

FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER  
WHEN SETTING YOUR OWN

# welcome table



THE WELCOME TABLE



# introduction

## GATHERING TOGETHER IS A TRUE LABOR OF LOVE!

Sometimes it takes extra effort, but mostly it is a natural and smooth process coming from a need to be in touch with others. Both for the host and the guest, the act of gathering with others taps into the deep desire of all people to be seen and known, to be fully-loved, and to find a place of belonging.

We long for connection and community; we long to be known and to know others. Somewhere deep within us, we know that we each shine brighter when hanging together than any of us would on our own. We just plain need each other!

We are certainly learning this in our larger world, in our communities, in our neighborhoods, our schools, and our churches. In these times of change, in times of difficulty, in times of grief, we are learning better who we are and who we can be through the experiences and stories of those around us.

And though we know all these things to be true, we also know it can be difficult to know how

to best navigate those spaces where our differences can create barriers to community and connection. So, we wanted to share with you

### *Five Things to Remember When Setting Your Own Welcome Table,*

a resource designed to guide you in setting a welcoming space before your guests even arrive.

This eBook suggests five main ideas for creating your own Welcome Table. Each idea is accompanied by practical suggestions to bring more welcome into your home, along with a blessing that you can use in your gathering if you choose!

After all, each opportunity we are given to gather together is a gift. It is a time to examine and open our hearts, a time to see ourselves fully and honestly, and a time to let go of that which keeps us from knowing more intimately ourselves and one another.



# WE ARE EACH CALLED

# beloved

## PREPARING THE SPACE: Create a space where each guest feels important.

One way to do this is by speaking your guests' names to them and to others. Using someone's name is one way of communicating that you see and care deeply about this person - and when this is practiced in a community, it creates a shared sense of significance among everyone.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

*The man said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.'*

**Genesis 32**

Names are significant!

The act of naming a child is different family to family. There are so many naming traditions from cultures and communities around the world. Children are named for relatives as a way of carrying on a legacy. Children are gifted names that are intended to guide the development, path, and personality of that life. Children are blessed



with names that reflect how or when a child was born into the world.

When we meet Jacob in this story, he is on the run from his trickster past, and yet, when he meets God in a full-on, middle-of-the-night wrestling match - what God asks of him is his name.



The story of Jacob is a story of redemption that is first and foremost a story of God's deep love for us exactly as we are. God did not ask Jacob to reveal all his mistakes or to confess all his trickster ways - God simply asked Jacob his name.

This story does not let us forget that we are never outside the reach of God's extravagant love. This story simply asks us to remember our name - whatever else we might be wrestling with in life - our past, our culture, our addictions, our failures. It begs us to know more fully our connection to the God story happening all the time around us, within us, and through us - in soul and body and name.

### TAKING IT TO THE TABLE!

- Have place settings with each person's name written by hand.
- If you are creating a gathering where many of your guests are meeting for the first time, have name tags that folks can write on and wear. Maybe encourage them to include a fun fact about themselves along with their name.

- Have extra place settings (or name tags) for any new or unexpected guests to let them know this space has already been prepared with them in mind!
- Be sure to greet each person as they arrive. If you know there are folks who do not already know each other, make a point of connecting them to each other by name.
- If you'd prefer not to have name tags, consider having a moment before the blessing where the host introduces each guest. That way they don't feel put on the spot and it gives you the opportunity to say each person's name out loud.

### BLESSING

Loving God,

We are thankful that long before we drew breath you called us Beloved. You remind us that we are never outside the reach of your extravagant love. You call us to see ourselves honestly in a way that we might be changed, redeemed, and renewed by grace.

Amen.

## DEMONSTRATE RADICAL

# vulnerability

### PREPARING THE SPACE

Create a space where your guests can be themselves.

There are few spaces in our lives where we can be completely ourselves. There are set expectations, often outside our control, around how we are expected to show up to certain spaces. Creating a space where your guests can be vulnerable says that you value all of who they are - and it opens them to fully valuing, with greater depth, the other guests gathered at the table.



As a society, we work hard to protect ourselves with perfectionism and judgment, proving our self-worth, and out-performing those around us all in an effort to keep everyone else from seeing our screw-ups, our imperfections, our fears. We do this because allowing oneself to be known so completely is absolutely terrifying! But allowing oneself to be seen and known - and allowing oneself to fully see and know another - is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experience.

This is what it means to be real; this is what it looks like to be vulnerable.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

*Bear each other's burdens. Don't take this opportunity to think you are better than those around you. Each person has his or her own load to carry and story to write.*

**Galatians 6:2-5**

Vulnerability is about the willingness to see our lives and truly be seen in our lives. Vulnerability transforms our front porches, our yards, our neighborhoods, our communities, our homes, and our tables, not simply into spaces of welcome, but into spaces of radical hospitality that break open our hearts in love, new possibility, and healing.



## TAKING IT TO THE TABLE

- Don't require a particular dress code. Dress codes can make guests feel self-conscious. Allowing your guests to dress to their own preference not only ensures they are comfortable, but it also allows them to express themselves through their clothing choices.
- Take a moment before the blessing to allow each guest to share something they are thankful for and/or something they have been struggling with.
- Consider not making your house perfect! When the dinner is done, let your dishes stay in the sink. Cleaning can make others feel like it's time to go!
- If it will drive you crazy to know that the dishes are piling up and waiting for you, consider using disposable dinnerware. That way the dishes take care of themselves and you can allow yourself to be present and vulnerable with your guests!

## BLESSING

Loving God,  
You call us to bear one another's burdens.  
Help us to practice vulnerability in our lives in ways that allow us to bear one another's burdens in friendship, in ways that fundamentally change our hearts and souls, in ways that turn strangers into friends and family.  
Amen.



# I AM BECAUSE *we are*

## PREPARING THE SPACE

Create a space where our dependence upon one another is evident.

The busyness of our day to day lives often has us moving around quickly in ways that don't allow much time for connection, leaving us feeling isolated. The antidote for this is to connect. We need opportunities to remember how much more enjoyable life is when journeying together than when trying to go it alone.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

*If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time - but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.*

**Lila Watson**

We are all connected. Our lives are dependent upon others from the moment we are born - for food and nourishment, for emotional health and wellbeing, for care when we are sick. We are truly dependent on one another.

Each breath that we take is made possible by parts of our world that most of us will likely never see in person. Even our own breath is a gift to the world as well.

That our breath affects the things around us, and that we are also sustained by their breathing, is a humbling reminder that we are intricately woven into the fabric of creation by threads of connection. We share a world together and are dependent on one another for flourishing. We can offer to the world the things that are life-giving and life-sustaining, or we can offer that which diminishes life, that crushes spirits, that deprives others of dignity.

We are granted some agency in how we will be toward one another and all of creation for the short time that we are a living part of all that is. Those choices can change the world for the better if we allow them - if we accept the responsibility of our connectedness to all things and breathe a bit of life-giving goodness into each moment.



## TAKING IT TO THE TABLE!

- Consider making this a potluck event. Invite each guest to bring a favorite dish to share so everyone shares in the task of making this meal together.
- Creating connection happens one small act at a time. Take a moment to do one small act of kindness for each guest (fill their cup, take their plate, listen to a story, just be present with them).
- If you are in a setting where you feel comfortable asking others to pitch in - maybe have a signup sheet where guests have an opportunity to volunteer to take on a chore (to wash dishes or clean the table etc.). That way it isn't falling only to the host. Be sure to say thank you for the help offered!
- Take a moment before the blessing to express your gratitude for those gathered around your table. It doesn't have to be a speech - you can even do that individually if you would prefer!

## BLESSING

God of goodness and life-giving breath,  
Help us to embody your spirit of creative  
liberation toward one another.

May we choose to offer in each moment - to our  
neighbors and our world - that which allows us  
all to breathe a little more easily.

Amen.





ARE YOU

# listening

## PREPARING THE SPACE

Create a space where people have opportunities to share and listen to the stories of others.

One of the highlights of dinner parties is the organic sharing of story and laughter among guests. These moments connect us in ways that move beyond that one gathering. The sharing of stories also opens us to learn with and from one another.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they began to speak to one another and hear one another in new ways as the Spirit gave them the ability.*

**Acts 2:1-4**

When we listen to the stories of others, we are reminded that the transformative power of God's Spirit is moving among us. In our listening, we



are prompted to hear, see, and understand one another in new and expansive ways. And we are compelled by the spirit of our common humanity to truly

understand how opening ourselves to the stories of another can fundamentally transform and change us.

With remarkable courage, people all around us are sharing their stories and giving voice to their longings and experiences. Are We Listening?

As the radical Spirit of love continues to move around and within us, may we learn to listen in ways that transform us, may we listen in ways that connect us to one another, may we listen in ways that move us to create change in our communities, and may we listen in ways that open us to see one another as God sees each one of us - as a beautiful gift.



## TAKING IT TO THE TABLE!

- As you are talking with your guests, allow them to share their stories, expectations, moments of joy and gratitude, anything in particular, without interruption.
- Set your tables in ways that foster conversation between your guests. Round tables are great for this! If you have enough space, consider not putting guests at the ends of tables. You might also include pictures, poems, or other visuals at the table as conversation starters.
- Have a stack of Table Talk cards. Try creating your own prompts, but if you need a little help, you can find some suggestions in our [Table Talk](#) series.
- Follow up on a difficult conversation. If you have a difficult conversation with a guest, consider asking them to lunch or a cup of coffee to have further conversation. Try to make understanding each other the goal, rather than convincing each other of your own views.

## BLESSING

Loving God - patient listener, full of grace,  
Help us to receive the gift of another's story.  
As we bear witness to myriad perspectives and  
languages of living, may our hearts and minds  
be transformed toward a more compassionate  
understanding of our world and one another.  
Amen.

# WELCOMING VOICES TO *the table*

## PREPARING THE SPACE

Create a space that fosters new friendships around the table.

Consider inviting friends from different spaces in your life to come together - family, work friends, childhood friends, etc. Friendships are often as compartmentalized as our lives - but bringing those parts of our lives together can be a fun experience.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

*And the table will be wide*

*And the welcome will be wide*

*And the arms will open wide to welcome us in*

*And our hearts will be open wide to receive*

**Jan Richardson**

Our lives are enhanced through the mutual sharing of life and story - it is these things that continue to bring us together and call each of us to one another.

When we imagine and create welcoming spaces - where those around us are invited to be heard and to listen, to share and to be seen - we find ourselves welcomed together into new possibilities.



When we honor the voices - coming from different places and bringing a variety of experiences - to pull up a seat with us, we broaden our communal dialogue in a way that allows us to be transformed by respectfully encountering the belovedness of another's story.



## TAKING IT TO THE TABLE

- When considering who to invite to your table, resist the urge to exclude someone just because they differ from you.
- Intentionally extend an invitation for your guests to bring guests of their own.
- Offer a prompt at each table that would allow your guests to share some part of their story with one another (if they feel led).
- If you know that there are going to be differing points of view at your table and anticipate conflict, take a moment before the blessing to remind your guests to be respectful of one another. Below is a reminder you can use if you would like:

“Thank you for coming and for being part of this community and gathering today. If there are friends here that you have not had an opportunity to meet yet, I hope

you might take a moment to get to know one another over the meal. Remember to be kind to each other today, and to enjoy conversations together that allow for differences of opinions while also stretching us all to see life through another person’s story. We are so glad you are all here!”

## BLESSING

God of welcome and new possibility,  
Help us to open ourselves to the story and ideas of one another.  
Help us to embrace the belovedness of those around us in a way that leaves us and our world transformed.  
Amen.





T H E  
W E L C O M E  
T A B L E



We are “The Bunce Girls”, or at least that is what we have been called most of our lives. Originally from Lexington, North Carolina, we were raised surrounded by music, justice, and faith. Most of our Sunday afternoons were spent gathered around an open table with family and friends where the food was plentiful, stories and laughter connected our hearts, and where the presence of each individual was held sacred. It’s those moments that have inspired The Welcome Table.

We, at The Welcome Table, believe that real conversations and community happen in the spaces where the belovedness and the voices of all are welcomed and valued. For us, this is rooted in the example of Jesus, who often used food and table to bring people from all walks of life into community together. Our objective is to help facilitate meaningful conversations that lead us to re-examine our own beliefs through a deeper understanding of the experiences and stories of those around us. This can only happen when people like you bring yourself, your voice, and your heart to the table.

