

JESUS AT THE TABLE



STUDY GUIDE

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Begin The Journey

Jesus at the Table is a 40 Day journey through the Gospel of Luke all set around a table.

The Gospel of Luke is one of the four Gospels that tell the story of Jesus' ministry. One of the interesting features of Luke's Gospel is that Jesus eats a lot! Many have observed that the teachings of Jesus happen either on his way to a meal, at a meal or just leaving one. In other words - if you like to eat, this is your Gospel!

It does raise the question, "why is the table so important to Jesus?" The table was important to Jesus because it was the place of gathering and social connection. It was where you gathered with your family and your friends to share a meal and tell stories. Much like today, it was also a place that reflected who is "in and out" in the social circle. The table was the hub of family and social gatherings.

Additionally, **the table was a picture of Heaven**. As you will see in the Gospel of Luke, the table mirrors the celebration, abundance and acceptance of Heaven. The table was one of the metaphors Jesus used to give a picture of what Heaven is like.

The table has the same meaning for us today. Sure, you probably haven't gathered around and thought, "this is a picture of Heaven on Earth." But, think about the last time you gathered at a table. Who was there? What did you eat? What did you talk about? Some of our most cherished memories happen around a table where there is laughter, great food, and that feeling of being a family. The table is a sacred place in our homes and in our culture, even in our fast paced, fast food, lifestyle.

Over the next 40 days, we will rediscover the table and the God who invites us to the table. We will grow in our relationship with God and others as we read the scriptures and reflect each day, allow Jesus to refine our character and rediscover the ancient practice of eating at tables.

Why 40 days?

In the Bible, 40 days is a time of preparation, testing and focused attention.

It rained for 40 days and nights (Genesis 7:12)

Moses spent 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18)

Moses prayed for 40 days and nights (Deuteronomy 9:18)

Israelites spies in Canaan for 40 days (Numbers 13:25)

After Elijah fled Jezebel, he traveled for 40 days and nights (1 Kings 19:8)

Jesus was tempted in the desert for 40 days and nights (Matthew 4:2)

There were 40 days between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:3)

How to Use This Study Guide

This Study Guide is the companion to our sermon series, “Jesus at the Table.” Here you will find the scripture readings for each day, a place for reflection, and spiritual practices to help you use this 40 Day journey to grow closer to God and reflect the love of God to the people in your life.

There is a devotional at the beginning of each week and scripture readings for each day. The days are marked out so you can catch up or read ahead. No problem if you get behind! There are “days off” to help you catch up.

The study is designed with readings and reflections for each day to help you develop the practice of reading scripture each day.

There are reflection questions and spiritual practices to help you live the scriptures you are reading.

This study is designed to be used as a personal spiritual practice that is shared in community. So share in your Sunday School or small group sessions. We will also dive deeper into the sermon texts on Wednesday nights.

The most important thing is to make this book your own as a way to set aside the next 40 days as a time of focused growth in your relationship with God.

Preparation

LUKE 4:1-5:26

The desert sets the tone for this story. The ancient Israelites spent 40 years wandering the desert in the Old Testament. Religious tension was high among the Israelites at the time, and there are many reasons for it. As a result, the fledgling nation was unable to put their faith in God's promises made to them through Moses. After reaching the promised land, 12 spies are sent forth to survey their discoveries, but they are unable to proceed with God's plan because they are too afraid of the people who live there. The desert is also a metaphor of solitude outside of the framework of the Old Testament. People in the Bible believed that the desert was inhabited by demons since it was seen as a location outside the bounds of society.

When Jesus is tempted by Satan, we learn about his character and take away a valuable lesson of our own. Jesus demonstrates that he is the true

Israelite, as he is able to withstand the temptations of Satan. He prays to his Heavenly Father in the midst of a dismal circumstance, quoting scripture as he confronts evil in both his divinity and humanity. But that's not all; Jesus also gives us some help to overcome ourselves when we're "roaming the desert."

I don't know about you, but when things get tough in my life, I'm tempted to isolate myself from others. In the face of possible shame, it's difficult for me to overcome my pride. When we're hurt or lost, we have trouble facing life's challenges and, as a result, we find it difficult to face our communities, for fear that no one will care or that we'll become a burden to those around us. Jesus taught us to turn to God for solace and to strengthen ourselves through Scripture when confronted with the 'deserts' of life.

Our bleak circumstances can be transformed into a source of strength as we seek light in the midst of desolation. While being tempted in the wilderness, Jesus was also preparing to go forward into the world through his ministry. You can find comfort in the knowledge that as you strengthen your faith in Scripture, you are preparing for your own ministry, even while you endure temptations, struggle, and isolation.

Know that you're not alone in a tough situation today. No matter what happens, you can trust that God has your best interests at heart. There are times when we need a break from everything to re-energize and prepare for the future via quiet reflection. But if you feel isolated and alone, someone will be waiting for you if you reach out in faith today.

Eat *this* book

LUKE 4:1-5:26

How did Jesus prepare for his ministry?

How can you prepare for what God will do in and through you during the next 40 days?

Week 1

INVITE **LUKE 5:25-32**

Do you ever find yourself saying, “we should grab dinner sometime”? Often, we say it with every intention of connecting with the other person, but we stop short of setting a time and place. That’s the most difficult part! Finding the time that actually works for us and our families - It’s like playing Twister! To be honest, it’s usually easier to leave it with the good intention - Let’s get together sometime.

When we do that, we miss the blessing of connecting with the other person. We miss hearing their story, building a friendship and making a connection that progresses past the superficial. All it takes is making the invitation. The invitation can look something like this, “what does Tuesday look like for you?” It opens the conversation and signals that you want to actually follow through on your good intention.

That’s what Jesus demonstrates in these opening stories. Jesus is beginning his ministry and its a ministry of invitation. Jesus calls his disciples, goes to parties and shows us how to love each other. In each of these stories, Jesus is inviting us into relationships with each other, because relationships are the most important thing in our lives. (Go ahead and read that sentence again.) God created us for relationships. One of the ways we live our faith is to invite people to actually connect. Not just good intentions, but to create stronger connections with the people in our life. When you do this, you become a little more like Jesus.

So, who do you need to invite to coffee, dinner or spend some focused time this week?

faith in practice:

Make a list of 4-5 people or families you would like to get to know better. Now, invite them to coffee, lunch or dinner. It can be at your home or at the restaurant. The point is that we want to make a practice of inviting others into our life.

Eat *this* book

DAY 1: LUKE 5:1-26

☐

Why do you think Jesus called disciples to come and follow him?
What does it mean for you to, "fish for people"?

DAY 2: LUKE 5:27-39

☐

Why do you think Jesus went to a party at Levi's home?
What do you think Jesus talked about at the party?

DAY 3: LUKE 6:1-16

☐

How is Jesus demonstrating the importance of relationships in our life?
Why do you think we see Jesus praying before he chose the disciples?
What important moments in your life can you begin to pray about now?

DAY 4: LUKE 6:17-49

☐

How is this "Sermon on Plain" similar and different than the "Sermon on the Mount"?
What is the most challenging part of the sermon for you?

DAY 5: LUKE 7:1-35

☐

Why was Jesus amazed by the Centurion's faith?
What does Jesus point to when John the Baptist faith is wavering? What do you look to in the moments when you need assurance of your own faith?

Week 2

FORGIVE **LUKE 7:36-50**

Sometimes our feeling of “right” gets in the way of our forgiveness. Jesus tells Peter a short parable about debts and indicates to Peter that people with larger debts will love those who forgive them more than those with smaller debts. Jesus is trying to illustrate to Simon that even those who consider themselves righteous frequently fail to appreciate the enormous generosity of God’s forgiveness.

Despite the fact that John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was a strong proponent of Methodism being a ‘social religion’ (meaning good works matter), he also recognized that salvation is by faith alone. Salvation is a result of trusting in God through Jesus Christ. In other words, being righteous isn’t why God values you. God, simply, loves all people.

The woman in this story understands that Christ is worthy of her adoration.

Her faith propels her from the background of the story into the foreground, despite the fact that she doesn’t say anything in this chapter. She didn’t need a Pharisee’s words to recognize her status; she knew. She needed forgiveness.

Paul makes it clear in Romans that none of us deserve God’s forgiveness. Nevertheless, God’s plan is for everyone to be redeemed. So, forgiveness is all about forgiving those who are unworthy; it is the cornerstone of Christ’s love for you. We should forgive, *always*, even if we feel like we’re “right.” Today, hear the good news: Christ has forgiven you. Your personal ministry to others should include forgiveness, since you have been forgiven. So, pass on the gift of Christ to others, as much as you can, through forgiveness.

faith in practice:

Is there someone that you've found difficult to forgive? Why? Make a list of 3 ways not forgiving is a benefit. (If you can.) Then, make a list of three ways that forgiving is a benefit. Look over those items. What do you see?

Eat *this* book

DAY 6: LUKE 7:36-50

☐

Why did Jesus use a story to demonstrate the importance of forgiveness? Think of a time you wanted to be right instead of forgive. How did you see that moment after the occasion?

DAY 7: LUKE 8:1-25

☐

Who were the people that were supporting Jesus' ministry and why was that important?

What spiritual practices help you be the kind of soil that puts the words of God into practice?

DAY 8: LUKE 8:26-39

☐

Why did Jesus cause the spirits to go into the herd of pigs?

What do you think the man shared about Jesus as he went back to his home?

DAY 9: LUKE 8:40-56

☐

How do you think Jairus felt when the woman stopped Jesus?

What are connections between the Jairus story and the woman's story?

DAY 10: LUKE 9:1-9

☐

Why did Jesus tell his disciples to "travel light"?

How does the work of the disciples contrast to Herod's concerns?

Week 3

GENEROUS LUKE 9:10-17

Have you ever been accused of being “Hangry”? “Hangry” is a combination of “hungry” and “angry” it is that zone when mere hunger passes from irritation to angry emotion to those around you. Popularized by Snickers commercials and studied by psychologist, hangry has entered the modern vocabulary to describe those moments when we are not our best because we are hungry. Honestly, it is difficult to focus when you are hangry. Why? Because when we are hangry, we are focused on ourselves and are less generous with others.

That’s the scene as Jesus is teaching “late into the afternoon.” The disciples are observing that the people are hungry and they are well past when they are learning anything because they are hungry. Jesus has another idea, of course. What follows is a miracle that feeds five thousand (not counting women and children). People are often captivated by the “how” of the miracle.

Where did all the food come from? Did it miraculously appear as people passed it around? Others prefer a more natural explanation - the people were inspired to share their own lunches. However the miracle happened, the point is this - God provides. When people were getting cranky and ready to go their separate ways, God provided.

Think about it in your own life. You probably had a moment when you needed something provided and whether it was a generous gift or you couldn’t quite explain how you made it through. What about the times when you provided for someone else - maybe a word you spoke or a need you met. God provides. God provides through others and through you. How can you be more open and generous with those around you?

faith in practice:

How we share food and welcome people to our table is a picture of generosity. We can all be more generous with our own food, time and resources. What are 2 or 3 ways you can be more generous this week?

Eat *this* book

DAY 11: LUKE 9:10 - 62

☐

What images of generosity do you see in these stories?

Why are we often less generous than we want to be?

DAY 12: LUKE 10:1-42

☐

How does Jesus demonstrate the ways we can be generous with our neighbor?

Are you more of a Mary or Martha? What can we learn from both?

DAY 13: LUKE 11:1-54

☐

How does Jesus teach us to pray?

Why did Jesus pronounce "woe to you" when he addressed the Pharisees and how should that make us consider our own motivations?

DAY 14: LUKE 12:1-5

☐

How does Jesus address our relationship to abundance?

What areas of your life do you find yourself worrying? How does the words of Jesus speak to your own worry?

DAY 15: LUKE 13:1-35

☐

How does our own righteousness keep us from being generous with others?

In what small ways is God working through you to bless others today?

Week 4

HONOR **LUKE 14:1-14**

Do you have places of honor at your table? You probably don't think of it that way, but if you have ever gathered for a Thanksgiving meal and noticed where everyone sits? Most likely, the patriarch or matriarch of the family will sit at the head of the table. If you work in a corporate setting then you have noticed this dynamic when the most senior person in the room sits at the head of the board room table. These are the seats of honor we experience in our culture.

This is a picture of what Jesus is addressing as he gathers for dinner at a prominent Pharisee's home. The story begins with a discussion of who can be healed on the Sabbath. While the Pharisee's are speechless, Jesus notices that everyone wants the places of honor. They want to feel important and special. Jesus makes

an observation that almost sounds like good advice rather than a spiritual principle but it has profound meaning - we all want to feel special.

What Jesus is saying is that, if we want to be special - to be honored by others - make other people special. Exalt other people rather than seek to be exalted. This can be challenging, particularly in a culture that seeks promotion rather than humility. Being noticed and exalted oneself is often considered a necessity. Yet, Jesus flips this around and invites us to honor others. Perhaps, to speak to our objections, Jesus tells us that when we honor others, we will find the honor we are all hoping for.

faith in practice:

How can you let the people in your life know that you love and appreciate them? Start with your family then pray about friends and acquaintances that you can honor and encourage. It can be a kind word, text message or note. Maybe even a special gift or sign of appreciation.

Eat *this* book

DAY 16: LUKE 14:15-24

☐

Why do you think Jesus used a parable about a great banquet to illustrate the Kingdom of God?

Who are you hoping will accept the invitation to come to Jesus' table? Pray for them.

DAY 17: LUKE 14:25-35

☐

Why is Jesus explaining the cost of being a disciple?

How does that challenge or inspire you to intentionally live your faith this week?

DAY 18: LUKE 15:1-32

☐

Why did Jesus tell these three parables?

Which character do you relate to the most in these three parables?

DAY 19: LUKE 16:1-18

☐

What does it mean to be shrewd and why would Jesus tell a story with this character trait?

How might this parable teach us about how we should live in light of the gifts and blessings we have been entrusted by God?

DAY 20: LUKE 19-31

☐

Why do you think Jesus told this parable?

How important to God and to us is it that we see the people around us?

Week 5

RECEIVE **LUKE 15:11-32**

Have you ever thought, “if I just had x, then my life would be perfect and complete”? The younger son of this story believes that if he just had his inheritance, then everything would be perfect. His lack of caution and lack of foresight ultimately led him to waste what he had received. That’s what can happen when we feel like we deserve something. Often, that thing we feel entitled to can consume us and we become shortsighted and waste days of our lives pining after our desires. As we are consumed by entitlement, our lives are, sometimes, run aground by our focus on the present.

Seemingly everyone wants what they feel they deserve. If we work hard, we might expect a raise and loyalty from our employer. If we do a good deed, we might expect praise. This younger son in this story expects his inheritance

and he feels like he’s entitled to it. After receiving his share of his father’s wealth, he squanders it with a life of profligacy. He decides to go back to his father with the hopes that his father will make him one of his servants. There, he is greeted by his father who is ready and waiting for his return.

The younger son’s entitlement is met with the generosity of the Father. The younger son learns that what he really needed was with him all along, and was scanning the horizon, waiting for his return. You see, often what we want is not what we truly need. How do we distinguish what we want and what we need? Once we learn to receive, not demand, we can truly experience the blessings that God is giving to us each and every day. Only love can change our hearts and make us complete.

faith in practice:

Think of a time when you didn't get what you felt you deserved? Is there something in your life today that you feel like you deserve? If so, take some time to ask yourself: what really matters to me? Is this a need, or a want? How can I approach disappointment if I don't receive it?

Eat *this* book

DAY 21: LUKE 17:1-10

☐

What do you think is the most challenging observation that Jesus makes in this passage?

How much faith do we need to have and why is that important?

DAY 22: LUKE 17:11-19

☐

Why did only one come back to thank Jesus?

What additional blessing did the person receive?

DAY 23: LUKE 17:20-37

☐

What warning is Jesus giving in this story?

Who is Jesus talking to in the story and why is that important?

DAY 24: LUKE 18:1-8

☐

Why did Jesus tell this parable?

How does this influence how you pray?

DAY 25: LUKE 18:9-17

☐

Why did the Pharisee compare himself to the person next to him?

How does humility open us to receive the blessings from God?

Week 6

SEE LUKE 16:19-31

Well over half the population in the United States need corrective lenses to see and most of those people have a condition called myopia, which is commonly known as “nearsightedness.” Most of us can see objects and people that are close to us, but the further away things are, the less we see them. Depending on how nearsighted, we may not see much of what is near us.

Many of us suffer from spiritual myopia. We may see what is close to us, but we miss the world and the people that are not too far from us. Things get blurry the more distant they are from us. This is especially true of the people in our life. We may interact casually or not at all, then it becomes easy to not actually see the people around us.

That is what Jesus is communicating in this story of the Rich Man and

Lazarus. The Rich Man has everything he needs, yet he suffers from spiritual myopia. The Rich Man sees Lazarus at Abraham’s side, yet the Rich Man still doesn’t see Lazarus as a person. He just wants Lazarus to do his bidding - get him water or go warn his brothers. Jesus is warning all of us to put on our glasses and see the world and the people around us.

Who do you see around you? That’s why the table is so important to us. While you won’t invite everyone to your table (I mean, you could!) - the table is a great way to sit, eat and actually see the people in your life. You get to hear their story, understand how they see the world, and know them as a human being, even for just a few moments. It’s a way for you to correct your vision and see the people all around you.

faith in practice:

Think of the people that you have noticed that are different from you and invite them to visit for a few minutes. Prayerfully reach out to invite, to share, then listen and see from their eyes.

Eat *this* book

DAY 26: LUKE 18:18-43

☐

How does the Persistent Widow parable invite you to pray differently this week?

What is Jesus teaching you about what is most important to you?

DAY 27: LUKE 19:1-27

☐

What might you learn from Zacchaeus and his persistence in trying to see Jesus?

What do you think God has entrusted to you?

DAY 28: LUKE 19:28-48

☐

How is Jesus' entry into Jerusalem a moment where we see the heart of God?

What is important to Jesus in the first moments when he comes into Jerusalem?

DAY 29: LUKE 20:1-47

☐

How does Jesus answer the questions that are asked by the Pharisees? Which conversation most speaks to you and why?

DAY 30: LUKE 21:1-38

☐

What is Jesus teaching about generosity as he observed the poor widow? How is Jesus speaking to what we should value most in this life?

Week 7

SERVE LUKE 22:7-23

Have you ever considered who Jesus was serving at the Last Supper, who was present at the table? Certainly, the faithful were there, but so was a betrayer, so was a coward (Peter), and so was a doubter (Thomas). Jesus knew that Peter would cower when asked if he associated with him. Yet, Jesus didn't call him a coward, he called him a rock. (Matt. 16:18) When Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection, he doesn't chew Thomas out for doubting, in fact, the first thing he says is "Peace be with you." And when Jesus knows that Judas will betray him, not only is Judas present at the Last Supper, but Jesus also washes his feet. In short, Jesus served everyone and he served expecting nothing in return.

Do you think it is challenging to serve people and expect nothing in return? Of course, but it doesn't feel that simple

when we are confronted with a difficult situation. When we serve others, we can often be caught up in their response, or rather, in our expectation. Sometimes we allow our expectations to ruin the experience. We don't need to search to validate why those we serve were ungrateful, we don't need to give up entirely when things don't go as expected, and we don't need to beat ourselves up if we feel like our service is not enough. Just serve.

Serve remembering these words: 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' (Matt. 25:40b) All people are under the providence and care of God; God loves every one of us. Let our love for others, then, be relentless. It doesn't feel nice to be unappreciated, but rest assured, God appreciates all the good that we do.

faith in practice:

Think of 2-4 people that you can serve
with gift, free of expectations.

Eat *this* book

DAY 31: LUKE 22:7-23

☐

What do you think the disciples thought of this meal as they were sharing it with Jesus?

What similarities or differences do you see in how we celebrate Holy Communion?

DAY 32: LUKE 22:39-71

☐

What did Jesus ask his disciples to do for him and why?

What do you think of this moment as Jesus wrestles with the will of God?
How do you relate to this struggle in your own life?

DAY 33: LUKE 23:1-25

☐

Why do you think Jesus did not answer Herod?

Why do you think the crowd chose Barabbas instead of Jesus?

DAY 34: LUKE 23:26-43

☐

Why do you think they mocked Jesus?

What final words did Jesus offer on the cross and which speak to you?

DAY 35: LUKE 23:44-49

☐

What does the death of Jesus mean to you?

Why do you think a Centurion (Roman soldier) was able to see Jesus for who he is?

Week 8

DISCOVER LUKE 24:13-35

Have you ever been around someone who seemed easy to talk to? While some people are genuinely easy to talk to, all of us can become better at taking an interest in the people around us by asking questions. If you think about it, most people are very open to talk when a person is taking an interest in them. Generally, we listen for a time to jump into a conversation to share our opinion, but what if we listened and asked questions instead?

That's what Jesus does in this resurrection story. It plays like a movie as we see Jesus joining these traveling companions, yet they do not know it's him. As Jesus walks with them, he asks them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" Jesus listens as they talk about him! They still don't recognize him until he breaks the bread and their eyes are opened.

That's the power of relationships and the power of the table. Jesus has used the table to ground the humanity of God, who lived among them. Jesus has taught his disciples that everyone matters and how to love by inviting people to come and sit at the table with him. In this resurrection moment, it all comes together for these travelers when he breaks bread with him.

What is God leading you to discover about faith, life, other people and who needs to come to your table. Our lives are a journey in which Jesus comes alongside in our everyday life and helps us to discover the people and blessings that are in our lives. Focus this last week to discover the presence of God in the people around you, at your table, and in your conversations.

faith in practice:

Keep a running list of the blessings you discover each day. It could be the beauty of a sunrise or the lyrics of a song. It could be a conversation or the thought from a scripture reading. Notice and discover the God who is always present with you.

Eat *this* book

DAY 36: LUKE 23:50-56

☐

Why do you think Joseph wanted to provide Jesus with a proper burial?

How do you think Joseph and the women were feeling at this time?

DAY 37: LUKE 24:1-12

☐

What is the significance of the women discovering the empty tomb?

What would it have been like to see the strips of linen and not know what had happened to Jesus?

DAY 38: LUKE 24:13-35

☐

What do you find extraordinary about this story?

Why do you think the travelers invited Jesus to stay and eat with them?

DAY 39: LUKE 24:36-49

☐

How would you react if you saw Jesus standing with you?

Why did Jesus greet them with, "Peace be with you"?

DAY 40: LUKE 24:50-53

☐

What do you think Jesus said as a blessing to his disciples?

Imagine you are one of the disciples that was there that day.

What kind of joy would you experience as you "continue to worship in the Temple"?

