

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

Sharing a Meal

Have you ever had a meal with a neighbour? You can learn a lot about a person when you share a meal with them. One way that Jesus regularly spent time with people was by sharing meals with them. But they did not just share meals with people He knew well. He regularly had meals with strangers and sinners and people He only just met.

When Jesus ate meals with people, the conversation and time together had an influence on their lives. That's because it was so much more than a meal.

When you invite people into your home for a meal, I think there are a few things at play: the Meal, the Conversation and the Home.

- + Meal – Generosity
- + Conversation – Vulnerability
- + Home – Heart

Generosity

Preparing a meal for someone takes time, resources and skills. It is a very giving act.

Vulnerability

Sharing your home with people and inviting them into your private space can be a very vulnerable space.

But more than that, having deep and connected conversations while someone is in your care takes vulnerability.

Heart

Home is where the heart is. A lot is revealed though your home, but also through your heart.

When Jesus ate meals with people, the conversation and time together had an influence on their lives. He was not just having meals with others for social enjoyment, though it is a wonderful way to socialise.

He was building relationships that would allow Him to have connections and influence in their lives for God's glory.

Matthew 9:10-13 NIV

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Him and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 5:46-48 NIV

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Jesus saw this time of connection with the lost, those who needed him, as a time of mercy, inviting them into a relationship with Him.

Matthew 11:28

Come to me all who are burdened and weary, and I will give you rest.

Prepare for the meal – Preparing the heart

A generous heart feeds into a generous home. When you don't have a generous heart, you can look inward, becoming selfish and possessive of your resources, including time, which is the most valuable resource.

A selfish heart sees these acts of kindness as time wasted – or time spent doing 'good work' from a posture of earning God's love. A heart posture of generosity sees sharing one's resources as faith that has produced good work—not earning love but coming from love.

Being generous but not vulnerable with people can also be a mistake. We may appear to be trying to solve other's problems rather than walking alongside them as brothers and sisters.

Sometimes, the very things that people connect over are shared struggles, areas of triumph, shared grief, shared health journeys, and life's ups and downs.

This all leads to having an open heart—an open heart that is generous and vulnerable—which leads us to want to have an open home.

Jesus had a Generous, Vulnerable Heart.

Discussion Questions

1. How are you going with getting to know your neighbours?
2. Have you seen any change in your relationship since beginning the first two parts of this series, to pray and to listen?
3. Have you ever shared a meal with your neighbour?
4. What is your heart posture toward this idea? Does it make you feel like it's a task, another thing to do, or an opportunity?
5. Would you say you have a generous heart? Why or why not?
6. Would you say you have a vulnerable heart? Why or why not?
7. What might you need to declutter your life, home, or heart to make room for sharing meals and times of significance with the people in your neighborhood who don't yet know Jesus?

Challenge for this week

Who from your neighbourhood or front line could you invite over for a meal?

Set yourself a deadline to contact them and invite them over. In the meantime, spend time in prayer for them, getting your heart posture ready.