CALLED TO
B.L.E.S.S.

Eat Missionally
Eat Missionally
The phrase “the Son of Man came” appears in Matthew’s Gospel three times. Matthew 18:11 reads, “For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.” (NASB version) (See also Lu 19:10.) Matthew 20:28 reads, “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (See also Mr 10:45.) These two verses assure us that the mission of Jesus Christ in this world is to find and save the lost people through His service and eventually through His death on the cross.

The Jews misunderstood Jesus for being a glutton, not recognizing His intention to befriend tax collectors and sinners. In those days, these groups of people were neglected and isolated by the Jewish people. Jesus’ mission was to become their friend through eating and drinking. Clearly, dining with people is a missional practice.

The Dining Table is where Relationships are Built

Has modern living put aside the function of the dining table to build relationships? In this high-tech society, even though people eat together, they might spend that meal checking their cell phone. Many households switch on the TV during meal times. As a result, nobody pays attention to those sitting and dining with them. The most extreme example is our fast food culture, where we try to finish a meal in the shortest possible time, so as to beat our tight schedule, oblivious to and totally neglecting those who eat beside us.

Let’s restore the dining table as a place to build relationships. Let’s allow opportunities for the mutual sharing of our life stories, be they mundane matters or matters of vital importance. Together, let’s recall things of the past, dream about things of the future, laugh together, and shed tears together. No matter whether we are at the same or different stages of our spiritual journey, we can find and experience the faithfulness and the grace of our God. Maybe we are
hesitant to speak about the gospel in front of non-believers. But let us remember that sharing the gospel is not the same as talking about theological doctrines; it is the sharing of God’s story in our lives. Therefore, as we exchange life stories over the dining table, God will reveal Himself naturally through our life stories.

**The Dining Table is where Barriers are Broken**

We frequently dine with family members, Christian brothers and sisters, friends, colleagues, classmates, co-workers, etc. Each category of people may eat together at different times and places. The most probable places where we eat together with colleagues and classmates are at the work place and at school, and during lunch hours. For Christian brothers and sisters, dining together mostly take place after small group meetings or worship services, either at a restaurant or at home.

It is quite likely that we spend more time eating with our family members than with others, and this mostly takes place at home. We love to eat together with our close relatives during holidays and special occasions, as a tradition or a routine. Our relationship with people is, to some extent, revealed by the occasions where we eat with them. Imagine this: if you were to invite a coworker to have breakfast at your house, would that person be someone with a deeper friendship? The feeling among brothers and sisters, as they eat together at home, may be more intimate than when they eat together in a restaurant. What do you think your casual friends would feel if, during a major festive occasion, you invited them to your home for a meal?

The way a meal is eaten together may draw an invisible boundary among people in terms of intimacy and acceptance. However, Jesus has broken the boundary by eating with those who were rejected by their community. He did so because He accepted and loved those who were marginalized and who needed His good news. He was willing to intentionally break down boundaries and mix with all people, thereby deepening relationships. The dining table is definitely where boundaries can be taken away. Although we may be frightened by the thought of eating together
Reflection:
The dining table is the first of our evangelistic stronghold, a place for exchange of life stories, for mutual acceptance and inclusion, and for serving others. With at least three meal times per day, how shall we make good use of these opportunities given to us by God to serve others?

Weekly Challenge:
• As a small group / individual, invite an unacquainted friend to dine together (preferably at home but is not mandatory).

with people we do not know well, this is a sure way to break down walls and show acceptance and grace.

**The Dining Table is where We Serve**

It is a form of hospitality to invite others to our home where we spend our daily lives, and to prepare a meal for them. This hospitality is more than the offer of food, but also an offer to your guests to be at home. The quality of the meal is not the focus; more important is the way that we serve them. When we serve our guests at home, they enter into our personal space. They become a part of our lives. Serving at the dining table is a service involving mutual sharing of lives. Those who serve their guests offer not only their time, heart, and space, but also part of their daily lives and their personal lives. This way of serving others draws people closer together. Is this not the essence of the gospel? The gospel draws people closer to God, so that the distance between people are also drawn closer. Let us use the dining table to serve others.
Luke 5: 27-32

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.’
Jews. They lived out a devoted life to the Lord through their observance of the Torah and maintenance of purity in all matters. The Pharisees kept themselves separate from the sinners.

Jesus was the one “spotted” Levi, not the other way around (v. 27). He chose Levi out of sheer grace and called for a personal commitment – to follow Him. In response to this call, Levi accepted by leaving everything, getting up, and began to follow Jesus (v. 28). The verb “got up” indicates one’s determination. Levi expressed his commitment by “forsaking everything”. He dared to leave the toll station and abandoned his old living style. Levi responded to the call by hosting a great feast for Jesus (v. 29). There was a large crowd of toll collectors and others in this feast because Levi wanted to share this good news with them. Pharisees labelled the others as sinners (v. 30). Obviously, the “others” did not measure up to the standard of the Pharisees and together with toll collectors were excluded from the Pharisees.

Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus chose to eat with Levi and all the toll collectors. Jesus graciously accepted Levi’s invitation to the feast in his house. Jesus chose to be in Levi’s social circle. He chose to be inclusive rather than exclusive, rejoicing with the lost rather than grumbling, (v. 30) and welcoming rather than rejecting.

Reflection:

God’s grace is for everyone! Is there anyone in my circle that is being unintentional excluded by me? Maybe that is the one who would desperately need the love of God and His salvation.

Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, have mercy on me to remove my blindfold and my barriers to your love. May You stretch my eyes to seek and have passion for the lost ones around me! Amen.
**Luke 7:36-50**

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”

“Tell me, teacher,” he said.

“Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

When we read this story, we usually focus on the harlot who is the main character. However, in today’s devotion, let’s focus on the interaction between Simon the Pharisee and Jesus. We often overlook where this story took place. Jesus was invited by Simon, a Pharisee into his home to eat with him. This Pharisee is among those mentioned in v. 30, “But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose, for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.” In the previous two chapters of Luke, the Pharisees questioned Jesus (See Luke 5:21; 6:2), grumbled (See Luke 5:30) and watched diligently (See Luke 6:7).

We know that Jesus loved to be with the sinners. But Jesus also loved the Pharisees, even though He fully expected that there would be some controversial conversations at their meal interactions. In spite of this, Jesus did not avoid Simon. Instead, Jesus embraced the opportunity to have a conversation with him.

Then a harlot came in to greet Jesus (v. 37) even
though she was not invited to attend the banquet. The harlot was depicted as a woman who had lived a sinful life. She prepared an expensive and precious jar of ointment to anoint Jesus’ feet. This was extravagant giving (v. 38). However, Simon’s only concern was that the woman was a sinner and Jesus let her touch him (v. 39). Jesus grasped the opportunity to teach Simon an important lesson on the response of God’s love (vv. 40–47). The more one feels inadequate, the more one appreciates the abundance of love from God. Since Simon thought that he was good, he stopped serving (wash the feet (v. 44)), stopped greeting (v. 45) and stopped giving (v. 46) to Jesus who loved him.

This conversation might be the defining moment to Simon the Pharisee, although it is up to his own interpretation of the dialogue. Let us not forget that this opportunity was graciously granted by Jesus who had first accepted Simon’s invitation to his house, though Simon was among those who were against Him.

Reflection:
If I were Jesus, how would I transform this meal into an opportunity to share God’s love with the Pharisee and with the woman? Search my heart honestly to reveal the people, whom I have seldom approached, especially those who are against me. What fills my mind when I think of these people?

Prayer:
Dear Lord Jesus, search my heart! Cast away my fear to dialogue with people who tend to complain, grumble and watch diligently over me. I know these people also need Jesus’ love. Lord, grant me the courage and kindness to accept Your divine challenge to eat with them. Give me Your wisdom and peace, Lord. Amen.
Week 3
Eat Missionally

Day 3

Meeting Others’ Needs even when Tired

LUKE 9:12-17

Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.”

He replied, “You give them something to eat.”

They answered, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.” (About five thousand men were there.)

But he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospel books. Prior to this miracle, Jesus had already spent a long time with the apostles who reported to Him all they had done (See Mark 6:30). Jesus intended to go to a quiet place to get some rest with the apostles (See Mark 6:31).

However, when the crowd saw them, they ran to them on foot from all the towns. Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd (See Mark 6:34). He started to heal the sick and teach the masses (See Matt. 14:14).

Try to imagine yourself as Jesus. It is late in the afternoon and you have been working all day. You are very tired and it is about time to rest. Would you act like the disciples and send people away so you could take a break and have some quiet time for yourself? The disciples were legitimate in their responses as they did not have enough food to feed the large crowd, they were tired, it was late in the day, and they were at the countryside far away from the city. It would be better off for them to send the crowd away so they would not be starved to death and the disciples could get some rest to prepare for the next day. Logically, this would be a win-win situation, right?

However, Jesus did the unthinkable! Despite His exhaustion, Jesus did not only see the crowd’s spiritual needs but also their physical needs (See Luke 9:13). To our surprise, Jesus decided to feed the 5,000 people! This was one of the greatest miracles He had performed. The disciples and the crowd experienced, at first-hand, the transformational power and the abundant grace of Jesus. This story could have been an ordinary one if Jesus had just listened to the disciples and turned the people away. Ironically, God’s name was made known by this one wise decision that Jesus chose to make at His tiring moment!
Reflection:

Imagine I am one of Jesus’ disciples. What lesson would I have learned from this miracle? I might have a lot of legitimate reasons not to practice my hospitality. Maybe I tell myself that there will always be a second chance. But what can I learn from the compassion that Jesus demonstrated to fulfill the needs of the people? How would I respond to interruptions when a great need is presented in front of me?

Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, fill my heart with Your faith and compassion to meet the needs of others. Grant me Your love and strength to step out of my comfort zone to serve them. Let me experience Your transformational power and abundant grace as I serve. Holy Spirit, please guide me with discernment on how to serve others with hospitality. Amen
Luke 14:7-15

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

This parable teaches us the lesson of humility and hospitality. Meals were important social ceremonies at that time. In the Gospel of Luke, we learn that where (See 5:29), with whom (See 5:30), and how (See 7:44; 11:38) people ate meals had important social significance. Meal practices often revealed a difference in social status. Jesus and the Pharisees ate differently. Jesus’ meals included marginalized groups, which foreshadowed the celebration in God’s Kingdom. On the other hand, invitation to the Pharisee’s meals was based primarily on social status, thus the majority group was excluded.

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ was less of a concern to the early churches. Rather, they devoted their attention to heated discussions on the appropriate guests to invite to their meals and their community (See Acts 10, 15; Gal. 2:11-14). We can learn 2 lessons from this story. Firstly, meals are not all about status and honour but rather are joyful occasions to celebrate with one another (vv. 7-11). The host is the one who honours the guests. Secondly, we should not expect anything in return from our invited guests (vv. 12-13). Jesus taught us not to just invite our friends, our siblings, our relatives, or our rich neighbors. Instead, we should invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. These belong to the “forbidden” group (See Lev. 21:17-23). As we serve for His glory, we will receive blessing and honour from God, not from men.
Prayer:
Dear Lord Jesus, transform our minds and our hearts to be more like You who is humble and generous. Teach us to serve others with openness and with a sincere gratitude.

Reflection:
This parable reminds us to rethink and reflect on our own Christian values. What are some of the barriers that I have consciously or subconsciously built up, which may prevent others from joining our Christian community or from receiving the grace of God? God does not look at our social status. God wants us to practice being extravagantly generous and inclusive in our daily fellowship with others. Is my small group a closed group or an open one? How can we better prepare ourselves to welcome any newcomer in our groups? Who are the newcomers that God has placed around me?
Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector. He was a chief tax collector and a rich man (v. 2). At the same time, he was not a popular person among the Jews because he had defrauded many people (v. 8) and he was a sinner (v. 7). Maybe that was why nobody gave him a place to see who Jesus was and eventually had needed to climb up a sycamore tree in order to see Him (v. 4). Let’s relate this incident to Jesus’ announcement of the Kingdom earlier in Luke 18:18-25: “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God”. The rich ruler did not give priority of his life to Jesus. He chose to cling onto his wealth and sadly left Jesus. However, when we examine these two incidents closely, Zacchaeus was similar to this young rich ruler in some ways. They both ran to Jesus seeking Him urgently and sincerely (See Luke 19:4; Mark 10:17). Zacchaeus

Week 3  
Eat Missionally

Day 5

Unconditional Acceptance
showed his humility by climbing up a tree which rich people would not normally do. Similarly, the young rich ruler knelt before Jesus (See Mark 10:17). The difference, however, was that Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus with joy and gladness while the young rich ruler moved on with his life without Jesus in sadness. What made this difference? The young rich ruler came to Jesus with the wrong question in mind, “What can I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 18:18) while Zacchaeus came to Jesus with no expectation but to just see Him.

The first thing that Jesus told Zacchaeus was: “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house” (v. 5). Out of the great crowd, Jesus chose Zacchaeus the sinner, the marginalized and the unpopular. Jesus did not just greet him but went to stay in his house. This act signified Jesus’ desire to pursue a closer relationship with Zacchaeus, which was a surprise to him. While others were rejecting him, he fully experienced Jesus’ unconditional acceptance. Jesus offered to stay in his house and publicly acknowledged his dignity. Zacchaeus’ eyes and heart were opened for repentance. He was accepted by the Lord and his life was greatly transformed. Zacchaeus was even willing to pay back four times the amount to his wronged, which was not required by the Old Testament after one had confessed his guilt (See Lev. 6:5; Num. 5:7). On the contrary, the rich young man in the previous chapter left with sadness because of his desire for money. Zacchaeus was able to make this extraordinary response because he was motivated by the unconditional acceptance of Jesus.

Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for granting me Your unconditional love and acceptance. Teach me to model after You. Help me to take a step to welcome others into my life by inviting them to eat with me. I trust that the Holy Spirit will take away my fear and anxiety and be willing to guide me through this journey. May my life become a channel of blessings to others!

Reflection:

How would I treat those who are unaccepted or those who grumble against me (v. 7)? Am I ready to offer acceptance to people who are marginalized or not well-liked? Am I ready to eat with them and show them the Kingdom’s love? Today, if I am going to eat like Jesus to show my acceptance to others, who would I invite? If I were Zacchaeus, how would I respond to the love and acceptance of the Lord?