—people from all over the world worshipping in a place that used to be the epicenter of homelessness and despair. The icons? They won't just be ancient saints, but Stephen and his friends, the ones he brought into the Kingdom. It'll be so filled with God's glory that no one will even remember what Skid Row used to be. People will only see redemption. Isn't it worth trying?"

Alex felt something stir deep inside him—equal parts awe and skepticism. "You really think that's possible?"

Ethan leaned forward, his voice steady. "I don't know if we'll ever find Stephen or build a cathedral on Skid Row. But we're here because we believe God can do the impossible—just like He did through Jesus."

"Honestly? We've already found several Stephens. Many of us Angelenos used to live on the streets, but Bonavista has become a place of healing." He gestured to the garden below, where two men worked side by side, laughing as they pulled weeds.

"Guys like Stephen need more than a sermon. They need to be seen, loved, and invited into a real community. That's what we do. We're not just serving the

poor—we're welcoming them into the family of God. And they're changing us too."

Alex swallowed hard. The dream sounded impossible—absurd, even—but hadn't he seen God do the impossible before? A small, quiet hope stirred inside him.

Ethan smiled. "People think we come here chasing the LA dream—the weather, the fame. But none of us want what LA is. We're here searching for a Kingdom not of this world—hidden in the faces of the poor."

Alex exhaled, staring out at the city. "I think..." he trailed off, wrestling with the thought. Could he believe something this bold? A part of him wanted to.

Finally, he smirked. "If you guys find Stephen, I'm gonna need to see that cathedral for myself."

Ethan laughed, clapping him on the back. "You'll be the first person I call when we do."

As they sat in silence, Ethan's words echoed in Alex's mind: **"We're looking for a Kingdom not of this world—it's found in the faces of the poor."**

He thought about Ray, the men in the garden, and Stephen—and all the saints still waiting to be found. The Gospel stories had always felt distant, theoretical. But here, in this broken city, they started to feel real.

Alex stared out at the city once more, the hum of life below them never stopping. For so long, he'd been searching for meaning in all the usual places—his career, his plans, his comforts. But maybe the meaning had been here all along, in places he'd never thought to look.

He thought about all the people who were still out there—waiting to be seen, waiting to be invited. Maybe, just maybe, that's where God had been all along.

And maybe, if we believed, God really could turn these streets into holy ground.

Takeaways

- Volunteer at a local ministry serving the homeless or marginalized. Look for ways to serve beyond donations.
- Ask God to break your heart for your city. Pray for eyes to see His presence in unexpected places.
- Reflect: Who in your community feels unseen or forgotten? How can you extend hospitality to them?

INTERNET

COMMUNION IS THE BETTER STORY

I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.

Matthew 17:20 NLT



Alex sat at Jake's dining table, staring at his untouched coffee. The usual post-dinner hum filled the air—clinking dishes, low laughter—but his mind was still in Los Angeles. He couldn't stop thinking about Bonavista—the gardens, the worship, the quiet dignity of men once forgotten, now restored.

Something in him had shifted. The world felt bigger, the possibilities greater. But back home in their cozy agape feast, he wasn't sure how to turn that feeling into action.

“I’m telling you,” Alex said, leaning forward, his voice urgent. “What Ethan’s doing in LA, it’s different. They’re not just running a ministry—they’re living like they actually believe God can do anything, just like in the Gospels.”

He glanced around the table. “As much as this has changed my life, what if it’s just the beginning? What if there’s more?”

Jake nodded. “We need to figure out how to support Bonavista, and maybe help this sort of thing grow here.”

Alex smiled, but the weight of it settled in. “Yeah, but how? We’re just one small group in one city.”

Tim, who’d been quiet most of the night, suddenly leaned in with a smirk. “Feeling small, huh? I get it. Seeing Bonavista makes you realize how much impact a community can have. But what if we could scale that connection—digitally?”

Alex shrugged. “What does that even mean?”

Tim pulled out his phone. “You guys have to hear this Dawson podcast.”

Jake groaned. “Oh no. Here we go again.”

Tim ignored him, eyes lighting up. “Listen, it’s blowing my mind. They’re talking about *redeeming the internet*.”

Alex blinked. “Redeeming the internet?” He laughed. “That’s... ambitious. I love the idea, but do you really think people are ready for something this radical?”

Tim grinned. “I know, right? But think about it. We already use the Canopy app to plan our agape feasts, right? Imagine if every church and small group worldwide could connect the same way—prayer requests, meals, outreach—all in one place.”

Jake nodded. “Yeah, it’s been super helpful.”

Tim pointed at him. “Exactly. The podcast asked, what if we scaled that up into a full social media platform? Except instead of ads and data mining, it’s built on real-world communities. No algorithms stealing your attention, just people serving and connecting with each other.”

Alex sat up. “So no doom-scrolling?”

Tim shook his head. “Nope. Instead of being *users*, you’d be *members*—connected to a real community with people who actually know you. And it’s a decentralized co-op, not a corporation. The crazy part? They’re basing it all on church history. You’ve gotta listen to the episode—they explain what it could look like.”

Alex frowned. “I mean, it sounds great, but how do you actually get people to switch? You’re talking about changing how billions interact. Where do you even start?”

Jake leaned back in his chair. “I don’t totally get how this would work... but something’s gotta change.”

He glanced around the table. “Social media’s a mess—people are more isolated than ever, addicted to their phones, arguing over everything. I’ve been convicted lately... Twitter feels like the exact opposite of prayer. I’ll spend 20 minutes with the Lord and feel full of faith, then 20 minutes online, and all that hope just drains out of me.”

Tim looked at Alex. “Bonavista is amazing, but it’s just one place. Imagine if it could connect with other communities—sharing stories, wisdom, and resources. The internet should help with that, but right now, it’s just a distraction machine. Maybe it all starts with agape feasts, and it just takes getting enough people on board.”

Jake tapped the table. “If we could build something that actually connects people—really connects them—I’d be all in. I don’t get all the tech stuff, but I’m listening.”

Tim grinned. “And that’s just the start. The podcast says we need to stop seeing Communion as just a small gathering and start imagining it on a *civilizational* scale. It doesn’t necessarily need to be the internet, he said, but we need a compelling vision for society. We don’t need everyone on board—just a few bold enough to start.”

Alex raised an eyebrow. “Civilizational scale... like Christendom? Isn’t it easier to just stick to what we have?”

Tim nodded. “That’s why Christopher Dawson is so interesting. Medieval society wasn’t just kings and castles; it was local communities shaping culture through their shared faith. It wasn’t a centralized bureaucracy—it was more like a patchwork of personal covenants. That blew my mind.”

Alex leaned back. “So... they’re saying we should build some kind of modern, digital Christendom? I mean, what if it’s too much? We can’t change the entire internet. Sometimes I feel like I’m barely holding my own life together.”

Tim laughed. “Well, it’s not the old-school version of Christendom. Not at all. This would be something new. He draws inspiration from some of the structures of Medieval culture that he thinks we need to reconsider. But the main point is, if we actually lived out Communion—in our neighborhoods, cities, even online—it could change everything. The host admitted he’s scared to bring up redeeming the internet because it’s such a massive idea.”

Jake tilted his head. “Why?”

“Because,” Tim said, leaning in, “he knows this could shape humanity for a thousand years—and he doesn’t want to be the guy who gets something seriously wrong for future generations to live with. It’s not just another tech startup—it’s setting the spiritual direction of an entire digital civilization. But

he said, ‘We shouldn’t just ask how the church can adapt to the digital age; we need to ask how a digital culture can be redeemed in the church age.’”

He paused. “Christians can’t just sit back and let the internet keep turning people into isolated, distracted consumers. We’re called to prayer and Communion—even online.”

Jake smirked. “But can I still watch cat videos?”

Tim rolled his eyes. “Obviously! Just they’d be more theological!”

He leaned back in his chair, his grin fading. “But seriously, they were talking about this thing called the Dead Internet Theory. Ever heard of it?”

Alex shook his head.

Tim nodded. “It kind of is. The idea is that most of the internet isn’t even *real* anymore—just bots and AI generating content, with barely any actual humans left engaging. It’s all artificial, fake engagement designed to keep us scrolling, buying, and fighting. If things keep going this way, the internet will eventually stop being a place for real human interaction altogether.”

Jake frowned. “Wait—are you saying the internet could just... die off?”

“Not in the way we think,” Tim replied. “It won’t vanish, but it’ll become meaningless—just an endless loop of AI-generated content feeding on itself, with nobody actually *connecting*. That’s why the podcast guy said we need a totally new way of interacting online. A whole new digital world that’s built on real relationships, not algorithms and profits.” Alex sighed. “So, what—you’re saying we either fix it, or we walk away?”

Tim nodded. “Exactly. Either we redeem it for something meaningful and human, or it’s gonna collapse under its own weight.”

Alex chuckled, then exhaled slowly. “So what’s the plan? Where do you even start?”

Tim's grin widened. "He's calling for a 'Congress of Founding Fathers'—Christian thinkers, technologists, and leaders coming together to lay the foundation for a Communion-based internet. He's hoping to connect with people like Jordan Peterson and Jordan Hall. Start a conversation about a whole new digital world—built on prayer, real-world community, and Scripture. They'd draft principles for privacy, freedom, and connection—not just for churches, but a new vision for how the internet itself could work for everyone. But his vision for it starts right here. With a table. With prayer. With real relationships and real communities that can't be faked by bots and AI."

Jake rubbed his chin. "Man... that's bold."

Alex thought about Ethan's dream for LA. "Yeah, it's bold. But if we could get this right, it would change everything. Isn't it worth trying?"

Jake grinned. "Alright, dream big. But is anyone actually doing this, or is it all just talk? What do you think, Tim?"

Tim's eyes lit up. "The first step is just getting people to consider what's possible with a new internet. Take education—right now, it's centralized, standardized, and failing. But what if churches had a platform to help them build decentralized homeschool networks? Real tutors, real communities, giving kids a classical, faith-based education."

Alex's mind flashed back to Bonavista. "They're already trying that in LA."

"Then there's media," Tim continued. "Imagine artists and filmmakers—not trapped by Hollywood, but creating work that values truth, goodness, and beauty over profit. Like *The Chosen*, but for the whole industry."

Jake leaned back, impressed. "I'd love to see it happen. I'm listening."

Tim's excitement grew. "And finance—what if we had a decentralized economy where churches and communities actually supported each other? Breaking free from consumer debt and building a system based on generosity and creativity?"

There's a whole episode called *Going for Baroque* that blew my mind about the roots of what Dawson calls 'bourgeois culture.'"

Alex chuckled, shaking his head. "This all started with a dinner invite, and now we're talking about rebuilding finance and culture."

Tim grinned. "Exactly. The church shouldn't just try to survive the digital age—we should lead it. Who else can provide spiritual vision for it other than the people who follow Jesus? None of this will be built overnight, but we can start by sharing the vision and seeing where it leads. We're not the only ones thinking this way—there's Ethan, the podcast..."

A thoughtful silence settled over them.

Jake finally spoke. "You know, when we started these dinners, I was just thinking about food and conversation. And now... we're sitting here talking about changing the world. But in the end, it still comes down to living it out—one meal, one prayer walk at a time."

He chuckled softly. "Maybe Communion really is the better story our culture needs."

Alex nodded. "It is. I've experienced it personally. And it all started here—at the table."

Jake raised his glass. "To dreaming bigger. You know, the monks on Mt. Athos end their prayers asking God to 'save the whole world.' I never thought about how that could happen, until now. If God could change us with just a dinner invite, imagine what He could do if the whole church started praying bigger."

Tim grinned, raising his glass. "To redeeming the internet. And maybe we start by inviting other agape feasts to dream with us?"

Alex hesitated, then lifted his cup, a quiet hope in his eyes. "To Communion."

As their glasses clinked, Alex thought about how he used to spend his nights—mindlessly scrolling, feeling life pass him by. Now, he was here, dreaming of changing the world with friends. It felt impossible... but it was real.

And it all started with an invitation to dinner.

Takeaways

- Audit your screen time and ask: Is this drawing me closer to God and others, or pushing me further away?
- Consider using social media to invite people into real-world community—whether through events, encouraging messages, or storytelling.
- Reflect: What small changes could you make to align your online presence with your faith values?

24

ABIDE, PART 2

WAKING, WALKING, WRESTLING, WORKING

I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message.

John 17:20 NLT



Alex closed his eyes, letting the warmth of his cup of tea seep into his hands. Around him, the room settled into silence for their cohort's final session of Centering Prayer.

They had practiced it many times during the Abide retreats, but today felt different—like months of practice had finally woven stillness through his restless heart.

“Remember—Centering Prayer isn't about emptying your mind, but returning to God,” James, the facilitator, said gently.

Alex breathed in slowly. He remembered how awkward this had felt at first—his thoughts darting like restless birds, trying to solve problems, make plans, replay conversations. It had taken time to realize he wasn't here to do anything, just to be present with Jesus.

The room was hushed, filled with the soft rustling of pages, quiet breathing, and distant birdsong. Morning sunlight spilled through the trees, casting golden shadows across the wooden beams.

He glanced at his journal, pages filled with prayers and reflections—eighteen months of wrestling, learning, and growing. His thumb traced the ink of his first entry: *Show up. Just say yes.*

Two years ago, when Jake first invited him to dinner, he never imagined how much a simple 'yes' would change his life. What started as a way to meet people and get free food had become something deeper—something truer.

Waking Up to Something More

Alex thought back to his first agape feast—the awkward introductions, the laughter, the warmth of the meal. He had walked in feeling restless and disconnected, not realizing how hungry he was for Christ.

He smiled, remembering how the community gently drew him in, and how Jake always said, "It's not about having it all figured out. Just take the next step."

That first step had led to so much more.

The Abide retreats—*Waking, Walking, Wrestling, Working*—had shaped him in ways he never expected. They taught him to slow down, embrace rhythms of silence and solitude, and lean into disciplines he once thought unnecessary: fasting, Sabbath, simplicity, community.

The crazy thing was, it wasn't just him. Their entire agape feast had embraced the journey together, following *Practicing the Way* and growing into a true spiritual family.

But spiritual discipline was harder than he expected. He still remembered feeling embarrassed when his girlfriend, Ashley, shared how God was teaching her through fasting—while he struggled to get through half a day of fasting without complaining.

Even in his struggles, he realized transformation wasn't up to him. The Holy Spirit was at work, teaching him to trust God—even when he felt like he couldn't endure being himself.

Walking in Communion

Alex thought back to when they first connected with other agape feasts after the Canopy conference. What started as a simple gathering had grown into something far greater than he imagined. Their prayer walks had become a cornerstone of their community, opening their eyes to their neighborhood—not just as a place to live, but to love, pray for, and serve.

He remembered the first *global worship service*, streamed live across the world through Canopy. That night, as voices from every continent rose in praise, he felt a deep awe—connected to something far bigger than himself.

He thought of Pastor Greg's encouragement to lean deeper into church—another turning point. At first, Alex wondered if the agape feast was enough, but Greg's words stayed with him: "God's church is bigger than one table. Find your place in the wider Body."

So, he did. Alex started serving, helping with outreach, and even mentoring younger men through the Abide Course. Little by little, he found himself not just attending church, but truly belonging.

The Wrestling

It hadn't all been easy. Alex thought about the late-night doubts, the moments he wondered if he was truly changing or just stuck going through the motions.

He remembered sitting in his car one night, the engine off, cold creeping in. Laughter spilled from Jake's house, but he remained outside, staring at his phone. His thumb hovered over Jake's contact, ready to quit. *"This just isn't for me..."*

Flipping through his journal now, he found the entry from that night: *"I almost texted Jake to say I'm done. This isn't working—and I'm the problem. But before I hit send, I saw a note I'd scribbled weeks earlier: 'Just say yes.' So, I tossed my phone aside and gave it one more week. One more prayer walk. One more dinner."*

Living in community wasn't always easy—frustrations, misunderstandings, moments he wanted to walk away. But Pastor Greg's words stayed with him: *"Sometimes, faithfulness just looks like showing up."* And now, looking back, he realized showing up had shaped him in ways he never expected.

A shiver ran down his spine when he thought about what he could've lost if he'd walked away that night—the friendships with Tim and Jake that had become like brothers, the quiet strength he'd found in prayer, the purpose he never knew he was searching for.

The thought of going back to his old life—isolated, restless, always chasing something just out of reach—filled him with a quiet ache. What if he had never pushed through? What if he had missed all of this?

The Working

Then there was LA. Alex smiled, thinking about Ethan and his relentless passion. Seeing Bonavista firsthand had been overwhelming—faith lived out in the grit and beauty of the city.

He remembered standing on Skid Row, watching Ethan kneel beside a man named Ray. "God's not done with you yet, brother," Ethan had said, believing with his whole heart that God was raising up saints from the streets—and somehow, that belief had taken root in Alex too.

That trip cracked something open in him. Now, their agape feast was dreaming bigger—finding ways to support Bonavista and maybe even start something similar in their own city.

Looking Ahead—And Building a Future

And then there was Ashley—the woman he met through an agape feast meet-up. They had been dating for over a year now, dreaming about hosting their own feast someday. A life rooted in Communion.

He smiled, picturing it—friends and strangers gathered around their table, kids running through the house, prayers whispered over meals. A home filled with the simple, beautiful rhythm of life shared with Christ.

"It All Started With an Invitation"

James' voice gently pulled Alex from his thoughts, calling everyone into silence for their final session. Alex closed his prayer journal, holding it against his chest for a moment before setting it aside.

He wasn't the same man who had walked into Jake's house two years ago. The restlessness, the emptiness—gone. He had found what he was searching for—not in a program or a productivity hack, but at a table.

Standing, he joined the others for Communion, putting his arm around Jake. Alex whispered a quiet prayer: *"Lord, I never thought I'd find a home like this. But here I am. Here we are. It all started with an invitation to dinner. Thank You."*

Looking around the circle, Alex wondered how many others felt the same way. He smiled—that small 'yes' had led to a life he never could have imagined.

And now, he was ready for whatever came next.

Takeaways

- Commit to showing up—whether at your agape feast, church, or quiet moments with God. Consistency builds community.
- Find an accountability partner to walk with you in your spiritual journey.
- Reflect: What is one step of obedience God is calling you to take today?

THE COMMUNION MANIFESTO

“Start by doing what’s necessary; then do what’s possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

St. Francis of Assisi



A Vision Too Big to Do Alone

I want to invite you to dream—of something so much bigger than you or me, so far beyond our own abilities, that without God’s hand, it simply won’t happen.

It’s a vision of **Communion**—not just as a ritual or personal practice, but as a movement. One that reimagines how we follow Jesus in our homes, neighborhoods, and even our digital spaces.

It's about reclaiming something ancient and essential—a faith that feels as real on Monday night at the dinner table as it does on Sunday morning in the pew.

It's a faith rooted in hospitality, discipleship, and formation—a way of life that draws us closer to Christ and one another, not just in theory, but in practice. Around tables. In living rooms. On street corners.

This vision has been stirring in my heart for years, but I know one thing for certain: **I cannot do this alone.** And I was never meant to. That's why I'm inviting you to be part of it.

This isn't just my dream; it can be yours too. This Manifesto is your invitation—to dream big and pray even bigger.

Before we look ahead, let me take you back to where it all began.

The Moment That Changed Everything

In November 2015, life was steady—predictable. I was working a corporate job in Calgary, living the kind of suburban dream I thought I wanted: a stable career, a comfortable home, and a clear path ahead for my wife and kids.

Then, out of the blue, a message popped up in my Facebook inbox. It was from an old acquaintance I barely knew. Nothing dramatic—just a single, disarming question: *"What would you do with your life if money wasn't an issue?"*

I nearly ignored it, brushing it off as a mistake or the start of some multi-level marketing pitch. But something tugged at me that I couldn't quite shake.

So I typed out a reply, almost without thinking, sharing three dreams I'd buried deep beneath the weight of responsibility and routine. Dreams that felt distant, unrealistic, maybe even foolish:

1. I would write study guides about the Bible.

2. I would talk to people about how to create a God-honoring society.
3. I would try to re-evangelize the English-speaking world.

I expected polite indifference or maybe some well-meaning encouragement. But his response stopped me cold.

He told me—without hesitation—that he believed the Holy Spirit had spoken to him about the future of the church, and somehow, it involved me and my family.

Then, before I could make sense of it, he vanished. He deleted his account, quit his job, and disappeared from my life, leaving me with one final cryptic message: "Just start evaluating what you love, because once it starts, *all that you have on your heart to do* will make sense."

I stared at the screen, stunned. What did it mean? And why me?

I tucked that moment away, unsure what to do with it. Life moved on. Work got busier. Bills had to be paid. Those dreams faded back into the background—neatly shelved alongside other things I told myself I'd pursue *someday*.

But God didn't forget.

In early 2020, after a week-long prayer retreat, the fire was stoked again. My wife and I felt an undeniable call stirring within us—one we couldn't ignore. It didn't make sense on paper, but we knew what we had to do.

We sold our house. I quit my job. We packed up our lives and moved overseas. It felt like stepping off a cliff, yet somehow, it felt right—like we were finally walking in step with God's plan.

And then, the confirmations started rolling in.

Between 2020 and 2022, three different people—completely unrelated—approached us with words they believed were from the Holy Spirit. Each one echoed those same mysterious themes from that long-ago Facebook message.

At a conference in 2022, someone prayed over me and said, “The Lord has given you a warrior’s spirit, and He will give you the power to do *all that you have on your heart to do.*”

I laughed under my breath—just like Sarah did when she heard God’s promise to give her a child in her old age. This phrase—*all that you have on your heart to do*—kept following me, chasing me down through the years.

Was it really possible that it was from God?

Seven Dreams, One Mission

Over the years, what once felt like scattered ideas have come together—seven interconnected dreams, each revealing a way to live out Communion in a fragmented world.

These dreams aren’t about grand. They’re much simpler, yet far more profound, than anyone would expect—ordinary people living ordinary lives in an extraordinary way, rediscovering faith not just on Sundays, but around dinner tables and in neighborhoods.

They’re not about hustling and striving to achieve more, but slowing down, showing up, and creating spaces where God’s presence can be felt in the everyday moments of life.

And now, I want to share them with you.

Abide: Building Spiritual Families

“Abide in me, and I in you.” —John 15:4

In a world where relationships often stay at the surface, **The Abide Course** offers a deeper way—an 18-month discipleship journey designed to cultivate Christ-centered relationships and build spiritual families that last.

Through four transformative retreats, shared meals, and intentional spiritual practices, participants learn how to create spaces of hospitality, prayer, and discipleship—where the love of Jesus is experienced in tangible, everyday ways.

More than just a program, **The Abide Course** is an invitation to rediscover the beauty of authentic community—small, committed gatherings that reflect the early church, meeting in homes, sharing life, and growing together in Christ.

Podcasts: Sharing the Story

Stories have the power to shape us—to remind us who we are and what’s possible.

Through a series of inspiring podcasts, we’ll capture the voices of those living out this vision—whether they’re hosting agape feasts, serving the homeless, or creatively engaging with culture.

Blending theology, history, and real-life experience, these conversations will offer practical inspiration—equipping listeners to bring the love of Christ into their own communities in meaningful, everyday ways.

Canopy: Weaving the Church Back Together

Too many communities of faith exist in isolation, unaware of how much stronger they could be together.

The Canopy is a movement of connection—linking agape feasts, local churches, and ministries into a shared mission of discipleship and hospitality into a relational web. It’s not a church-planting network, but it serves a similar purpose

for agape feasts, offering support, encouragement, and practical tools to help them thrive.

Through best-practice guides, workshops, and partnerships, The Canopy equips communities to reclaim the ancient practice of gathering around the table as a core expression of faith—fostering deeper relationships and a stronger, more united church.

Saunterre: Turning Streets into Holy Ground

What if every street became a place of encounter with God?

Saunterre is a movement of believers walking their neighborhoods and cities with purpose—praying for their communities, listening to God, and seeking opportunities to bless and serve.

It's not about grand gestures or quick fixes; it's about bringing the quiet, steady presence of Christ into the ordinary places of life. One step, one prayer, one conversation at a time, we believe our streets can become sacred ground.

Bonavista: A Monastery in the Heart of Los Angeles

Imagine an abandoned shopping mall in LA—once a symbol of consumerism—transformed into an urban monastery, a sacred space of prayer, hospitality, and renewal.

Bonavista will be a refuge where the homeless find dignity, artists create beauty, and disciples are formed in the radical lifestyle of Christ.

More than just a shelter or a ministry, it will be a living expression of Christ's love, offering hope, healing, and belonging in the midst of the city's chaos—and casting a vision of urban renewal for cities around the world.

Angelenos: A New Kind of Holy Order

A modern-day monastic community, The Angelenos will live out a radical commitment to prayer, simplicity, and service—right in the heart of the city.

They'll walk the streets with open hands and hearts, offering presence and hospitality to the forgotten and overlooked. Through small, daily acts of faithfulness, they'll cultivate renewal—bringing the light of Christ into the urban landscape, one relationship at a time.

Redeeming the Internet: A New Digital Ecosystem

The internet is one of the greatest mission fields of our time—yet it's also one of the most fractured and isolating spaces in our lives.

I believe the church has a unique opportunity to reclaim the digital world—not as a source of distraction, but as a platform for authentic connection, discipleship, and community. By building a Communion-centered digital ecosystem, we can create spaces that foster real relationships, spiritual growth, and meaningful engagement with the world.

Your Invitation to the Communion Revolution

You don't need to have it all figured out. You don't need a perfect plan. All it takes is a simple 'yes' and a willingness to create space for God to move.

Because changing the world doesn't happen overnight—it happens one meal, one prayer, one conversation at a time.

What if renewal in the church and revival in our communities starts right at your table? What if something as simple as breaking bread with your neighbors could lead to something far greater than you imagined?

You don't have to wait for me—or anyone else. This vision belongs to you, to your family, to your friends, to your neighborhood. Start where you are, with what you have, and watch how God works.



How You Can Start Today

The best way to start? Host an agape feast. Invite people into your home, share a meal, and let them see how your life is changing. Because when others witness something real—something that brings hope, connection, and purpose—they'll want it too.

This movement is about simple, faithful acts of love that, over time, create lasting change. Here's how you can step in right now:

Set the Table: Gather a few people around your table this week.

- It doesn't have to be perfect or impressive—just open your home and your heart.
- Pray for them before they arrive, listen to their stories, and share yours.
- Watch how God works in the simplicity of a shared meal.

Pray with Purpose: Prayer is the foundation of renewal.

- Walk your neighborhood and pray for your neighbors.
- Invite friends to join you in praying regularly for your community.
- Ask God to show you where He's working—and how you can join Him.

Take One Step Forward: Don't let hesitation hold you back—step out in faith.

- Start the Abide Course and build a deeper foundation of discipleship.
- Organize a prayer walk through Saunterre and invite others to seek God for your city.
- Connect with others through the Canopy and discover how agape feasts can strengthen the broader church.

Dream Bigger: God's vision is always greater than our imaginations.

- Ask Him to show you your role—whether it's hosting an agape feast, supporting missions like Bonavista, or finding new ways to bring Communion to the digital world.
- Say “yes” to what God puts in front of you, no matter how small it seems.



An Encouragement to Pray Boldly

Jesus gave us an astonishing promise:

"You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

What if we actually believed Him? What if we dared to ask for the impossible—not for our own gain, but for the glory of God?

As you step into the Communion Revolution, I challenge you to pray with boldness and confidence.

Pray for revival—in your home, your church, and your community.

Pray for unity—for the walls of division within the body of Christ to crumble.

Pray for renewal—that God would move in unexpected places and ways in our culture, our relationships, and even in the digital spaces where so many seek connection and meaning.

Pray for the salvation of the whole world—because why should we settle for anything less?

Then align your actions to your prayers by faith. Trust that God will do what only He can do.

The Kingdom Is Coming

This movement is about ordinary people doing ordinary things with extraordinary love.

When you set the table, you're inviting someone into the Kingdom of God.

When you pray for your neighbors, you're partnering with the Holy Spirit to transform your community.

When you take Communion, you're proclaiming Christ's presence and uniting with believers around the world.

Small, faithful acts—done with love—can change everything. As these ripples spread, from one home to the next, they have the power to spark a movement of renewal that touches entire cities and beyond.

At its heart, this manifesto isn't a strategy to fix the world—it's a **prayer**.

A humble *perhaps*, much like Jonathan's in 1 Samuel:

"Perhaps the Lord will help us, for nothing can hinder the Lord."¹

I know I can't do this alone, and I don't believe this vision rests on me. But I do believe that if we pray, if we step out in faith, and if we open our lives to God's work—He will move in ways far beyond what we can imagine.

The Communion Revolution isn't just my dream; it's a calling for all who long to see God's Kingdom come.

So, I ask you—Will you say *yes*? Will you take this dream and make it your own?

The Kingdom is already at hand. Let's build it together—one meal at a time, one prayer at a time, one act of love at a time.

EPILOGUE

ANSWERING COMMON OBJECTIONS

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

Philippians 1:6 NLT



Theological Objections

Critique 1: "This overemphasizes hospitality and downplays other aspects of discipleship."

Hospitality doesn't compete with prayer, Scripture, evangelism, or worship—it creates the space where they thrive. At the table, prayer deepens, Scripture

becomes shared wisdom, and evangelism flows naturally through authentic relationships.

The table isn't the whole of discipleship, but it's where discipleship finds its roots. Faith is practiced, tested, and lived out in community. Jesus didn't just preach from pulpits—He broke bread with people. Around meals, truth traveled from head to heart through presence, conversation, and love.

Hospitality is the bridge that turns doctrine into action and ideas into encounters with grace. It doesn't replace the spiritual disciplines but weaves them into the rhythm of everyday life, grounding faith in the messy beauty of real relationships.

Critique 2: "It feels overly focused on works rather than grace."

We are justified by faith, not works—but true faith always bears fruit. Hospitality isn't a way to earn grace; it's the overflow of grace we've already received.

When we open our tables, we're not striving for God's favor—we're responding to it. Hospitality is an act of trust, not self-reliance. It's saying, "God has filled me, so now I can pour out." The transformation doesn't come from us—it's the work of the Spirit. We set the table, but God changes the hearts.

Critique 3: "Where's the Gospel proclamation?"

The Gospel is the thread running through this entire book, woven into every story of grace, surrender, and reconciliation. But if you need it plain and clear, here it is:

Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day—defeating death and offering eternal life to all who believe.

This is the message that turns every agape feast into sacred ground. It's the heart of every act of Christlike hospitality: an invitation to encounter His love and respond to His grace.

In the Gospels, Jesus didn't just preach sermons—He embodied the Kingdom at the table. Meals were where forgiveness was served, grace was poured, and the outcast was welcomed into a new way of life.

Hospitality doesn't replace Gospel proclamation—it plants the seeds for it. It creates trust, intimacy, and belonging, the soil where conversations about salvation can take root and flourish. When people feel seen, loved, and safe, they're ready to hear the words that change everything: *Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.*

Critique 4: "Is Communion being redefined?"

The agape feast in this book isn't meant to replace or redefine the sacrament of Holy Communion as practiced in 'high church' traditions. For those in traditions such as Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Anglican, the Eucharist is a sacrament where Christ's Real Presence is encountered in a unique and sacred way.

For low church traditions, Communion is often taken symbolically as a reminder of Christ's grace and sacrifice. Though the expressions may differ, both share the same heart: encountering Christ and remembering His redemptive work.

I honor and uphold the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, properly administered within the church. For those who share this belief, the Eucharist remains the pinnacle of worship and grace—nothing in this book seeks to diminish that.

But Communion is more than a sacred moment at the altar—it's a way of life. While the Eucharist is sacramentally distinct, believers can also experience Christ's presence through meals shared in everyday settings, where bread and wine are taken symbolically as reminders of His grace among us. This practice, though different, can deepen fellowship, heal divisions, and reflect the early church's spirit of breaking bread together in their homes.

The agape feast is an extension, not a substitution. It's a way to live out the reality of the sacrament beyond the walls of the church—embodying fellowship, reconciliation, and shared grace in the rhythms of daily life. Whether high church or low, the heart of Communion remains the same: *Christ in our midst, drawing us closer to Himself and to one another.*



Practical Objections

Critique 5: "Hospitality isn't for everyone."

Hospitality isn't about your personality, the square footage of your home, or gourmet meals—it's a posture of the heart that every Christian is called to cultivate. At its core, hospitality is a virtue that reflects Christ's love through acts of welcome, service, and presence.

It doesn't require extroversion or a perfect home. It can be as simple as offering a neighbor a cup of tea, sharing a meal with a friend, or sitting with someone who needs to be heard. For introverts, for those with small spaces or limited resources, take heart: the power of hospitality isn't found in what you have but in your willingness to open what you do have to God's purposes.

Hospitality isn't a burden—it's a spiritual practice, one that reshapes us from the inside out. As we open our homes, we also open our hearts, learning to live with the same generosity and grace that Christ continually shows us.

Critique 6: "This feels too idealistic or impractical."

Life is hectic, and the thought of adding one more thing can feel impossible. But the beauty of agape feasts isn't in complexity—it's in their simplicity. They

aren't meant to be grand productions or weekly obligations. They're meant to fit into real life, offering connection without the pressure of perfection.

You don't need a banquet table or a packed calendar. Start small. Invite a friend for coffee, share a meal with a neighbor, or gather a few people once a month. What matters isn't the frequency or the formality—it's the heart behind it. Being present. Listening. Creating sacred space for connection and grace. That's not idealistic. It's doable. Start where you are, with what you have. God's work has never required perfection—just willing hearts.



Cultural Objections

Critique 7: "This is too focused on Western individualism."

Yes, this book is written with an emphasis on the unique challenges of Western culture—especially its struggles with isolation, suburban detachment, and individualism. I don't believe that's something to apologize for, because this is where I feel called to speak.

Like John Wesley, my calling is to address the spiritual and relational needs of the English-speaking world, where loneliness has become a crisis.

That said, hospitality and community are not bound by geography or culture. The agape feast is a universal practice, adaptable to any setting and capable of enriching traditions everywhere. In fact, many non-Western cultures already live out much of what this book encourages.

For readers from those backgrounds, I hope this serves as a celebration of the communal strengths you already carry and a reminder that we in the West have a lot to learn from you.

This isn't about imposing a solution from one culture—it's about calling Western societies back to what we've lost, while drawing inspiration from the global church's witness of shared faith and life. Together, we're building Christ's Kingdom, one table at a time.

Critique 8: "This feels like it's pandering to culture."

The focus on healing loneliness and fostering belonging isn't about watering down spiritual truths—it's about creating the relational trust that allows those truths to be heard.

Many people aren't rejecting the Gospel because they don't care about truth; they're tuning it out because they don't trust the messenger.

Jesus knew this. When He shared meals with tax collectors and sinners, it wasn't just an act of kindness—it was a revelation of God's Kingdom. His hospitality disarmed defenses and invited transformation.

The agape feast follows this same model. It's not community for its own sake; it's an embodied expression of the Gospel, where discipleship naturally flows from trusted relationships.

In today's culture, where distrust runs deep, hospitality may be one of the most effective ways to create the space needed for life-changing conversations.

It's far more effective than shouting at people on the internet.

Online arguments harden hearts, but a shared meal softens them. When we invite people to the table, we're inviting them to bring their stories, doubts, and struggles into an environment of grace and truth.

The agape feast isn't about avoiding tough conversations—it's about earning the trust that makes those conversations matter. When the church learns to listen, welcome, and love like Christ, we'll find that people are more open to the Gospel than they ever were through online shouting matches.



Church-Centric Objections

Critique 9: "This undermines the local church."

The agape feast isn't a substitute for Sunday worship—it's a complement. As Pastor Greg highlights in Part 3, Sunday services remain the backbone of Christian community, grounding us in sound teaching, sacrament, and communal prayer. The agape feast doesn't seek to disrupt that—it's designed to enhance it.

Think of the agape feast as an extension of Sunday's message. While worship in the sanctuary connects us to the body of Christ, the dinner table is where those connections deepen. It's where sermons turn into conversations, where prayers turn into care, and where we live out the call to love one another.

These smaller gatherings aren't meant to pull people away from the local church but to help them feel more connected to it. The table invites those on the fringes into the heart of the community, creating space for personal discipleship and genuine relationships.

When the sanctuary and the table work together, they form a dynamic ecosystem for spiritual growth—one that nourishes both the soul and the body, bringing the church into the rhythms of daily life.

Critique 10: "This doesn't work for larger churches."

Megachurches already understand the power of small, relational gatherings. Many have thriving small group ministries because they know that large-scale worship needs to be balanced by intimate discipleship.

The agape feast simply builds on that foundation—encouraging small groups to eat together as part of their spiritual growth.

In a post-pandemic world, large churches have a unique opportunity to embrace a hybrid model, combining the broad reach of online services with the depth of kitchen table fellowship. By fostering agape feasts within their networks, they can extend discipleship beyond the walls of the church, creating spaces for meaningful relationships without straying from their core mission.

This isn't about scaling back—it's about scaling deeper. Agape feasts give megachurches the chance to feel smaller, more personal, and more connected while continuing to engage the wider community with the Gospel. When large churches lean into this model, they don't lose their reach; they strengthen it.



Doctrinal or Eschatological Objections

Critique 11: "Is this really revival?"

Revival isn't something we wait for—it's something we step into. Christ has already poured out His Spirit, and the goal of revival is simple: to love God and our neighbors more deeply.

If you're longing for revival, start now. Choose to love your neighbors as yourself—and be revived.

Throughout history, revival has taken many forms. Some have been dramatic, with mass conversions and miraculous signs. Others have been quiet and steady, like the early church breaking bread in homes or the Methodist class meetings that quietly reshaped entire communities.

But whether loud or quiet, revival always results in the same thing—with small, faithful acts of love. That’s where the Kingdom takes root, and that’s where the Spirit moves, transforming individuals and, through them, entire communities.

Critique 12: "This feels too optimistic about culture."

I’m not particularly optimistic about where our culture is headed. Apart from the grace of God, we could be facing a ruinous future—a great chastisement, even. But that’s exactly why I believe in the urgent call to hospitality.

In the New Testament, we’re commanded to practice hospitality in the context of “the end of the world.”

"The end of the world is coming soon... Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal."

1 Peter 4:7-9

"Let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."

Hebrews 10:25

The Apostles didn't suggest retreat or panic—they told believers to gather around tables, break bread, and build each other up.

If society is unraveling, isolation won't save us. But creating bonds of community rooted in Christ just might. Hospitality isn't naïve or blind to the reality of sin or cultural decline—it's a biblical response to it.

It's the embodiment of Kingdom hope, where fear, loneliness, and disconnection are met with Christ's love through tangible acts of care.

By investing in relationships now, we're building something that can outlast the storm—it's about building your life on the solid Rock of Christ.

Community and faith aren't idealistic—they're realistic survival strategies for the people of God.

The Communion Revolution isn't about ignoring the brokenness around us—it's about responding to it with the radical confidence that Christ's Kingdom is breaking in, even when the world feels like it's falling apart.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

Retreat # 1

***Soul Whisperer* by Daniel Austin Napier**

Napier invites readers to rediscover Jesus as a master philosopher and guide to personal transformation. Drawing comparisons with figures like Socrates and Aristotle, Napier explores Jesus' teachings on the soul, lasting change, and co-working with God.

***Seeking God Together* by Alice Fryling**

Fryling offers an accessible guide to group spiritual direction, helping people grow in their relationship with God through shared reflection and prayer.

***Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* by M. Robert Mulholland Jr.**

A guide to understanding spiritual formation as a lifelong process of growing in Christlikeness, with practical steps to deepen one's spiritual life.

***The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard**

This book shows how spiritual disciplines can transform individuals and communities, offering practical ways to incorporate practices like solitude, prayer, and fasting into everyday life.

Retreat # 2***Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer**

Comer provides a practical framework for spiritual formation, helping believers apprentice themselves to Jesus by adopting His lifestyle and rhythms.

***Survival Guide for the Soul* by Ken Shigematsu**

Shigematsu blends ancient spiritual practices with modern psychology to help believers find balance, rest, and a deeper relationship with God in the midst of a hectic life.

***Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* by Ruth Haley Barton**

Barton offers a spiritual roadmap for leaders, encouraging them to cultivate a deeper relationship with God through solitude and self-reflection, enabling them to lead with integrity and soul-centered wisdom.

***The Eight Doors of the Kingdom* by Jacques Philippe**

A profound exploration of the Beatitudes, showing how these teachings of Jesus offer a path to true freedom and spiritual maturity.

Retreat # 3***Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

A classic exploration of Christian community and fellowship, Bonhoeffer offers timeless insights into living together as the body of Christ.

***Sacred Companions* by David G. Benner**

A thoughtful exploration of how spiritual friendships and direction can deepen your walk with God and transform your journey of faith.

***The Transforming Friendship* by Dr. James Houston**

Drawing on theology, Scripture, and the wisdom of Christian tradition, this book invites readers to discover the deep joy of knowing God as a friend and to reflect that friendship in their relationships with others.

***From Tablet to Table* by Leonard Sweet**

Sweet argues that Christian life and discipleship are rooted in shared meals. He calls for a shift from screen-driven, individualistic culture to face-to-face community, showing how the table is central to spiritual growth, gospel living, and authentic relationships.

Retreat # 4

***The Gospel Comes with a House Key* by Rosaria Butterfield**

A compelling call to practice radical, everyday hospitality as a way of evangelism and community-building.

***Practicing the Way of Jesus* by Mark Scandrette**

A hands-on guide that encourages believers to integrate Jesus' teachings into their daily lives through shared community practices and spiritual experiments.

***The Art of Neighboring* by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon**

This book challenges Christians to build genuine relationships with their literal neighbors, offering practical advice for loving your community well.

***Creating a Missional Culture* by J. R. Woodward**

Woodward shows how churches can cultivate a culture of mission and discipleship, especially through the practice of shared meals and hospitality.

Bonus Suggestion

***Discipleship on the Edge* by Darrell W. Johnson**

A compelling commentary on the book of Revelation, showing how its message equips believers to live faithfully in a world of cultural and spiritual challenges.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“If anyone asks, ‘Why are you untying that colt?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

Luke 19:31 NLT



I am a disciple of Jesus, and my faith is the most important thing about me.

A few years ago, I was going through the Ignatian Exercises. During one exercise, I was meditating on the story of the widow’s mite. I imagined myself sitting with Jesus in the Temple, watching as the poor widow gave her offering.

At that time, I was wrestling with feelings of my own poverty. I had recently gone through bankruptcy, and my prayers were heavy with disappointment and loneliness. I poured out everything in my prayer journal, filling three pages with raw emotions and questions.

In the middle of this meditation, I felt prompted to ask Jesus a question: **“Which one of your disciples do you think I’m most like?”**

Right away, I felt the Holy Spirit lead me to Mark 11:1-11—the story of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In this passage, Jesus sends two disciples to find a donkey for him to ride.

As I read the passage, the message stirred in my heart: “Matt, imagine going with the disciples to find the donkey. Untie it and bring it to Jesus. The Master has need of it.” So, I pictured myself bringing the donkey to Jesus.

Then, the Holy Spirit spoke again: **“Matt, you are the donkey.”**

I understood: “You may feel unworthy or inexperienced, but the Lord has need of you. You’ve been chosen to carry something important: this message of hospitality, community, and rebuilding. You are being called to usher *The Communion Revolution* into the world, so that Christ might be glorified in His church.”

The donkey in the story wasn’t special because of its great accomplishments, but it was chosen for a specific purpose. In the same way, my calling to write this book wasn’t about being the most capable or knowledgeable. It was about being willing.

Like the donkey, I didn’t need to understand the full plan or the significance of what I was carrying. In fact, I wouldn’t be able to fully understand, even if I wanted to. I just trusted that Christ was leading me, so I obeyed.

So, I embrace it: I’m the donkey. Christ has entrusted me with this message, and it’s my duty to carry it forward.

What is He calling you to carry into your community? Is it the courage to invite someone to your table? The willingness to practice hospitality? The faith to build deeper relationships that reflect Christ’s love? Whatever it is, know this: the Master has need of you.

You don't need to understand the full plan or feel completely prepared. Like the donkey, you simply need to trust that Jesus knows where He's leading you. He has chosen you for a purpose, and He will equip you for the journey.



Thank you for reading this book. Writing it has been a journey of unexpected challenges and moments of grace. Balancing this work with the demands of everyday life hasn't always been easy, and there were moments I wanted to give up. But through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I knew I had to keep going.

I didn't write this book because I have great wisdom, but because I felt called to share what God has placed on my heart. My highest hope is that something in these pages has encouraged you, challenged you, or helped you draw closer to Christ.

One of my favorite books is *The Interior Castle* by St. Teresa of Avila. Written in 1577, it wasn't intended for fame or recognition—she simply wrote out of obedience to Christ. That humility inspires me. I've prayed countless times that the Holy Spirit would guide my words and use this book, even in small ways, for God's Kingdom.

I believe the most important thing is obedience to God's call. Even if this book impacts only a few people, it will have been worth the effort. If any part of this book has been helpful to you, know that it's not my wisdom but God's grace at work.

As you consider what God may be calling you to do, I encourage you to dream boldly, to act faithfully, and to trust in His timing.

Thank you for taking the time to read these words. May God bless you richly as you continue your journey of faith and discipleship.

In Christ,

Matt McPherson



About the Author

Matthew McPherson is a disciple of Jesus, devoted to building Communion through Christlike hospitality.

A lifelong evangelical Christian with a B.A. in Ancient and Medieval History, Matthew combines his love for history, contemplation, and faith to guide believers in forming deep, meaningful relationships.

The Communion Revolution captures his vision of table-driven Christianity, offering a practical guide to creating spiritual families around dinner tables, just as Jesus did with his friends.

Matthew is the founder of Canopy, a network for connecting Christians in agape feast communities, and the Abide Course, an 18-month discipleship program focused on spiritual growth through table fellowship, prayer, and communal living.

When he's not writing, Matthew enjoys meditating on Scripture, coaching Little League baseball, and trying recipes from his Grandma Sue's cookbook, *Come for Dinner*.

Matthew's mission is to help Christians rediscover the beauty of Communion and hospitality as a way of life.

To connect with him or learn more about his work, visit www.communionrevolution.com or follow him on social media: X @CommunionRev, Instagram and YouTube @CommunionRevolution.

DEDICATION

To Kristin, my wonderful wife— Thank you for walking beside me, supporting me, and believing in this dream through all its ups and downs. Your love, patience, and encouragement have been the foundation that allowed this book to come to life. I am forever grateful.

To Kathleen, my beloved sister— Your steadfast faith through years of suffering has been a living testimony of grace and resilience. This book is, in part, a reflection of the strength I saw in you. Thank you for teaching me what it means to carry my cross with dignity and love.

To Grandma Sue— For “Come for Dinner,” the family cookbook that inspired this journey. Your warmth, hospitality, and love for bringing people together around the table sparked a vision in me that I pray will touch many others.

To the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Our Lady of Communion— Blessed Mary, the mother of our Lord, who teaches us to say “yes” to God’s call and who magnifies the love of Christ through her faith and obedience. May this book honor your example of drawing others into deeper communion with your Son, as we gather at His table to share in His grace and unity.

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ENDNOTES

Introduction

1. John 16:33 NLT
2. Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 39
3. Acts 2:42 NLT
4. 1 Corinthians 11:33 NLT

The Loneliness Epidemic

1. John 15:2 ESV
2. Acts 2:46, 47 NLT

Christ's Visionary Ideal

1. Luke 22:19 NLT
2. Revelation 3:20 NLT
3. John 6:54 NLT
4. Matthew 18:20 NLT
5. 1 Corinthians 10:17 NLT
6. Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Church*, ch. 8
7. Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, Book 10, Letter 96
8. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Chapter 67

The Agape Feast Game Plan

1. Mark 2:22 NLT
2. Psalm 68:6 NLT
3. Matthew 6:24 NLT
4. Luke 16:9 NLT
5. Matthew 19:14 NLT
6. Matthew 16:18, 19 NLT

Breakfast with Peter

1. The Symbolic World Podcast: 369 – Fr Josiah Trenham – Orthodoxy in America, Dec. 7, 2024
2. Matthew 26:35 NLT
3. John 21:3 NLT
4. John 21:5 NLT
5. John 21:7 NLT
6. John 21:15-17 NLT
7. John 21:17 NLT
8. John 21:18 NLT
9. 2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT
10. John 21:17 NLT

Wedding at Cana

1. Ephesians 3:20, 21 ESV
2. John 2:4 NLT
3. John 2:5 NLT
4. John 2:7 NLT
5. John 2:10 NLT
6. Galatians 5:23, 23 NLT
7. John 2:11 NLT
8. John 13:35 NLT
9. Matthew 5:16 NLT

Martha and Mary

1. Luke 10:40 NLT
2. Luke 10:41 NLT
3. Matthew 18:15 NLT
4. Luke 10:42 NLT

Feeding the Five Thousand

1. John 6:29 NLT
2. John 6:5 NLT
3. Matthew 14:15 NLT
4. John 6:9 NLT
5. Mother Teresa, A Simple Path

6. Luke 9:14 NLT

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2. Luke 7:39 NLT

3. Luke 7:42-48 NLT

Levi, the Tax Collector

1. Matthew 9:2,3 NLT

2. Matthew 9:4-6 NLT

3. Matthew 9:6 NLT

4. Matthew 9:9 NLT

5. Matthew 9:11 NLT

6. Matthew 9:12, 13 NLT

7. Matthew 9:13 NLT

8. 1 John 2:6 ESV

Zacchaeus

1. Philippians 1:6 NLT

2. Luke 19:5 NLT

3. Luke 10:5 NLT

4. Luke 19:10 NLT

5. Luke 7:34 NIV

6. Luke 19:7 NLT

7. Luke 15:32 NLT

8. Luke 19:8 NLT

9. Luke 19:9 NLT

10. Matthew 10:14 NLT

11. Matthew 18:22 NLT

Greedy Pharisee

1. Luke 11:35 NLT

2. Matthew 6:21 NLT

3. Luke 11:41 NLT

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5. Therese of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, Chapter 8

6. Luke 11:43 NLT

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8. Philippians 2:5-7 NLT

9. Luke 11:48 NLT

10. Luke 11:52 NLT

11. John 14:6 NLT

12. Isaiah 58:7 NLT

13. Matthew 25:35, 36 NLT

14. John Wesley, *The Use of Money*, Sermon 50

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2. 1 John 5:21 NLT

3. Romans 8:1 NLT

4. John 12:5 NLT

5. Ephesians 5:21 NLT

6. 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13 NLT

7. Matthew 26:10 NLT

8. Philippians 2:8 NLT

9. Matthew 26:11 NLT

10. Colossians 3:13 NLT

11. Matthew 6:12 NLT

The Road to Emmaus

1. Luke 24:17 NLT

2. Luke 24:27 ESV

3. Psalm 22:16, 18 NLT

4. Luke 24:30, 31 NLT

Part 3

1. Romans 10:14 NLT

The Communion Manifesto

1. 1 Samuel 14:6 NLT