

LIVING *Life2Life*

Re-imagining church through the power of relationships. Volume 1 | Issue 3

How did Jesus do “insider evangelism”? He did it over dinner. Surprised? “Our surprise develops into a sense of urgency when we recognize that a primary, maybe the primary, venue for evangelism in Jesus’ life was the meal,” writes Eugene Peterson. Why meals? Meals are natural and safe places for insiders to begin faith conversations.

Jesus loved to eat with sinners. “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners’” (Luke 7:34). The Gospel records are rich with Jesus’ dining ministry (Matthew 9:10-13; Luke 7:36-50; Luke 14:1-27; Luke 19:1-10). Living as an insider means being hospitable, living life2life around a shared meal.

In Jesus’ culture, hospitality was a sacred duty. People believed that guests were sent to them by God. Meals were a place of intimacy, with the dinner party reclining on the floor, engaged in conversation with one another. Relationships were nurtured and built around shared food.

Jesus’ simple act of eating turned the worlds of the religious conservatives upside down (Luke 15:2). In their eyes, this young rabbi and reputed Messiah was compromised by His dinner guests. “Why is your teacher eating with tax collectors and sinners?” they asked in horror. They believed that anyone eating with religiously unclean people became unclean (Mark 7:1-4). Moral disease was like a cold spread through contact. For the conservative Jew, “Unclean people and objects constantly threatened to corrupt God’s holy [people]. Like literal physical disease, we may think of ritual impurity as contagious,” writes theologian Craig Bloomberg.

We can learn from Jesus’ model. He didn’t set preconditions on who could attend the banquets. There’s no record of Him calling people to repentance when dinner conversations stalled. He never gave his host a list of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Grace invites everyone to the table of truth. Meals became a symbolic expression of the Lamb’s wedding feast (Revelation 19:9), the banquet where outsiders were compelled to join (Luke 14:23,24).

Jesus easily moved into these social events, accepting people as though they were his own family. As He did so, many chose to follow Him and became new members of His spiritual family (Luke 19:9). Meals are the one true cross cultural ministry tool. Everyone in every culture has to eat. No wonder the early church naturally gathered in homes around shared meals (Acts 2:46). Jesus set the example.

Dining is an insider strategy. When we live life2life, food becomes a tantalizing ingredient for faith conversations. Live the Jesus way and invite people into your home for a meal. If this isn’t possible, meet over lunch, dinner, or a cup of coffee at an inexpensive restaurant. Turn food into a Kingdom encounter and watch the Lord build relational bridges for faith conversations. Is dinner ready yet?!

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