



EXTENDING THE TABLE  
BECOMING A CHURCH FOR OTHERS

# EXTENDING THE TABLE

## BECOMING A CHURCH FOR OTHERS



## Introduction

God deeply loves our world and desires to redeem, heal, and restore all things. One of the ways Scripture describes this vision of restoration is through the lens of hospitality. God's kingdom is portrayed as a great banquet where all are invited to the table to feast on grace and share in a healing, life-giving community. The church is made up of those who have received and embraced this invitation - but not just for our own sake. As we receive God's gracious hospitality, we also join in God's mission to become agents of hospitality, extending the table into the world around us.

In this series, we will examine six practices that are central to becoming a church for others: listening, proclaiming, praying, forgiving, eating, and blessing. We will explore how these practices are cultivated in us as we worship together and what it looks like to engage them for the sake of others.

This booklet can serve as a guide for individuals and groups as we walk through this series as a church. You are invited to participate through:

- Weekly worship and sermons in-person/online
- A weekly prayer + practice
- Video vignettes with questions for discussion

May God's grace be extended to others through us as we learn and grow together!



# WEEK 1

## EXTENDING THE TABLE

### Watch Video 1: Extending the Table

#### Optional Icebreaker *(5-10 minutes)*

Briefly describe the most wonderful dining experience you've ever had. Include where it was, what was served, and who you were with.

#### Scripture and Discussion *(30-40 minutes)*

Isaiah 25 paints a picture of a great feast taking place on Mount Zion, the highest point in Jerusalem and a location symbolic of the Promised Land. The fulfillment of God's kingdom is also described in Revelation 19 as a great wedding feast. These images in Scripture invite us to imagine what God's kingdom will look like when it comes in all of its fullness. As you read and reflect, imagine what it looks like for us to embrace this vision of the kingdom right here and now. If God is preparing a feast for all people, what is our role in extending an invitation to God's table?

- 1) Describe a time or situation where you saw a meal bring people together. What did it teach you about the role of the table in relationship-building?

#### Read Isaiah 25:6-9

*<sup>6</sup>On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. <sup>7</sup>On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; <sup>8</sup>he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. <sup>9</sup>In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."*

- 2) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- 3) God is described in this passage as the host of the meal. Based on the description of the meal in verse 6, what do you notice about God's hospitality?
- 4) According to verses 7-9, what are the results of sharing at the table with God? What makes you hopeful? What do you find challenging?

- 5) Read the words of Jesus to the Pharisees in Luke 14:12-14. What do Jesus' words teach us about the hospitality of God? What does it say about the hospitality the church is called to extend?
- 6) One of the deepest needs people have is for belonging and community. Can you think of examples where that need is expressed in our culture or in your own life? How is the church uniquely gifted and called to meet people at this point of need?
- 7) What factors most often keep the church from existing for the sake of others?
- 8) At the center of the church's life is worship which provides a weekly rhythm of practices that have the power to shape us over time in significant ways. What aspect(s) of worship most resonate with you when it comes to becoming a hospitable presence for others?
- 9) What happens if our worship never leads us outward in mission? What happens if we try to engage in mission apart from the practices of worship?

### **Personal Reflection** *(5 minutes)*

What factors keep you from personally extending hospitality toward others? Write them below and offer them to the Lord:

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### **Closing** *(5-10 minutes)*

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying in unison this week's prayer found in the Prayer + Practice section.

# PRAYER + PRACTICE



## WEEK 1 EXTENDING THE TABLE

### Prayer

Loving God,  
Thank you for inviting us to your table.  
Shape our hearts by your Spirit,  
that through us, your grace may flow into the lives of others.  
Amen.

### Practice

This week, we want to raise our awareness of others. Extend an intentional word of thanks to someone within your sphere of influence (work, neighborhood, church) that you may not otherwise regularly acknowledge. Thank them for the way(s) their presence enriches you and/or others. This may take the form of a spoken or written word (text, email, letter). Write your ideas below:

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## WEEK 2

# THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING

### Watch Video 2: The Practice of Listening

#### Optional Icebreaker *(5-10 minutes)*

If you could invite any historical figure over for dinner, who would it be and why?

#### Scripture and Discussion *(30-40 minutes)*

In his letter to early Christian communities, the Apostle James encourages the churches to live faithful, authentic lives. In chapters 1 and 3, James urges believers to tame the tongue because of the great power words have to either build up or tear down. The implication is that if we want to live faithfully and hospitably, it will require us to first close our mouths and open our ears. Listening opens the way for us to become more aware of and responsive to the voice of the Spirit, as well as to the voices and needs of others. As you read and reflect, consider what it would look like for us to be a community that is known for listening well.

- 1) Describe a time someone listened to you well. What did he/she do that made them a good listener?

#### Read James 1:19-27

<sup>19</sup> My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, <sup>20</sup> because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. <sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. <sup>26</sup> Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

- 2) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- 3) According to verses 19-20, what is the relationship between anger and listening? How does the presence of anger affect our ability to be a hospitable presence?
- 4) According to James 1, what is the relationship between listening/hearing and acting?
- 5) Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-3. This passage describes the importance of listening when approaching God in worship. What effect do times of silence in worship have on you?
- 6) To what extent is silence and careful listening valued in our culture? Why do you think this is?
- 7) Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his book *Life Together*,

“Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words. One who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and be never really speaking to others, albeit he be not conscious of it. Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and for his own follies.”

What is the role of listening in extending hospitality? How does practicing silence allow us to become more present to others?

- 8) What are the primary marks of a good listener?

### **Personal Reflection** (5 minutes)

What factors keep you from being an effective listener? What habit(s) would need to be released or adopted in order to grow in this area?

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### **Closing** (5-10 minutes)

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying this week's prayer in unison.

# PRAYER + PRACTICE



## WEEK 2 THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING

### Prayer

*Turn off all of your devices and eliminate as much noise as possible. Spend 5-10 minutes in silent listening.*

Lord,  
Silence in us any voice but yours,  
that hearing you,  
we may become more  
attentive to others.  
Amen.

### Practice

This week's practice is to listen intentionally. After 5 -10 minutes of silence and prayer, consider one of the following ideas:

- In the course of natural conversation, ask a neighbor, coworker, or someone who needs a listening ear some questions about their background/history/current needs.
- Walk or drive your neighborhood, paying close attention to who lives around you. Record your observations.
- Do some research on a topic you're passionate about but include perspectives with which you're unfamiliar or might usually disagree.
- Research the demographics of your neighborhood or city, taking special care to note the greatest needs you observe. Record your observations.
- Fast from all media for a day. Ask the Lord to speak to you.



## WEEK 3

# THE PRACTICE OF PROCLAIMING

### Watch Video 3: The Practice of Proclaiming

#### Optional Icebreaker *(5-10 minutes)*

What is the most unusual food you've ever eaten?

#### Scripture and Discussion *(30-40 minutes)*

In his letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul writes from prison to encourage the church in its devotion to Jesus Christ. In chapters 3-4, Paul explores the contours of the new life that ought to mark those who belong to Jesus. As Paul draws his letter to a close, he asks the church in Colossae to pray for open doors for him to clearly proclaim the mystery of the good news of Jesus to others. He then encourages the Colossians to make the most of opportunities *they* will have to speak and respond gracefully to others, especially to those who are not yet part of the church. The implication is that Paul is not the only one who will be doing the proclaiming. The church, through gracious conversation with the culture around it, will have open doors to speak good news, thereby creating hospitable space for people who are seeking a relationship with the living God. As you read and reflect this week, we are invited to consider the power that comes through gracious speech.

- 1) What's the best news you've ever received and how did it make you feel? How did others respond when you shared the news?

#### Read Colossians 4:2-6

<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. <sup>3</sup> And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. <sup>5</sup> Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

- 2) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?

- 3) Paul asks for prayer that God would open doors so that the mystery of Christ may be proclaimed. He wrote these words while in chains. What do you think an “open door” would look like for Paul in that situation? What might it look like for us in our homes, neighborhoods, or workplaces?
- 4) Paul instructs the church to “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders” and “make the most of every opportunity.” What do you think Paul means by this? How does the church’s posture toward the world affect its ability to speak good news?
- 5) Conversation that is “full of grace” (v. 6) is often in short supply today. Conversations and disagreements can often turn harsh, critical, and divisive. Where do you see that reality playing out in our culture? How can a lack of grace in our speech impede the church’s ability to extend the table to others?
- 6) Read the message Jesus was called to proclaim in [Luke 4:14-21](#). What do you observe about the good news presented here? How does it compare with the one most often proclaimed by the church today?
- 7) Last week, we discussed the practice of listening. What is the role of listening in sharing good news with others?
- 8) Proclaiming or sharing good news with others may look different for different people, according to their personality, temperament, and gifting. Can you think of examples of this? What do you think practicing proclamation and gracious speech looks like for you?

### **Personal Reflection** *(5 minutes)*

What “open doors” for sharing good news within your circle of influence exist now or could exist in the future? Record the people or situations that come to mind:

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### **Closing** *(5-10 minutes)*

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying this week’s prayer in unison.

# PRAYER + PRACTICE



## WEEK 3 THE PRACTICE OF PROCLAIMING

### Prayer

Loving God,  
Keep us mindful of the  
power of our words.  
Fill our speech with grace,  
that the message of our lives  
may point others to the good news of your love.  
Amen.

### Practice

This week's practice is to share good news and speak graciously. Some ideas:

- Write out your spiritual journey and share it with someone. On a timeline:
  - Plot significant life events (people, places, vocation, etc.)
  - Plot seasons of joy and loss
  - Plot moments of spiritual dryness and growth
- Respond: Where have you seen God at work in your story? How can your story be shared to encourage and give hope to others?
- Know someone who is struggling? Reach out intentionally with a word of grace or encouragement through a conversation, card, call, or text that expresses the good news that they are loved by God and that they are not alone.
- Commit to say nothing negative or critical for a day. Take a "speech inventory" and record times or situations in which you were tempted to use harsh, negative, or critical words. How did these times affect your mood? Ask the Lord to change your heart and fill your words with grace.



## WEEK 4 THE PRACTICE OF PRAYING

### Watch Video 4: The Practice of Praying

#### Optional Icebreaker *(5-10 minutes)*

What has been one of your most memorable road trips or vacations?

#### Scripture and Discussion *(30-40 minutes)*

In the first letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul writes to his young son in the faith to encourage him as he serves the church in Ephesus. The very first reminder Paul wants Timothy to pass on to the Ephesian church is about the role and importance of prayer. The church is to offer “petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving.” This prayer is not just an inward-facing activity. Rather, this prayer for others is done with the belief that God desires all to come to a knowledge of Christ as Savior. Prayer for others enables us to participate in God’s work in others’ lives in ways that will bring about salvation and wholeness. As you read and reflect, we are invited to consider how the practice of intercessory prayer is a key aspect of becoming a church for others.

1) Can you think of a significant time someone prayed for you? How did it affect you?

#### Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6

*<sup>1</sup> I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people—<sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.*

2) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?

3) From the beginning of the Christian church, believers prayed for others in their gatherings of worship. According to verses 1-2, who are believers called to lift up in prayer? Why is including intercessory prayer important?

- 4) Paul indicates that we are to pray specifically for governmental authorities. Why does Paul include this group in the instructions on prayer?
- 5) According to Paul's teaching, God wants all people to "be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (v. 4) How might the knowledge that God is already at work in people's lives affect the way we pray for others?
- 6) Read Luke 6:27-28. Have you ever prayed for someone who mistreated you? How does interceding for those who mistreat us affect our ability to extend hospitality?
- 7) What does it mean to "pray without ceasing"? (1 Thess. 5:17) What might this look like for you in the course of a typical day?
- 8) There's a well-known West African proverb that says, "When you pray, move your feet." What does this mean to you? What is the relationship between praying for others' needs and taking action on their behalf?
- 9) Praying for others' needs, whether we are present with them physically or not, requires a compassionate heart. What factors most often keep us from engaging in intercessory prayer?

### **Personal Reflection** *(5 minutes)*

Consider the rhythms of a typical day for you. When could intercessory prayers for others be easily inserted into your day? Who comes to mind that would benefit from such prayers?

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### **Closing** *(5-10 minutes)*

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying this week's prayer in unison.

# PRAYER + PRACTICE



## WEEK 4 THE PRACTICE OF PRAYING

### Prayer

Gracious Father,  
Remind us of the  
privilege we have  
in bringing the needs  
of others before you.  
Fill our hearts with love  
and move our feet to action.  
Amen.

### Practice

This week's practice is to engage in intercessory prayer. Here is a simple format that may be helpful:

- 1) Remove distractions and relax your body and mind. You may be sitting, standing, or walking.
- 2) Ponder God's love and acknowledge that God is already loving and gracing the people for whom we pray. Ask the Holy Spirit for that same love.
- 3) You may already have a list of people or situations in mind. If not, imagine yourself walking through the spheres of your life (family, friends, work, community, difficult situations, etc.). As people or situations are brought to mind, pause to focus on each one. Ask God to fill that person with Christ's love and make them whole. Release the person to God's care and pray that God's will would be done.
- 4) Pray a prayer of gratitude and express your openness to be an instrument of grace to others. Close with the Lord's Prayer.



# WEEK 5

## THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVING

### Watch Video 5: The Practice of Forgiving

#### Optional Icebreaker *(5-10 minutes)*

What is your favorite road trip snack?

#### Scripture and Discussion *(30-40 minutes)*

The Apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth to address challenges that had arisen in the community. Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to know that ministry comes not through power, but through weakness. The cross ultimately reveals God's character as sacrificial and self-giving love. This love God has shown, displayed in the cross, has the power to forgive us and reconcile us to God and each other. The good news that God no longer counts our sins against us means that we don't have to keep score of others' sins. God's forgiveness and peace can be received and extended through us, wherever we are. As you reflect this week, we are invited to consider how our lives may be increasingly marked by the practice of forgiveness.

- 1) Can you think of a time when someone forgave you for something you said or did? How did their forgiveness affect you?

#### Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

<sup>14</sup>For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup>And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. <sup>16</sup>So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

<sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup>that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- 2) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?

- 3) Paul uses the language of “new creation” to describe what it means when people are “in Christ.” (v. 17) What thoughts or feelings does this image evoke in you?
- 4) What are some of the reasons we sometimes avoid forgiveness and reconciliation? What happens to us if we do not forgive?
- 5) Read Matthew 5:23-24. What is the relationship between our reconciliation with God and our reconciliation with others?
- 6) Paul speaks of being ambassadors of reconciliation and that God is, “making His appeal through us.” What does an ambassador do? Does this idea motivate, surprise, or alarm you?
- 7) It’s tempting for the church to adopt the angry, combative stance that’s so prevalent in our culture. How does doing so affect our ability to be a hospitable presence? What can we do to maintain a peaceful presence in our interactions with others?
- 8) Read James 5:16. Why is regular confession important both in our times of gathered worship and in our daily lives? How do you think this practice helps us become a church for others?

### **Personal Reflection** *(5 minutes)*

Is there a person or group in your life you need to either forgive or ask forgiveness from? How is God calling you to respond?

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### **Closing** *(5-10 minutes)*

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying this week’s prayer in unison.

# PRAYER + PRACTICE



## WEEK 5 THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVING

### Prayer

Lord,  
Remove our pride  
and help us forgive.  
Deliver us from holding grudges  
and fill our lives with your peace.  
Amen.

### Practice

This week's practice is to extend forgiveness. Some ideas:

- Pray the Lord's Prayer. When you come to the line, "And forgive us our trespasses," open your hands with palms up. Release any sins to God which come to mind. When you pray, "as we forgive those who trespass against us," extend your hands palms down. Imagine yourself releasing grace and forgiveness to any who may have offended you.
- Reflect: Is there something I have said or done, whether intentional or not, that has wounded another person or group of people? What do I need to do to reconcile?
- If there is anger or bitterness over past hurt, don't carry it alone or let it linger. After a prayer for wisdom, extend an apology through a conversation, phone call, or written message. If you have been wronged and there is no apology, consider reaching out to talk with a pastor, friend, or trusted mentor.
- If you are struggling with guilt over past sins, contact a pastor who can schedule a time to meet with you confidentially and lead you through a time of confession and assurance of forgiveness.



## WEEK 6

# THE PRACTICE OF EATING

### Watch Video 6: The Practice of Eating

#### Optional Icebreaker *(5-10 minutes)*

Briefly describe a fun or unique tradition observed at mealtimes in your household. It may be a current tradition or one from your childhood.

#### Scripture and Discussion *(30-40 minutes)*

The Gospel of Luke ends with Jesus ascending to the Father and the disciples in Jerusalem praising God and waiting for “power from on high.” (Luke 24:49) Luke’s sequel, the book of Acts, opens as the Holy Spirit descends on the followers of Jesus. This gives birth to the church, a dynamic and growing multicultural community of shared life and mission. Acts 2 provides a snapshot of the early Christian community where a key feature of the church’s life was eating together. This practice provided social connection that bridged many cultural divisions of the day. It helped ensure those with less would not be hungry. It also became a primary doorway for seekers to experience the hospitable life of the church. At the center of their shared life and meals was their worship which included the “breaking of bread.” (2:42) Here, the celebration focused on the bread and wine, Jesus’ words to them from the Upper Room (Luke 22), and the presence of God at work among them. As you reflect this week, consider how the very common habit of eating a meal together may be a powerful way people can experience the hospitality of God.

- 1) In the culture of the first Christians, sharing a meal with someone was an act of intimacy and trust. What role does food play in our culture? How is it similar to or different from that of the early church?

#### Read Acts 2:42-47

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

<sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

- 2) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?
- 3) As you read the passage, what do you notice about the shared life of the early Christians? Is this similar to your experience of Christianity? Why or why not?
- 4) Read verses 46-47. The early church experienced rapid growth without advertising itself or intentionally setting out to attract newcomers. What do you think contributed to the growth of the church? What was the role of worship in this growth?
- 5) Read the following brief passages:
  - a. Luke 22:19 (the Last Supper)
  - b. Luke 24:28-32 (Jesus with disciples on the road to Emmaus)
  - c. Acts 27:35 (Paul as prisoner on ship sailing to Rome)
  - d. 1 Corinthians 11:23-24 (Paul's instructions for worship)

What patterns do you see? Why do you think Communion was so central to the worship of the early Christians? What does the pattern and practice of Holy Communion teach us about the Christian life?

- 6) In what ways does an invitation to share a meal help someone feel loved and welcomed? What are the key features of being a hospitable host?
- 7) Why do you think we sometimes hesitate to invite new people to our tables? How can this hesitation be overcome?
- 8) Hospitality is not only something to be offered in spaces we host. It can also be extended when we are the guests. What does it mean to you to be a gracious guest? How can being a guest at someone else's table serve to extend God's hospitality to others?

### **Personal Reflection** *(5 minutes)*

As you think about your current lifestyle and habits, what keeps you from extending hospitality to others in this way? What habits would need to change for you to extend the table?

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### **Closing** *(5-10 minutes)*

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying this week's prayer in unison.

# PRAYER + PRACTICE



## WEEK 6 THE PRACTICE OF EATING

### Prayer

Loving God,  
Thank you for providing food which sustains us.  
Open our eyes to your presence,  
that every table may become for us an altar,  
and every guest be welcomed as Christ.  
Amen.

*Note: The feasibility of some of these ideas depends on developments with the pandemic. For activities involving eating with others not within your household, you are encouraged to utilize masks and social distancing, when appropriate. Consider an outdoor space where you can bring your own food. If in doubt, pay attention to local/county health guidelines.*

### Practice

This week's practice is to eat with intentional hospitality. Some ideas:

- Many of us have habits of eating with people we know well. However, we often do not easily open the circle to new people. If you have a meal planned with others, offer an intentional invitation to someone new to join you or your group.
- If your situation allows it, eat with coworkers when you may normally eat alone. Use the time to get to know your colleagues better.
- Plan a meal where everyone in the household helps prepare. Make it a point to enjoy the preparation as much as the meal itself. When it comes time to eat, turn off all electronic devices and be present with each other. Pay special attention to how you can celebrate everyone's presence and contributions through an intentional mealtime discussion. Some possible questions:
  - What do you love about each person at the table?
  - What gifts does each person bring to the table?
  - How can the group be praying for each person in the coming week?
- Deliver a meal, special dish, or a restaurant gift card to someone you know who may need it, a neighbor, or a person who may otherwise typically eat alone.



## WEEK 7

# THE PRACTICE OF BLESSING

### Watch Video 7: The Practice of Blessing

#### Optional Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

Have you ever received an unexpected gift? Briefly share the experience with the group.

#### Scripture and Discussion (30-40 minutes)

In his pastoral guidance to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul celebrates the generosity of the Corinthians and admonishes them to “abound in every good work.” (2 Cor. 9:8) This call to generous, outward-focused living is not rooted in their natural abilities but in the acknowledgment that they have been blessed and graced by God. According to Paul, the consequence of being blessed by the gospel is to become a blessing. We receive so that we can share. When this economy of grace is extended, it will result in others being blessed and ultimately, offering their praise and thanks to God. As you read and reflect this week, consider what it might look like to live lives that overflow in ways that tangibly bless others.

1) What do you think people usually mean when they say, “I am so blessed!”?

#### Read 2 Corinthians 9:8-15

<sup>8</sup>And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup>As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” <sup>10</sup>Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup>You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup>This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. <sup>13</sup>Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. <sup>14</sup>And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. <sup>15</sup>Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2) What words, images, and ideas stand out to you in this passage?

- 3) According to this passage, what does it mean to be blessed? What is the result of being blessed by God?
- 4) A majority of the early Christians were poor and would have had very little material wealth. What role does our economic status play in our ability to bless others?
- 5) Read Matthew 5:14-16 and see verses 2 Corinthians 9:12-14. What effect does blessing others in the name of Christ have on them? Can you think of a time when either you or someone you have observed has responded this way when blessed in a tangible way?
- 6) William Temple, former Archbishop of Canterbury wrote, “The Church exists primarily for the sake of those who are still outside it.” Does this vision of the church challenge you? Encourage you?
- 7) What effect does it have on someone who is not part of the church when a Christian or a church blesses them in a tangible way? What are some of the ways we can bless our neighbors?
- 8) In our culture, there is a high value placed on calculating the return on investment – what we may receive by giving something away. How does the Scripture’s definition of blessing challenge this approach? How can we bless others without strings attached?
- 9) When we end our worship services, we end with a blessing and a dismissal (meaning *sending*) to “go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” Have you thought of the end of our worship service in this way? How does this practice help us think of our daily lives as an act of worship?

### **Personal Reflection** *(5 minutes)*

What habits have to be cultivated in order to be a person who consistently blesses others? Think about the habits you have developed surrounding your time, money, and gifts. What habits may need to change in order to enable you to live a life of generous blessing to others?

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### **Closing** *(5-10 minutes)*

Spend the last few minutes sharing any burdens or thanksgivings with the group and then pray together. Close by praying this week’s prayer in unison.

# PRAYER + PRACTICE



## WEEK 7 THE PRACTICE OF BLESSING

### Prayer

Generous God,  
Help us live with open hands,  
that every gift we have received  
may become an instrument of blessing to others.  
Amen.

### Practice

This week's practice is to joyfully bless someone who is not part of our church. You may want to practice this on your own and/or with a group. Some ideas:

- Deliver a meal, special dish, or a gift card to someone in need or who may simply be encouraged by such a gesture.
- Write a note or card of encouragement and mail or deliver it to someone who would benefit.
- With a group, prayerfully decide on a person or group not directly connected to the church who may be blessed by an act of generosity. Identify either an existing need or a tangible way to encourage the recipient. Mobilize the group to bless them with this gift or act of service.



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5500 W. 91st Street, Overland Park, KS 66207  
[www.christchurchkc.org](http://www.christchurchkc.org) | 913.648.2271