

Pastor's Pen

"Praying for Revival"

Dear Congregation,

Looking back over my files, I discovered a message I preached on *Revival* over 14 years ago. My notes show I spoke about the Welsh Revival of 1904 and the Asbury College Revival of 1970.

It seems to me I wrote about revival in this church newsletter several years ago, but I cannot find that edition. Since Revival is happening right now, beginning once more at Asbury, I think this is the ripe time to write about it again!

Who would imagine that another outpouring of the Holy Spirit would take place at Asbury here in 2023! Over the course of some 13 days, over 50,000 people have flocked to Asbury, now a university, located in the small town of Wilmore, Kentucky. The same outpouring has spread to over a dozen other college campuses around the country. People have been coming from all over the world to experience God in these places.

My daughter Raquel is a student at Asbury. She came home last weekend and shared her experience of the revival with our church during worship on February 19. She noted it began in an ordinary way, on a campus which was spiritually dry, with many students just going through the motions of being Christian.

The outpoured blessing began on February 8, when a small group of students remained behind after regular chapel service in Hughes Auditorium. They continued worshipping, and soon the Spirit of God fell on the place, enveloping them with his love. Other students heard about it and began returning to the Auditorium, which seats 1600 people. They stayed, including through the night, soaking in the presence of God.

It was like that for three days, mostly among the college students and staff. Many classes were canceled or suspended. Student musicians spontaneously took turns leading worship, others stood and gave testimony, and still others confessed their sins, while many prayed for each other, all while the Spirit of God filled the place with love like a thick blanket of peace.

The move of the Spirit also flowed across the street to Asbury Seminary. Then news spread and it began to draw crowds which slowly grew over the course of days from hundreds to many thousands.

I was able to travel to Asbury for several days before the crowds were overwhelming. I was blessed



to be there. The Spirit of God was palpably present in the worship. The university staff was very humble in trying to allow people to experience God's blessing, and yet steer things to respect the needs of the students they have charge of.

By the time you read this, the Asbury administration has already taken action to move the revival off campus. The number of people flocking to the town simply overwhelmed the small community. State police had to be called in to help manage the huge numbers.

I learned that prayer was a key part of what happened. Many had been praying for years for a fresh revival to come Asbury.

The 1904 Welsh revival was preceded by a handful of people praying earnestly, some for over ten years, that God's spirit would come and revive their region. At the time, Wales was spiritually dry and destitute, filled with many hopeless and broken families and people, with its churches in decline.

When the Spirit finally fell, he brought a fire of healing, purification, and new life, all through the love of Jesus. Before it was over, the revival resulted in over 150,000 people coming to Christ and joining the churches in Wales. Many lives were completely transformed, with "homes and families healed, churches packed, and on fire with fervour and zeal!"

The original 1970 Asbury revival also was preceded by earnest prayer. "For some time, a small group of students had been involved in a vigorous devotional discipline. It included getting up a half hour earlier than usual each morning for prayer, Bible study and to plan specific ministries during the day...In addition, various groups - large and small - had been meeting at different times to pray for spiritual awakening." (From *One Divine Moment*, by Robert Coleman).

What will come out of this 2023 revival remains to be seen. It is notable that it began as an outpouring on the young adults. Also, that it was not limited to one place, but jumped to other schools and locations. Our young people face so many challenges which were unimaginable just 20 years ago. It is a beautiful mercy of God to see him begin his blessing through them.

Considering the spiritual state of our nation and people, we need a revival badly! Please join me in praying earnestly that revival will spread all around our country; also that revival will come specifically to Schuylkill County. Let us hold onto God tenaciously until he grants our petition!!

In Christ's love, Pastor Fisher



Worship & Preaching Schedule March - April, 2023

Sunday Worship: 9:00AM Live & Online

10:45 AM Coffeehouse Worship in Fellowship Hall

Saturday Worship: Live at 6:00 PM

Theme: Ephesians

"Because of Christ love...How shall we live?"

- March 5** 2nd Sunday in Lent
w/ Holy Communion
Ephesians 4: "Fulfilling your Call"
- March 12** 3rd Sunday in Lent
Eph 4: "Living as Children of Light"
- March 19:** 4th Sunday in Lent
Eph. 4: "Instructions for Holy Living"
- March 26:** 5th Sunday in Lent
Eph. 5: "Imitators of God"
- April 2:** Palm Sunday
w/ Holy Communion
Special Program: Youth Sunday
- April 9:** Easter Sunday
6:30 Sunrise Service
9:00 Traditional Worship
10:45 Coffeehouse Worship
- April 16:** 1st Sunday after Easter
Guest Speaker: TBA
- April 23:** 2nd Sunday after Easter
Eph 5: "Help for Marriage and Family"
- April 30:** 3rd Sunday after Easter
Eph. 6: "The Armor of God"



Communion Offerings

- March 5 Pastor's Discretionary Fund
April 2 TBD



Church Prayer Ministry Updates

9 Things to Pray about in March-April 2023

- 1) Pray for both our Spring and Fall Alpha Course outreach initiatives. Please pray for the spiritual explorers and the team members who will be running the course.
- 2) Pray for revival to continually spread among the young people of our country, and that it will come to our own community and spread like fire! Pray for a hunger for the things of God in children, youth, young adults, and all the families of Schuykill county.

- 3) Pray for our community schools and educators, and especially for the Christians among them, that they will have grace and wisdom to teach our community children well. Pray for mercy and protection for the schools and buses.
- 4) Pray for our church, the NCLL legal team, and the UMC and GMC.
- 5) Pray for discernment and unity for our fellowship, including as we seek a new name for the church.
- 6) Pray for our pastor, staff, lay ministry leaders, and our discipleship, mission, and outreach teams; Pray for our small groups, and for the missionaries we support.
- 7) Pray for our government officials, and for those in authority everywhere, that we may live at peace for the sake of the gospel. Pray for the situation in Ukraine, Israel, and other world hotspots.
- 8) Pray for our seniors, home-bound, shut-ins, lonely, and sick.
- 9) Pray for the body of Christ to be built up in God's love and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Weekly prayer team ministry continues.

During the Season of Lent, the weekly prayer meeting has been moved to **Tuesdays at 6:00 pm.**

We continue to recruit prayer teams to pray for one hour a day for one week for the Kingdom of God to come more fully in our church and our community and beyond. You can also pray together in your own homes via video chat or phone call.

Do you have a testimony to share?

Please consider sharing your story as part of our faith-stories series. Contact the office at office@havenfirstumc.org if you want to share.



Lent and Holy Week Schedule

February 22

6:00 p.m. – supper

7:00 p.m. – Worship

Message: "The parable of the Farmer with Seed to Sow" by Mr. Brian Reading

March 1

6:00 p.m. – supper

7:00 p.m. – Worship

Message: "The parable of the Wheat and the Tares/Weeds" by Mr. John Fatora

March 8

6:00 p.m. Supper

7:00 p.m. Worship

Message: "The Parable of the Wedding Feast by
Mr. Dwight Dros

March 15

6:00 p.m. - Supper

7:00 p.m. - Worship

Message: "The parable of the mustard
seed/leaven/yeast and hidden treasure by

Rev. Portia Kuzanga

March 22

6:00 p.m. - Supper

7:00 p.m. - Worship

Message: "The Parable of the Ten Talents"

By Mr. Gary Daum

March 29, 2023

6:00 p.m. - Supper

7:00 p.m. - Worship

Message: "The Parable of the Rich Fool" by
Mr. Doug O'Connell

April 6 - Holy Thursday (*Note earlier supper time*)

5:45 p.m. - Supper

7:00 p.m. - Choir Cantata

8:00 p.m. Prayer Vigil begins...

April 7, 2023 - Prayer Vigil Continues thru 8:00 pm
Good Friday

April 9, 2021 - Easter Sunday

6:30 a.m. - Sunrise Service

9:00 a.m. - Worship

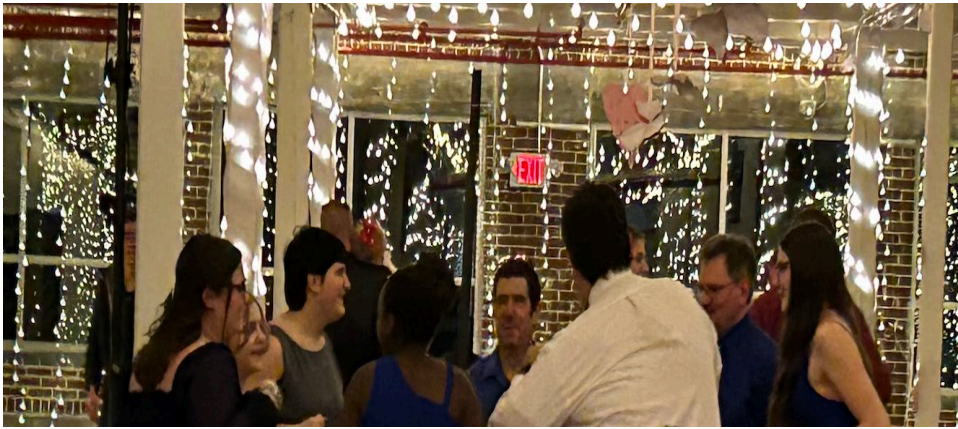
10:45 a.m. - Coffee House Service



IGNITE SENIOR HIGH YOUTH

MARCH TO APRIL 2023 CALENDAR

| | | |
|--------------|--|----------------------|
| March | | |
| 1 | Discipleship Night | Youth Room |
| 5 | Coffee and Fellowship | FUMC fellowship Hall |
| 8 | Discipleship Night (Lent Dinner and worship service) | Youth Room |
| 12 | Coffee Shop | Fellowship Hall |
| 15 | Discipleship Night (Lent worship Service) | Coffee Shop |
| 19 | Coffee and fellowship | Youth Room |
| 22 | Disciple Night | |
| April | | |
| 2 | Youth Sunday Palm Sunday | |
| 5 | Discipleship Night (Lent Worship) | Youth room |
| 9 | Coffee shop open | Coffee shop |
| 12 | Discipleship night | Youth Room |
| 16 | Coffee shop Open | Coffee Shop |
| 19 | Discipleship night | Youth Room |
| 23 | Coffee shop open | Coffee Shop |
| 26 | Discipleship Night | Youth Room |
| 30 | End of month special Activity | |



What a beautiful day it was to have the Father Daughter Dance!

This year's dance was a success and we had 90 pretty girls and handsome fathers attending. The dance floor was crowded with couples dancing and having a great time! The men looked handsome with their ties that the daughters picked out for them to wear, and the girls looked beautiful in their dresses and accessories.



It was such a blessed event to witness as the girls

had a twinkle in their eyes while slow dancing and many smiles were shared during fast dances. Their expressions of love and devotion was truly

memorable.

Our church is truly blessed to have many come out and volunteer their time to help with the various set up tasks to do beforehand along with cleanup. Thank you to all who helped and gave food donations! Thank you for the memories!





connect

Wednesdays in March & April

6:30 – 8:00 PM

Haven Rec Center

Gretna Glen Youth Afternoon

Sunday, March 19

3:00 PM – 8:00ish PM

Bring \$5 for dinner
& dress for the weather

Youth Sunday

April 2 @ 9 AM

Fellowship & Fun

Sunday, April 30

TBD

Be sure to visit:

www.havenignite.org to get
the latest news & events!



IGNITE JR. MEMBERS COLLECTED OVER 200 ITEMS FOR LOCAL FOOD PANTRIES DURING
THEIR SOUPER BOWL TO TACKLE HUNGER FOOD DRIVE. YAY TO GO!



Calling all Youth in Grades 5-8 to join us at the
Schuylkill Haven Recreation Center beginning March 1 from
6:30-8:00 PM as we connect with Jesus, each other and volleyball!



How to Have a Mental Health Check-In with Your Teen & Preteen

Dr. Chinwe Williams

Is your teen or tween behaving *more* differently than usual? I know, this probably seems like a trick question. The emphasis is on the word **more**. For example, has your usually uber responsible fourteen-year-old neglected to take the dog out *again*, forgot two class

assignments in a row, and just failed an exam in his easiest subject? Or has your outgoing, mild-tempered eleven-year-old started to disappear into her room for hours at a time and when she does come out, she is increasingly prone to tearful and aggressive outbursts?

Whether your child is a preteen or a teen, mental health symptoms are widespread around this age. Studies show that mental health and substance use had been rising among adolescents. According to the [CDC](#), 9.4% of children ages 3-17 have been diagnosed with anxiety and 4.4% with depression. In addition, the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) says that one in five teenagers from 13-18 will experience a “severe mental disorder,” as well as 13% of kids from 5-15 years old.

If you are struggling with how to check-in on your child’s mental health, here are some tips to get you started.

Keep an Eye Out on the Warning Signs

- **Changes in school performance.** Your child may be falling behind in school. Even if your child is not a “perfect” student, watch for changes in effort. An occasional poor grade is one thing, but it’s an entirely different matter if your child simply stops trying.
- **Changes in sleep.** Your child may have trouble falling asleep, waking up in the middle of the night, or is sleeping too much. There may be something more going on with them if they prefer to spend most of their days in bed.
- **Intense moodiness.** Your child may spend a lot of time crying or getting very angry. If this type of behavior goes on for at least two weeks, your child could be battling mental or emotional distress.
- **Loss of interest in activities they enjoy.** Teens like to have fun on the weekends with their friends or join clubs or sports to be more social. However, experiencing struggles like anxiety, despair, or depression can make them lose interest in *things and people* they once enjoyed, causing extreme isolation.
- **Changes in appetite or weight.** If your child is hardly eating, or hoarding food, or you see fluctuations in their weight, they could be struggling emotionally and/or with a food-related concern.

Ask Questions

Once you observe signs that your child may be struggling, it's time to ask questions. It may feel awkward at first, but it's better to ask a question imperfectly than not to ask it at all. The key here is to encourage them to open up. One way to create a connection is to share your stuff first. First, start off by sharing how your day went. This will help your child to establish trust that they can come to you. Afterwards, you can ask them if *they* can share something about their day.

Avoid asking open-ended questions like: "Are you okay?" Otherwise, you'll just get an "I'm fine" response.

Instead, ask them questions that involve somewhat lengthy responses like:

- "What's taking up most of your headspace today?"
- "What was your favorite part of your day?"
- "What was difficult about your day?"
- "What load are you carrying that feels particularly heavy today?"
- "When was the last time you hung out with your friends?"
- "When was the last time you went outside and moved your body?"
- "How can I encourage or support you better moving forward?"

This should inspire a dialogue between you two. Offer Validation Instead of Solutions

Depending on how your child responds, as a parent, you may be quick to offer a solution to save your preteen or teen from struggling. However, whatever your child is going through is often too complex to have a simple solution. One of the most productive things you can do when your preteen or teen is struggling emotionally is to listen. Avoid giving advice, making cliché statements, or aggressively coaching them on what to do to get out of the slump. Unless they ask specifically for guidance, it's better to listen to what they have to say with no interruptions or judgments. It's great for your preteen and teen to know that you are listening and taking what they say seriously.

Validate that you understand they are having a tough time and compliment them on their efforts. Remind your preteen or teen that you are always there for them. Validation isn't necessarily agreeing with your child's assessment of their situation. Instead, validation is a communication tool that helps to shore up the parent-teen relationship foundation.

When you have a stable, nurturing relationship with your child, they will feel more comfortable coming to you for help when they are in trouble.

Refer Your Child to Other Sources

Generally speaking, keep whatever your child shares with you in confidence. Be sure to obtain permission before sharing the private details of their struggles with anyone. However, there's a caveat to that. There is one occasion where you will need to share what you've heard. If your child shares something that places *themselves* or *someone else* in danger, seek immediate help from a mental health professional.



Junior Church

Children ages 5-12 are
welcome to join

Pastor Portia for
Junior Church

(singing, dancing, a
children's message &
more!) during the

9:00 AM service on
March 12 & 26



March 5, 12, 19

April 2, 16, 23, 30

10:45

Designed for kids
in PK-4th grade

Please note that
spark! will NOT be
held on Sunday,
March 26

Hey Parents,

As we continue the discussion on living a legacy, "You may feel burdened about the state of today's culture. I find great comfort in the words of the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:11. No matter how maddening the world is, God is still in control. He wants to bless your child with an abundant life and remind you that you are the one He chose to help convey this truth.

What is the key to inheriting this promise? The answer is found in the next two verses in Jeremiah. The key words for you and everyone in your family are all your heart. We find hope when we choose to seek God wholeheartedly.

Satan knows that if he can prevent your child from pursuing a committed relationship with Jesus Christ, he likely has gained a soul. Satan knows the good plans God has for your child, and he schemes to release all hell on earth to keep him from becoming everything God promises.

But Scripture tells us in 1 John 4:4 that "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Although Satan is out to end it all for my kids and yours, we have One on our side who is greater than any lie from Satan. No matter how hard Satan works to deceive, we, too, must work hard to empower our teenagers to understand the errors of this culture.

Your goal isn't to have a perfect child. It is to be a guide toward truth as they navigate an ever-changing world. I want my children to live in obedience to the standards set in Scripture. I want them to know the difference between right and wrong and choose to do what honors God. I want them to become everything God desires for them.

Jesus said in Matthew 22:37 that the greatest commandment is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength" (NCV). Our calling, and our privilege, is to raise children who aspire to love Jesus Christ with every facet of their lives.

Taken from Day 5 of
Raising Successful Teens
by Jeffrey Dean

METHODIST WOMEN MINISTRIES UPCOMING EVENTS



Mar. 11 – We will be serving the **Community Lunch** that day. Ham, green beans and applesauce are on the menu.

We would love any assistance since we will be short some people. Come out and join us. We'll be there at 10 am.

April 11- Tues. 2pm Sing a-long at Green Valley Nursing Home. Meet at church at 1pm to pack goodie bag for residents. Looking for groups or individuals to help us gather items for the bags – chap stick, small packages of tissues, small lotions, etc. Will need approx. 30 of each item. Let Jean know if you can help. Phone- 570-345-5061.



Mother's Day brunch 2023



We are planning a brunch for May 14th after the 10 o'clock service (you heard it here). One service that day. Tickets will be available April 9th- reservation required. Deadline to reserve a seat is April 30th. A \$5 donation is requested at the time of registration. Hope you will join us that day to honor mothers and mothering persons! Help is always welcome.

More information will be coming in March.

Faith Community Nurse's Notes

Brought to you by Ann Moyer RN, FCN

Acts of Kindness

Spring is such a wonderful time of year. The sun lingers in the sky longer, buds appear on the trees with the promise of new life and the beauty of bird song mingles with the morning air. It is the ideal time to refresh our spiritual growth.

We celebrate Easter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the awesome promise of eternal life for all who believe in Him! This salvation not only gives hope for eternity but also hope for today. It is the same hope that Jesus asks believers to share with others.

In order to pass the hope and love of Jesus on to others, we have to each work on our inner selves. Sitting in God's presence, praying, and spending time in God's word help cultivate our spiritual lives. Hebrews 10:22- Let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. - Rejoice in God's unfailing love and mercy. A heart devoted to Christ enables us to give love to others as He has given to us.

Join me in a self-challenge of spreading Christ's love in daily acts of kindness over the Lenten season into Easter. Some ideas for acts of kindness:

- Buy a stranger a cup of coffee or surprise someone you know with one
- Bake something for a neighbor
- Visit a shut in
- Send a note to a loved one
- Make a playlist of songs for someone you care about
- Create a care package for someone in need
- Donate to a food pantry
- Pay for someone's meal at a restaurant
- Help someone with their bags
- Leave positive notes in random places
- Leave treats for the mailperson or delivery drivers
- Read stories to children
- Smile at strangers
- Give a person a compliment and mean it
- Call a family member and tell them you love them
- Leave a love note for your spouse

- Donate clothing and home goods to a charity
- Tell your coworkers how awesome they are
- Bring doughnuts to work
- Offer to babysit for free
- Give someone a Big Hug
- Write a nice comment on a blog post
- Text a friend you haven't spoken to for a while and arrange to catch up
- Let someone go before you in a line
- Send a thank you to a business you frequently use
- Hold the door for someone
- Leave an encouraging note on a coworker's desk

God desires for us to be constantly growing and refreshed in the spirit. What better way to show devotion to Christ than to love and serve others with a giving heart? In doing this, we many times reap joy and blessings beyond measure.

*Be ready to do whatever is good.
Titus 3:1*



Stephen Ministry Update



First Church has an active Stephen Ministry program. You may not be aware of it because it is a very quiet ministry. Stephen Ministry provides confidential support to people experiencing a crisis in their lives. A person is assigned one of our Stephen Ministers who will walk beside them during this time. They meet once a week for an hour. The meetings may be in person or by phone (especially since Covid).

Currently, we have 12 active Stephen Ministers and 6 people being cared for by a Stephen Minister. Since the program began, 24 people have received care and currently we have 6 active relationships. Each of our Stephen Ministers have taken a 50 hour course to prepare them for their ministry.

Stephen Ministry also provides grief support. Stephen Ministry has a series of 4 books in their "Journeying through Grief" series. These books have been extremely beneficial for those experiencing grief. They are sent to people at 3 weeks, 3 months, 6 months and 11 months after the death of a loved one. To date we have sent over 200 completed sets of these books with approximately 20 active series. These books have compassionate and practical advice for someone grieving after the loss of a loved one.

If you have any questions about this ministry, or know of someone who may benefit from our program, please contact one of our Stephen Ministry Leaders - either Lynne O'Connell (570-449-2355) or Nancy Kraft (570-617-4431).

Alpha launches soon...

It's a great opportunity to meet new people and explore faith together in an open, informal environment. **Everyone is welcome!**

INVITE YOUR FRIENDS

Join us for our spring ALPHA launch party on Friday, March 17 beginning at 6:30 P.M. at the Schuylkill Haven Rec Center



Sunday, April 2 * 4:30 PM * Haven Rec Center



SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday, June 3

1:00 - 3:00 PM

Fellowship Hall

*Please reserve your seat by
contacting Barb Brady*

Join us at the ballpark for Father's Day Weekend!



Friday, June 16, 2023

Gates open at 6:00 PM

Game starts at 7:00 PM

Tickets are \$30.00 per person and include:

AYCE Picnic Buffet * Pool Deck * Character Visits * Post-Game Fireworks

Contact Stacey Lehman to order tickets as seats are limited.

Payment is due June 1, 2023.

Jesus: The Model

Today's inspiration comes from

Gather and Give

by Amy Nelson Hannon



If we are called to practice hospitality and to model the life of Christ, then it would be fitting to examine how Jesus used the ministry of hospitality in His own life, right? Consider how many times the Bible tells the story of people encountering Christ at the table, in their homes, or over a shared meal.

In his book *A Meal with Jesus*, Tim Chester lists multiple accounts in the gospel of Luke alone in which Jesus ate with people:

Luke 5: Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners at Levi's house.

Luke 7: Jesus accepted an invitation to eat in the home of Simon the Pharisee.

Luke 9: Jesus fed a crowd of five thousand-plus.

Luke 10: Jesus was welcomed in the home of Mary and Martha for a meal and a stay.

Luke 11: Jesus was reclined at the Pharisee's table when He warned the teachers of the law.

Luke 14: Jesus was at a meal when He said that welcoming the broken results in blessing.

Luke 19: Jesus initiated hospitality by coming to Zacchaeus's house.

Luke 22: Jesus gathered His nearest and dearest around a table for the Last Supper.¹

And that's not all! The woman at the well, the wedding at Cana, plus countless parables, narratives, comparisons, and more are food-focused in the Scriptures. Feasts, the Bread of Life, living water, and I could go on and on!

The array of people Christ engaged in hospitality is broad. What a mixed bag! Becoming the talk of the town, He broke bread with tax collectors and sinners. He hung out with people who were distant from God. He shared meals with people whose bad reputations had spread far and wide. These meals drew the controversial opinions and judgment of some. "How can He dine with people like that?" they would say. "Doesn't He know what kind of woman she is?" they would scoff.

On the other end of the spiritual spectrum, Jesus also gathered around a table with distinguished religious leaders and Pharisees, who were the legal experts of the day. These dinners usually included some heated conversation about the truths of the Kingdom of God and the condition of their hearts. Jesus not only engaged Heaven's outsiders and holy rollers, but He also dined with His disciples and supporters, His nearest and dearest, His friends and companions. He attended weddings, funerals, and banquets. On most occasions, Jesus was on the receiving end of a hospitality invitation, but there are accounts where Christ did, in fact, play the role of dinner host and even chef!

The Bible tells us in Matthew 11:19, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking." Why is that? Because

- Jesus knew there was something significant about what happens around the table.

He knew that a simple act of hospitality created the perfect platform for emotional, relational, and spiritual transactions to take place. For Jesus, the table was a primary platform for ministry, not because He was a

foodie but because He was a people person. And He knew what my grandmother Euna Mae knew — that food was a means to an end, and the end was demonstrating the goodness of God in the lives of others. Breaking bread and sharing the cup allowed Jesus to find common ground with people from all walks of life, from all socioeconomic levels, and from all spiritual conditions.

- Jesus used the intimacy of a shared meal to express truth and grace. He used the ordinary of the table to impart His extraordinary love and care.

It was in this way that Rosaria Butterfield's life was completely changed. Through the faithful, generous hospitality extended to her by neighbors who knew Christ, she came to understand God's great plan for her life. She went on to pen *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* about the Lord's capturing her heart over years of hospitality shown by her believing friends. She considers that hospitality is ground zero for the Christian faith, saying, "Hospitality, biblically speaking, takes strangers and makes them neighbors, and takes neighbors and makes them family of God."² Jesus knew this. He modeled this!

Jesus used the ordinary of the table to impart His extraordinary love and care.

Christ used the most basic, ordinary, daily activity of eating a meal as a primary tool for meeting emotional and spiritual needs. He invited people to gather, feeding and nourishing them. He loved, welcomed, and served. Christ strategically used the ministry of hospitality in all kinds of ways with all kinds of folks to bring about restoration and inspiration. Over the setting of a meal, He evangelized and disciplined, confronted and corrected both the lost and the found. People were not only filled but they were also satisfied. And their lives were never the same.

In Luke 5:27–32, we see Jesus at the table with sinners.

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow Me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed Him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to His disciples, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Levi was a tax collector turned Christ follower. In recent days, Levi had experienced a radical conversion, responding to the call of Christ in his life. So, he left everything behind to follow the great Teacher who had changed everything for him. Levi left behind his position, his title, and his old ways. With a new leader, new values, and a new purpose, Levi had become a new man!

As a sinner on the other side of repentance, Levi wanted to express his newfound love for the Lord Jesus, so he held a banquet to celebrate his new Teacher and the new life he had found in Him! It wasn't just a casual get-together; no, the Bible describes it as a *great* banquet! Having a career as a tax collector would mean that Levi was a man of reasonable fortune, so this gathering would've been a night to remember. It also would imply that not only his new friends in the faith would be attending but also his cronies from his tax-collecting days. You've likely found yourself at a gathering with similarly polar-opposite people.

Can you imagine what this event was like? What did they talk about? Did the guests curb their conversation out of respect for the holy man in their midst? Or did they let loose with topics and tenor that were true to form? Was Levi embarrassed by his old friends in front of his new King? How did Jesus interact with Levi's friends? Did the guest of honor leave early or linger into the night?

We don't know exactly how that evening went down or what took place at Levi's house. Scripture doesn't say. But we do know that Jesus was in the business of using the table as a bridge to build relationships in order to reach the lost. He was known for creating common ground to lead to higher ground. After all, both sinners and rabbis alike have to eat, right?

Although the goings-on at the banquet are not revealed, the purpose of Christ's accepting the invitation to dine with sinners is revealed. In Luke 5:30, the religious elite known as the Pharisees questioned Jesus' followers. In my best southern

mother translation: "For cryin' out loud! Why on earth is He hangin' out with all those heathens? Didn't His Daddy teach Him any better?" **clutches pearls**

Without missing a beat, Jesus declared that He came to call sinners to repentance. To heal them of their sickness — that is, their sin. To offer them the life-changing, course-altering hope that Levi found. To save their souls.

The Pharisees couldn't fathom why Jesus would gather or break bread with people who lived so utterly opposite of what He believed and taught. They assumed that sharing a meal with them was equivalent with accepting and approving of the lifestyles that filled the room. But dear ones, Jesus wasn't approving sin or promoting sin. His proximity came with a purpose. His meals were missional. Christ said He came to seek and save that which was lost. And one of the ways He did that was to break bread, drawing near to those far from God.

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1. Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discover Grace, Community, and Mission Around the Table* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 13.
2. Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* (Crossway, 2018), <https://vimeo.com/262120176>.

Your Turn

Let's remember that we're not endorsing other people's lifestyle choices or beliefs just by hanging out with them. Let's let others clutch their pearls if they must while we hang out with people who need Jesus and shine light into their lives with love. Come share your thoughts. Who are you sitting at the table with? ~ [Laurie McClure, Faith.Full](#)

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The Circuit Writer

March / April 2023

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