

Week 3: Invitation to Your Table

Inviting someone to our table requires us to take initiative. We must extend invitation for someone to come. The act of inviting is typically preceded with intentional thought, “Whom should I invite?”

Seeking Jesus for direction is always the right answer. We can trust when the Holy Spirit causes us to notice someone, gives us compassion for someone, or stirs our spirit about someone, that we have a starting point. But we don’t want to get stuck by over thinking or over spiritualizing our trying. We can be practical in determining whom to invite to a place at our table.

We are frequently attracted to like-minded people or people in similar stages of life who share in our current circumstances or interests. While there is nothing wrong with this, it is not the full picture of the Kingdom of God. Even scripture comparing us to different parts of the physical body imply we need “other parts” to function best. Diversity in the Kingdom of God can be a picture of health and a source of wealth to us. The natural tendency to look for who might be the most likely match, is only one way we should consider invitation.

Jesus reminds us in Luke 10 what it means to be a neighbor.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” Luke 10:25-37

When the expert in the law first answers Jesus he quotes out of the Old Testament, specifically Lev 19:18 with “*love your neighbor as yourself.*” The word “neighbor” used there in Hebrew denotes a reciprocal relationship, whether a friend, companion, fellow, or another person. There is something you share in together; in the weakest sense it could be just a shared conversation. This idea that a neighbor is someone we reciprocate with differentiates from a stranger.

A neighbor could be a friend. A neighbor could also be someone who lives nearby and our only shared bond is our value for the area or region, but that is reason enough for us to reciprocate in some way.

It would've been expected that a Jew would look out for his countryman, especially a Levite and priest. In this story though, neither the Levite nor priest receive the title as neighbor. What they shared in was not enough.

If we peel back this word “neighbor” in Hebrew, we find that the root of the word actually means to tend or to feed (a flock). A neighbor is someone we have a reciprocal relationship with because of our willingness to tend to them.

The most unlikely and even offensive character, the Samaritan, proves to be the neighbor. The Samaritan tends to the injured man. He shares in his pain and cares for him.

It is the act of tending to someone that makes us a neighbor to them. Jesus challenges the expert in the law to be a neighbor.

Inviting someone to a place at our table is more than an act of kindness to a stranger (which God also calls on us to do), it is the choice to be a neighbor and to tend to them even if in the smallest of ways.

When considering whom to invite to our table, is it possible another starting question could be “whom can I tend to?”

1. If we start with the question “whom can I tend to?” how does that effect our position going into the time together?	2. What are ways we can tend to people?
3. How does the question “whom can I tend to?” change who ends up at our table?	4. Tending to one another can look like being pulled into one another’s lives. What are the fears or cautions that come with that?

Practical Convo: As an act of tending to your guest, would you feel comfortable praying over each person given a place at your table (whether during your prayer for the meal or before the guest leaves)?