
THE FAMILY TABLE

Part 1 - Everyone Get's a Seat

The church is a table where people come to get fed. Jesus said in John 6:35, "I am the bread of life." The challenge that we have as local churches in this culture, and around the world, is to feed people.

The primary two-fold purpose of the church is to build up followers of Jesus (that is, to disciple those who have crossed over the line and decided to follow Jesus) and reach out to those who have not yet made that decision (to tell the world about Jesus).

One of the most important ingredients we can share as a church if we are wanting to reach our potential in building believers and serving those who don't yet know Jesus is to have strong relationships – strong community. If we are going to effectively serve our community, we must first be a great family community here at Riverlife.

Community was Jesus' Plan to Change the World

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus' first step was to establish community. Throughout His whole ministry, He modelled and taught on the nature of life in this new kind of community. On the last night of His life, He prayed for the oneness of His community.

He said that the credibility of His whole ministry and mission rested on their oneness (John 17:20-23). You cannot abide in Jesus without being a part of His community.

Jesus knew there were certain dynamics of life in His kingdom of spiritual growth that only happen when people are in community, forming circles of intimacy, commitment and mission together.

Dynamic #1 - The Uniqueness of His Presence

Jesus is uniquely present in His community, when we are gathered around His table. Jesus is always present every place, every moment—but He's present in His Community in a special way (Matthew 18:20; Hebrews 10:24-25).

The reality is that when the coals get together, there's a kind of fire, and Jesus is present in His community. We experience moments when He gives comfort or guidance, healing or hope or strength in and through the family gathering.

In community we find a grace where God speaks through us and our actions towards one another. That's the way the family of God works.

Dynamic #2 – Spiritual Drift

There is a sharpening of one another when we come united together (Proverbs 27:17). And the reality is that no matter how bright or strong or intelligent that any one of us thinks we are, none of us are above the need for community.

We are all prone to spiritual drift. In community, we are spurred on to good deeds, and we are held accountable. The community tethers us to what we value most.

This runs counter to one of the biggest myths in our day, and the myth is that it is possible for a human being to “do spirituality” by the “Self-Study Method.” Most of what you see in popular sources about spirituality makes it sound like it is purely individualistic.

Jesus called people into community where we:

- + worship together
- + pray together
- + grow together
- + serve together
- + confront each other
- + are on mission together

That's Community! That's what He called people to do. Apart from that, we are prone to spiritual drift.

Dynamic #3 – A Place to be Real

There is a third dynamic that takes place in a Jesus centred community. 'The Family Table' should be the one place where it is fully safe for us to take off our masks and to know the healing power of being known and loved—to stop hiding.

In Genesis it states that initially the man and the woman were “naked and not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). There were no secrets; they were fully known; everything about them was revealed and they were loved. Then with the Fall came shame, and then hiding (Genesis 3:10). Humanity has been hiding ever since, and sometimes people in churches hide the best of all.

James says, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you might be healed (James 5:16). We can only be loved to the extent that we are known, and we can only be fully loved if we are fully known.

Dynamic #4 - Love

It is at The Family Table where we find the opportunity to love the way that Jesus loved.

- + “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)
- + “This is my command: Love each other.” (John 15:17)
- + “By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:35)

The whole credibility of Jesus' mission rests on this: not whether we are smart, not whether we build something big or impressive, but that we love one another.

What made the church explode was a relentless, Spirit-empowered determination of those within the community to lavish love on anybody who could possibly stand it! We can never underestimate the hunger of a human being to be loved.

God has called us to gather around His table, to feed on the bread of life. Our church should be a place where no one stands alone – where nobody hides – where nobody drifts – a place where everyone can find a seat at The Family Table.

As we try to navigate the complexity of a culture of authentic community, we must remember it is something developed over time and from intentional investment – it is a process and it's a team effort.

Discussion Questions

1. Church should be a place where we find community, but our recent survey found that many Riverlife people found they didn't connect, don't experience the kind of love Jesus prayed for us to have for one another, and a large percentage felt invisible! Share of an experience you have had at church when you have felt like this. What would have made the difference?
2. Read John 17:20-26. This is Jesus' prayer for you to His heavenly Father. What does this stir in you? What importance does this place on our need to be a loving community?
3. Read John 15:9-12. Jesus wouldn't command something we couldn't do. The secret to success is to abide in Jesus (v5). How does this bring a new insight to the need for community and being prone to spiritual drift?
4. What are some simple things you can commit to do when at church to help make others feel accepted, loved and that Riverlife could be a place where they feel a strong sense of belonging?
5. Pray for one another and for a unity amongst our church.