

Bethany Community Church

BC PRESENTS:

RECLAIM
THE TABLE
RESTORING **HOPE** IN EVERY HOME

TABLE TALKS

The following are short Bible discussion starters for during or after mealtime with family or friends. Scan the “Table Talks” available and pick out the one that you think it best for your group. The first 4 “Table Talks” have a bonus assignment, which is short video that illustrates the “Table Talk.”

These devotionals get a little more difficult to grasp the further down the list you go. Any of them could be used for younger people or those who are less Biblically knowledgeable, but you may want to reword them a bit. Consider who is at the table, and tailor the conversation to their understanding.

1. CHRIST IS STILL IN THE FIERY FURNACE

He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” Daniel 3:25 (NIV)

I assume the three Hebrew men were aware of the presence of Christ in the furnace, but one thing we know for sure is that King Nebuchadnezzar was aware of Christ's presence. This makes the point that when we live openly and honestly before others, they can see Christ in our lives during our hardest times. We don't have to hide our trials and tribulations. We don't have to keep our losses and hurts a secret. Because Christ is in our "Fiery Furnace," we don't ever have to despair, and we should NEVER give up. May we be unbound and unburned in the furnaces of suffering, criticism and rejection.

- *Re-tell the story of the 3 Hebrew men and the fiery furnace.*
- *In your experience, does God also sometimes leave us in uncomfortable circumstances?*
- *Are you able to appreciate Christ's presence in life's fiery furnaces? Explain.*
- *How does Christ show Himself to others through our difficulties?*

Bonus Assignment: Watch the amazing testimony of Ann, about how her husband Stan, along with their children Elle and Stanley, dramatically showed Christ to a city of Muslims in Turkey through Stan's public battle with cancer. - http://agtv.ag.org/chapel_82013

2. FULL LIFE OR A FULFILLED LIFE?

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” John 4:31-32 (NIV)

Most of us spend a lot of time trying to fill our senses with experiences and our space with stuff. True, the trips and the stuff we buy can bring a lot of pleasure and certainly aren't evil, but how many trips to Disney will it take to have a happy family? How many more gadgets will we need to finally be amazed and organized? How many more places do we need to run to for another fine dining experience? How many more concerts must we attend to be entertained? While there is a lot of good to be said about all of that stuff, is it possible that we have a full life, but might be missing out on a fulfilling life?

Jesus spent a day sharing his love and wisdom with a lonely Samaritan woman while his disciples went searching for food. When Christ's disciples asked if He had eaten, he referred to his day of ministry as “food that you know nothing about.” In other words, doing good for another filled him up in a way that food couldn't.

By the way, it can be a positive thing to share fun experiences with our family and friends, but Christ reveals that the secret to deeper fulfillment is to empty myself on behalf of God and others. The key to significance is not self-will but HIS will. J-esus, O-thers, Y-our; what a wonderful way to spell J-O-Y.

- *Is it possible we could be happy with less stuff, less busyness, less involvements?*
- *Is always being on the run really the best way to make a difference in the lives of others?*
- *When is the last time you spent a few hours just talking to another human being?*
- *Have you ever spent a whole day serving someone else? How did that feel?*
- *What person or cause in your life right now could represent, “the woman at the well?”*
- *Bob Goff says, “Every Thursday I quit something.” What do we need to quit that matters less, so we can be available to do what matters more?*
- *What would you be willing to give up in order to serve a person or a cause?*

Bonus Assignment: Watch the video, “How to be secretly incredible” and hear the story of how Bob Goff responded to 9/11 by having his children write a letter to all world leaders, asking them what they hoped for and asking if they would come for a sleepover. You won't believe what happened. - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Bb7vJINYFc>

3. THE GREATEST PRAYER EVER PRAYED.

“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ (Matthew 6:9-10, 12-13 NIV)

The famous “Lords Prayer” tells us eight amazing things. These eight parts of the greatest prayer ever prayed will give us the greatest life possible. You see, the “Lord’s Prayer” is about knowing who God is in relationship to you, and who you are in relationship to God. The “Lord’s Prayer” isn’t just a bunch of magic words, but it’s the story of our lives with God and Jesus Christ. The “Lord’s Prayer” means that God is on my side, and I am on His side; it’s the greatest prayer ever prayed. It teaches ...

1. I am a child, and God is my father.
2. I am a worshipper of God.
3. I am an enthusiastic citizen of God’s kingdom.
4. I am committed to see God’s will done on earth NOW!
5. I have sinned against others; God please forgive me.
6. Others have sinned against me; God, I forgive them.
7. I might still want things that aren’t best for me; please don’t let me have them.
8. I am helpless without you Lord; but with your help, my adversary won’t win.

- *How does it feel to be God’s child?*
- *What kind of things do you ask God because you know He’s your father?*
- *Which of the eight points of the “Lord’s Prayer” stands out to you at this time?*
- *Are you struggling with any of the eight points of the Lord’s Prayer right now?*

Bonus Assignment: A teaching on prayer with Francis Chan. (The Title, “Stop Praying” is a bit misleading.)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAdilvLxBQA>

4. LOVE-ABILITY

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:11 NIV)

We tend to search our world trying to find lovable people. Being a love-ability detective is fraught with frustration. Being a love-ability detective makes us critical and hypersensitive. Being a love-ability detective means we are always getting disappointed. Invariably, we find that those who we thought were worthy of our affection are flawed in some way we find intolerable.

I have a suggestion: Stop being a love-ability detective, and start loving people just because God loves you. God’s love never changes. I know it sounds incredible, but you don’t need any other reason to be nice to people than that God is nice to you. Sure, we believe God’s going to judge the world someday, but you are not God, and he doesn’t need your help in that department.

- *What do you think of this statement, “We don’t have to agree on anything to be kind to one another”?*
- *List as many benefits as you can of giving others unconditional love.*
- *Why do we naturally find loving others the way God loved us so difficult?*
- *What can we say to ourselves to help us get better at loving others?*

Bonus Assignment: Watch Bob Goff tell this crazy story of a guy named Randy, who just loved him and wanted to be with him as a high school dropout. I don’t recommend you do exactly what Randy did, but I do hope we all learn the lesson of really loving people.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pllgoc4TGel>

5. WHEN OUR HEROES LET US DOWN

In the morning, David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, “Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.” 2 Samuel 11:14-15 (NIV)

This text makes me sick to my stomach. It is so disturbing to read that David could be such a slime bucket, such a jerk, and such a self-serving tyrant. This is the same man who wrote all those beautiful praises to God; the same man who trusted God so completely; the same man who felt guilty for just cutting a slice of cloth from a sleeping Saul's robe. This man is one of my favorite Bible characters; one of my heroes whose example and words have gotten me through many tough spots. Now I find him acting like a creep; engaging in sexual sin, acting deceptively then staying on the slippery slope of sin till it brought him to the unthinkable act of sacrificing another man's life.

So, what are the lessons of this hero's moral failure? That the Bible is a trustworthy and honest book? That we all have a dark place and the ability to do unthinkable things? That we should not put anyone on such a pedestal that we don't pray for them and watch out for them? That we all better guard against unaccountable moments of moral insanity? That no matter how important we are, our sin will visit us with painful consequences? That no matter how low we go, God's grace can find us and bring us back to Him? I say the story of David's failure teaches us all of the above. Let us be thankful that God doesn't cover up the failures of the heroes of the faith. As painful as this story is, we need it.

- *How do you feel about God leaving this horrible story in the Bible?*
- *Which one of the lessons to learn from the story of David's failure stands out to you?*
- *Have you ever had a hero let you down? How did you feel about it?*
- *Who looks up to you? What are you doing to care about them?*

6. PLEASING PEOPLE

“To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.” Luke 7:31-32 (NIV)

Serving people is one thing, trying to perform for them is another. Jesus expresses the frustration that in life, where trends and fads are decided, we can never hope to stay on top for more than a few minutes. Contrast that with loving and serving God; with living life for an audience of one. The simplest (not always the easiest) thing in the world is to know where you stand with God and to win His approval. “My burden is light.” Note to self: Sing and dance for the approval of God, and you will be constantly affirmed. The crowd out there in the world around you will wear you out.

- Ever feel like the world is constantly screaming at us about how we are supposed to look, what we are supposed to wear, what music we must like and what life we must live? Explain your answer?
- Is it wrong to care about style? When is caring about what society tells us to care about just too much?
- What would happen if we all decided that pleasing God was going to be the most important thing in our lives? How awesome would that be?

7. GOD'S MERCY VS. MY RIGHTS

“Lord, hear my prayer; listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief.” (Psalm 143:1 NIV)

When pressure and trouble come from that which we seek relief, it is normal to cry for justice. By the way, it is appropriate to ask God for justice, but does that mean we actually deserve God serving us that way? The cry for mercy indicates that we understand we are sinners deserving of wrath, but understanding His grace. The cry for mercy points to the fact that we believe in a loving God who is ready to show us something other than what we deserve.

The man or woman who cries mercy is in a posture of gratitude and worship. When the relief comes, the mercy plea turns into “Thank you,” instead of, “It’s about time you showed up,” or worse, “Why did you allow me to go through that?” The mercy perspective keeps us flexible, gentle and cheerful. The mercy perspective protects our hearts from the cancers of rage and bitterness.

- *How does asking for mercy differ from demanding our rights?*
- *Compare James 4:6 with Psalms 143:1?*
- *Why is humility so important to God? After all, hasn’t God made us worthy of all His blessings?*
- *What is it like be in a family or circle of friends when everybody is being humble? What about the opposite?*
- *How could the world be a better place if we had more humble people?*
- *Are we willing to be humble, even if others are not? What are the risks? Is God big enough to take care of us?*

8. SHAMELESS AUDACITY

***“But this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!”
Luke 18:5 (NLT)***

“I tell you; even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.” (Luke 11:8 NIV)

If you boldly ask God for a thousand things there are probably a hundred of those things that you won’t receive for various reasons, but 900 requests granted is going to give you a pretty amazing life. We don’t ask for enough.

- How does it feel to be turned down for something you really want?
- Can you recall a time in your life when persistence paid off?
- How might our lives change if we made more big, bold requests of God?
- What great big, wonderful, bold thing do we need to be asking God for right now?

9. HOW TO HAVE REALLY ASTONISHING RESULTS

“They were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken.” (Luke 5:4-10)

Telling someone to obey can seem like an insult. It’s natural to believe that anyone who expects obedience, especially instant obedience, doesn’t love or respect us. The disciples might have even thought that, when Jesus asked them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat after they had fished all night, he was being insensitive to how tired they were. The disciples may have also felt their intelligence was insulted; after all, what does a carpenter’s son know about fishing?

The disciples did something amazing that gave them astonishing results; they quickly obeyed. My experience is that sometimes I am able to think about what the Lord is directing me to do. At other times, I need to move almost instantly. I am convinced we would see a lot more unbelievable things happen if we would be willing to instantly obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Let us consider getting ourselves into a place in our thinking where we would instantly obey when Jesus calls us.

- *Do you remember a time when you just, without thinking, did something you thought Christ wanted you to do? What was that like?*
- *What would happen if you did that more often?*
- *Is there anything scary, silly or daring that you feel like God wants you to do right now?*
- *Are you going to do it?*

10. NEWS FLASH: GOD LOVES YOU LIKE HE LOVES JESUS

***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
(John 3:16)***

The most powerful being in the universe looks at you and his only son with equal desire. It’s as though God said to Jesus, “Go do whatever you have to do to bring your siblings home to me, so we can be a family again.”

- How does it make you feel to imagine God desiring you as much as He desires His son Jesus?
- How does such love fill us with hope?
- What responsibilities does such amazing love leave us with? Explain?
- Tell about the time that you decided to begin living as God’s child?

11. ARE YOU A SLOGGER OR A SPRING MAKER?

Slog = “To walk or plod heavily.”

Spring Making = Digging down until a refreshing spring of water is discovered and comes to the surface.

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.” Psalm 84:5-6 (NIV)

This passage has meant so much to me through the years. Face it, there are life events that are no fun. There are at least two ideas in this passage that provide wise instruction for such times. #1. “Set your heart on pilgrimage, and #2. “Make it a place of springs.”

1. Set your heart on pilgrimage.

Many of us have destination disease. We want to build a permanent home in the place of prosperity, but life is about “passage,” not permanence; life is about seasons, not about staying in a desirable set of conditions. This is because our ultimate destination is the Kingdom of God. We must embrace the journey, the travel, the pilgrimage and the ADVENTURE. Stop putting your hope in places, and start putting your hope in HIM. Some of us are driving ourselves to insanity looking for the right place to be in life, not realizing that all places change before our eyes. Jesus Christ is the WAY not the PLACE!

2. Make it a place of springs.

How do we “make it a place of springs?” The way you make the “valley” a “place of springs,” is to dig down. This is hard work, this is intense, and this has to be intentional. Dig down for insight, wisdom, divine presence, faith, hope and love. Spring-making is not a casual activity, it is laborious and difficult; it takes guts to determine that a valley of stress, pain and disappointment will become a valley of springs. Springs don’t come from the surface, but from deep within the earth; much deeper than the average person wants to go. Most people would rather medicate their pain than dig down for a deep discovery of wisdom, beauty and grace.

In the words of the great Gordon Jensen song, “Leave a well in the valley, your dark and lonely valley, for others have to walk that valley too. What a blessing when they find the well of joy you’ve left behind. Leave a well in the valley you go through.”

- Whose story of overcoming difficulties really inspires you? Why?
- Okay, what is a pilgrimage, and why do you suppose God wants us to set our hearts on one?
- What does it look and feel like when you slog through a difficult day?

12. A BAD CHAPTER IN AN AMAZING LIFE

“So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself.” 2 Samuel 16:13-14 (NIV)

Would we say King David had a successful life? Of course we would, but successful lives have bad days, and great stories have horrible chapters. A bad time doesn't mean a bad life. We MUST NOT quit in the middle of a crazy or dark chapter, because books have many chapters. We must not quit just because we have a bad day, a bad week, a bad year or even a difficult few years. If we give up, we will interrupt the great story that God is writing, which is our lives.

Really good stories have struggles. Really great movies have a lot of moments when you don't think the hero is going to even live, much less succeed. Do you want your life to be a great story that has meaning and purpose? Then pay attention to 2 Samuel 16, and see how King David gave himself courage when nobody else did.

- *Is it reasonable to expect every chapter of our life story to feel awesome?*
- *Who has gone through something difficult lately? Who is going through something hard right now?*
- *How can our reaction to difficult things make matters worse?*
- *How can our reaction to difficult things make it easier to move on and be the winner you were intended to be?*

13. REASON OR REVELATION.

“Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies.” Psalm 119:98)

The French Enlightenment did a tragic thing to our philosophy of education and has proceeded to shape the philosophy of higher learning for Europe and the entire Western world. The “Enlightenment” deified human reasoning and therefore made the ability to think one’s way to conclusions the summit of human development. “I think, therefore I am” became the motto of modern man. “Self Realization” became the goal of education, not divine revelation. God’s instruction is now viewed as archaic remnants from less evolved humans, when in truth, it is still the summit of wisdom, because it is not dependent on flawed human reasoning, but on an all-wise and all-loving deity who is trying to save us from ourselves. “Oh taste and see that the Lord is good.” We humans are continually thinking our way to wrong conclusions. That doesn’t mean we should stop reasoning, but our thoughts just don’t contain ultimate truth. Why? Because God has all the information; we do not.

I feel like I am spitting in the wind and like the adult in Charlie Brown’s voice going Wa Waa Waa Waaa. Secularists can’t hear me, because they associate me with a political “Religious Right,” who they feel want to take them back to the dark ages, where religion is fused with government, to keep society ignorant. Many Christians can’t hear me because “commandment loving,” sounds anti-grace. For the record, I have never said that any of us will ever perfectly keep all of God’s commandments or that we can be good enough to get into heaven. All I am simply contending is that God knows best, and the Bible is the revelation of God’s superior knowledge. The command to love and be loyal to Christ is the ultimate command of God, but we don’t find Christ without God revealing Him to us.

I have come to doubt that I can convince those of you who are truly committed to humanism. I am no longer optimistic that I can persuade a majority who reside in the “City of Man” to move to the “City of God.” Perhaps I can encourage those of you who feel alone, as I sometimes do, in a world that not only thinks we’re crazy, but also thinks we’re out to hurt them. Don’t undervalue your role as a “prophet.” Be willing to love those who will totally misunderstand your love. Don’t be a hater, even if they call you one. Don’t be that angry person who is always publicly calling everybody out. Be steady and sweet. Be willing to be light and salt in a dark and decaying place. In the end, God’s revelation will prevail over human reasoning. In the end, the world will know that this all-wise Biblical God really loved them.

- What do you know about the French Enlightenment?
- How can the ability to think for oneself and reason be a good thing?
- How can the ability to think for oneself and reason lead us astray?
- Do you believe that God has more knowledge, wisdom, love and power than humans do?
- Does your conclusion cause you to trust God more or less?

Additional Resources Recommended:

Once-A-Day At the Table Family Devotional: 365 Daily Readings and Conversation Starters for Your Family

Available at Amazon in paperback or kindle.

http://www.amazon.com/Once---Day-Table-Family-Devotional/dp/0310419174/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1433512591&sr=8-1&keywords=once+a+day+at+the+table+family+devotional

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