

# *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life*

## **Small Group Guide: “Eating Well”**

(LifelongFaith Associates)

### **Suggested Setting**

Use a meal as the context for this session, demonstrating the practices of “eating well” at a meal.

- Seat people at round tables if possible.
- Decorate the table appropriately and use a placemat or table tent to present the evening program. (Samples included in the PDF version of these materials.)
- Have all of the learning materials on the table.
- Include a meal blessing at the tables for all participants.

During the meal and session, children can use the Eating Well activities in the *Living Well Children’s Workbook*.

### **Opening: Common Meal and Storytelling**

Over a common meal discuss the following questions. (These questions are also on page 5.7 in the *Living Well* chapter.)

#### **Family Meal Yesterday**

1. What was it like in your family when you were growing up? Think about your family table and place the people around your family table.
2. What was a typical family dinner like?
  - What time did you eat?
  - What were your typical meals? Favorites? Worst meal?
  - Who prepared it? Who served it? Who cleaned-up?
  - How did your meal begin?
  - What did you talk about at the family table?
  - How did the family meal end?

### **Part 1. *Yearning*: The Hunger for the Practice: Stories of Eating Well**

This small group session focuses on the Christian practice of Eating Well. Read the two opening stories on pages 5.2—5.4 in *Living Well*: “Loss: No Time for the Family Dinner” and “Recovery: Kids in the Kitchen.” Think about how these stories reflect the challenge of eating together as a household and how they connect with your own experience.

### **Part 2. *Reflecting*: Reflection on the Hunger for Eating Well**

Use the following questions to share your story of a typical family dinner today. This is a storytelling experience so be sure to give each person time to share his or her story without interruptions or discussion. (These questions are also on page 5.7 in the *Living Well* chapter.)

## Eating Well Today

What is your typical family meal like today? A lot has changed over the past twenty-to-thirty years. A typical answer to this question is another question: "What family meal?" So what is your typical family meal like today?

- How many days a week does your family gather for a family meal together?
- What time do you eat?
- Where are your typical meals?
- Who prepares it? Who serves it? Who cleans-up?
- How does your meal begin?
- What do you talk about at the family table?
- How does the family meal end?

Read the commentary on the power of the family meal on pages 5.5—5.6: "The Surprising Power of the Family Meal" and "What Makes a Regular Family Meal so Hard Today?" After everyone has finished reading, discuss the following question as a group.

- Where you aware of the research on the benefits of the family meal? What are the implications of the research for families today?
- What challenges to the family meal would you add to the analysis in the chapter?

## Part 3. *Exploring*: The Christian Practice of Eating Well

Food and meals were central to the life and ministry of Jesus. The Exploring section of the "Eating Well" chapter in *Living Well* presents five characteristics of the Christian practice of eating well.

1. Eating Well Involves Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Food
2. Eating Well Involves Storytelling
3. Eating Well Involves Sharing Food and Serving Others
4. Eating Well Involves Celebrating
5. Eating Well Involves Listening to God's Word

### 1. Introduction to The Christian Practice of Eating Well

- Have everyone identify as many meal/feeding stories in the gospels as they can remember.
- Have one or more people read the introductory material on pages 5.9–5.10 to the whole group or read the material quietly as individuals.
- Have groups discuss the material by responding to the question: *Why do you think a meal and feeding people was so important for Jesus?*

### 2. Exploring the Five Characteristics

You can work together through each of the five characteristics OR have each person/household take one of the characteristics, read the section, prepare a brief summary of the characteristic, and share it with the group. (If there are more than five people, group members can work in pairs or triads.)

#### Eating Well Involves Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Food

1. **Read or Present a Summary** of page 5.10 in *Living Well*.
2. **Discuss:** *How do we give thanks for food in our household?*
3. **Activity:** Create a meal prayer that everyone can utilize at home.

### **Eating Well Involves Storytelling**

1. **Read or Present a Summary** of pages 5.10—5.11 in *Living Well*.
2. **Discuss:** *How do we share our stories over a meal in our household?*
3. **Activity:** Create suggestions (potential topics or questions) for meal time storytelling at home.

### **Eating Well Involves Sharing Food and Serving Others**

1. **Read or Present a Summary** of pages 5.11—5.12 in *Living Well*.
2. **Discuss** at table groups: *How do we share food and serve those in need?*
3. **Activity:** Create specific actions and suggestions that people can use to share food and serve those in need.

### **Eating Well Involves Celebrating**

1. **Read or Present a Summary** of pages 5.12—5.13 in *Living Well*. Also read the story of the wedding feast in John 2:1-11.
2. **Discuss:** *What are several of your favorite celebrations involving a meal?*
3. **Activity:** Develop a list of events that people can celebrate throughout the year and incorporate into their own ritual traditions, e.g., feast days, liturgical seasons, holidays, life transitions, and special occasions.

### **Eating Well Involves Listening to God's Word**

1. **Read or Present a Summary** of page 5.13 in *Living Well*.
2. **Discuss:** *How can we incorporate reading the Bible into our meals as a household?*
3. **Activity:** Create practical ways that people can incorporate reading the Bible into meal times.

## **3. Concluding Activity**

### **Option 1. Table Discussions**

Conclude with table discussions using the following questions:

- What did you discover about the importance of meal practice in Jesus' ministry?
- Why were meals so central to Jesus' ministry?
- What are the implications of Jesus words and actions for us today?

### **Option 2. Create an Advertisement for Living the Practice of Eating Well**

Have each table group create an ad that communicates the importance of the Christian practice of Eating Well, using the content in the *Living Well* book and the results of the table group activities. People can use a variety of advertising methods, e.g., a 30 second TV or radio ad, a song, an ad in a magazine, poster advertisement, a billboard, etc. Here are several suggestions for creating an ad:

1. *Focus the Ad:* In short phrases clearly identify what you want to communicate.
2. *Select the Advertising Approach:* Think about all the types of advertisements in magazines and on the radio and television. Select your approach, e.g. 30 second TV or radio ad, magazine ad, poster advertisement, direct mail postcard or advertisement, etc.
3. *Design the Ad:* Combine your content or message with your advertising method to create your unique promotion. Add color or artwork or whatever else will enhance your promotion.

## **Part 4. *Living*: Application of the Christian Practice to Daily Life**

Take some quiet time to reflect on how you can strengthen your meal practice. The “Living” section can serve as a guide for reflection and discerning what actions you (and your household) can take. Read the opening story in “Living the Christian Practice of Eating Well” on page 5.14 and then review the strategies in “Getting Ready” and “Enriching the Meal” on page 5.15.

### 1. Getting Ready

- Find time for family meals.
- Prepare meals together as a family.
- Tune out distractions.

### 2. Enriching the Meal

- Give thanks to God before eating.
- Make conversation and storytelling central at your meals.
- Share food with those in need.
- Celebrate church seasons and family events.
- Read the Bible as part of your mealtime.

After your reflection time, join together as a group and brainstorm additional ways to strengthen your family meal practice.

Now take several minutes to decide on which strategies you will use to strengthen your (or your household’s) family meal practice. Here is a simple process of moving from idea to action:

1. List three actions you would like to take to live the Christian practice of Eating Well in your daily life.
2. Choose the action that you would like to do first.
3. List the potential roadblocks to implementing this action.
4. Develop strategies for overcoming these roadblocks.
5. Describe in detail the action you will undertake and the steps you will take to ensure that it will happen.

After everyone has created a plan for living the practice in their daily life, have each person share their plans for one idea with their table group.

## **Part 5. *Praying*: Prayer for the Practice**

Conclude in prayer using the prayer on page 5.16 in the chapter.

## Resources for the Christian Practice of Eating Well

*52 Simple Ways to Talk with Your Kids about Faith.* Jim Campbell. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2007.

Family life is full of “teachable moments”—occasions of hope and joy, worry and stress that provide excellent opportunities for children and parents to talk about their faith. At times like these, meaningful conversations can flow, but only if parents are prepared to talk about God openly and honestly. This book identifies 52 opportunities for faith sharing that arise naturally in the course of everyday family life and suggests ways that parents can start a meaningful conversation about the spiritual issues involved.

*Amen! Prayers for Families with Children.* Kathleen Finley. Liguori, MO: Liguori Press, 2005.

This book provides a variety of short family prayers that can be easily woven into family life and prayed at mealtime. The book includes: Daily Prayers, Seasonal Prayers, and Special Occasion Prayers.

*The Blessing Candles: 58 Simple Mealtime Prayer-Celebrations.* Gaynell Bordes Cronin and Jack Rathschmidt. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000.

Each of the 58 prayer-celebrations include a gathering prayer, the lighting of two candles, a reading and a prayerful response to it, reflection questions and a sending prayer. These mealtime rituals are organized into several categories: Blessings for Everyday, Blessings for Special Needs, Blessings for Special Occasions, and Blessings for the Year.

*Celebrate Life: Rituals for Home and Church.* Peter Young. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999.

This book offers meaningful celebrations to help families deepen their sense of God’s empowering presence and strengthen the relationship between one’s own family and the larger family of faith. This guide for family worship offers rituals for times of growth, new life, significant change, uncertainty, loss, separation, and more; and rituals for milestones and other special times in life.

*Celebrating at Home: Prayers and Liturgies for Families.* Deborah Alberswerth Payden and Laura Loving. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998.

This easy-to-use, hands-on resource includes a variety of rituals, prayers, and liturgies throughout the liturgical year, organized into Prayers for Daily Life, Seasonal Celebrations, and Life Transitions. The book is designed to help families connect their everyday lives with their faith.

*FaithTalk: Four Keys.* Bloomington, MN: The Youth and Family Institute, 2008. [[www.tyfi.org](http://www.tyfi.org)]

These brand new FaithTalk® cards will inspire your family to live out The Institute’s Four Key faith practices every day! Designed to keep your faith active and alive, each discussion card poses a question focusing on one of these four areas of spiritual development: 1) Caring Conversation: Sharing Our Stories, 2) Devotions: Identifying God’s Presence in All of Life, 3) Rituals and Traditions: Living Out Our Beliefs, 4) Service: Actions that Honor Our Values by Caring for Our Neighbor. The packaging allows the cards to be “set up” on your table, truly making it a centerpiece for encouraging and growing faith in the home. .

*Feasting with God: Adventures in Table Spirituality.* Holy W. Whitcomb. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1996.

Feasting with God is an entertaining celebration of creative and spiritual ways to enjoy food. Understanding that sharing food is integral to communal life, and knowing the importance of providing the right setting for celebrations, Holly Whitcomb presents themes—among them wisdom, wonder, creativity—that act as points of departure for her various “feasts” and “culinary interludes.” The sixteen feasts include “Bringing Heaven to Earth,” “Rites of Passage: A Feast of New Beginnings,” “A Birthday Feast,” and “Living in Thanksgiving.” The culinary interludes include, “Tea and Sabbath,” “Making and Breaking Bread,” and “You Who are the Gift.”

*Food for Talk—Bringing Families Together One Conversation at a Time!* Julienne Smith. Philadelphia: Running Press, 2006. (Box with 200 cards) [<http://www.foodfortalk.net>]

Food for Talk is a collection of 200 cards with questions and topics designed to take the dinner table conversation to the next level—bringing the family closer while sharing thoughts and stories that will inspire your loved ones.

*Grace Before Meals: Recipes for Family Life.* Father Leo E. Patalinghug. Hunt Valley, MD: Leo McWatkins Films, 2007. [[www.gracebeforemeals.com](http://www.gracebeforemeals.com)]

Grace Before Meals is centered on one fundamental concept: the simple act of creating and sharing a meal can strengthen all kinds of relationships. Founded by Fr. Leo Patalinghug in 2003, Grace Before Meals has grown from a simple idea to a worldwide movement, producing a book, blog and even a pilot for a TV show endorsed by PBS. Research shows that having frequent family dinners can reduce the susceptibility of teens to risks like teen pregnancy, smoking, drug use and depression. And these benefits don't just apply to traditional families or people with kids. Stronger families foster stronger communities, and that's the goal we're striving for—one meal at a time.

The book, *Grace Before Meals*, is more than a typical cookbook—it offers families receipts for building more meaningful lives. The chapters reflect on a variety of topics related to personal milestones, family holidays, and faith observances. Short essays offer practical wisdom and ideas, so parents can create a comfortable environment for honest communication and a “real life” approach to discussing important spiritual themes that impact the life of a growing child.

*HomeGrown Faith.* David and Kathy Lynn. Nashville: World Publishing, 2006.

HomeGrown Faith offers a variety of activities, research about the importance of passing on faith, and encouragement for every step of the journey. The book includes a wealth of practical suggestions for the family including chapters on: The Top Ten HomeGrown Faith Practices, Imaginative Prayer Ideas, Easy-to-Do Devotions, Creative Faith Conversations, Easy-to-do-Service Projects, Faith-Filled Family Walks, and Wacky Family Fun with a Touch of Faith!

*Making Time for God: Daily Devotions for Children and Families to Share.* Susan R. Garrett and Amy Plantinga Pauw. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002.

This daybook engages the family in exploring the Bible, while helping children develop a strong pattern of daily devotions and prayer. The authors combine biblical teaching with engaging stories that children can identify with, as well as thoughts for personal application. The book draws from most books of the Bible, and includes both the best-loved Bible verses and the harder-to-understand passages. The 366 entries emphasize the seasons of the church year and correlate to the secular calendar as well.

*The Meal Box: Fun Questions and Family Tips to Get Mealtime Conversations Cookin'.* Bret Nicholaus and Tom McGrath. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2009.

Do you wish that you could actually get your kids to open up a bit and communicate with you, and that time together at the table could actually be fun? Simply open *The Meal Box*, pull out a question card, and let the family conversation begin! *The Meal Box* contains 54 cards, each one featuring a creative question guaranteed to spark a family conversation like never before! The questions, such as "If you could have the voice of any famous person, whose voice would you have?", is sure to engage everyone in the family. The reverse side of each card features a quick "Food for Family Thought" tip that helps families apply the question—or their answers—to their everyday experiences, while reminding them of the role faith plays in their lives.

*Pilgrim Prayers for Mealtime.* Alexander Campbell. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003.

This book consists of 150 prayers, all of which relate to a particular Scripture passage and correspond to the themes of thankfulness and praise. Prayers are organized into the following categories: God of Mercy, God of Grace, God of Thankfulness, God of Love, God of Peace, God of Righteousness, and God of All Seasons.

*The Surprising Power of Family Meals: How Eating Together Makes Us Smarter, Stronger, Healthier, and Happier.* Miriam Weinstein. Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2005.

*The Surprising Power of Family Meals* is the first book to take a complete look at the stories and studies surrounding a ritual that was once so common that it flew beneath the radar screen, and to synthesize them into an engaging, informative read. The book shows how families and communities around North America are responding creatively to the pressures of a 24/7 world, taking what is best from our past and transforming it to meet current needs, and offers valuable strategies that can be tailored to suit your own family's situation.

*Together We Pray: A Prayer Book for Families.* J. Bradley Wigger. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005.

Pausing to pray together may seem impossible for many families, but doing so can calm the chaos and change everyone's perspective on the day, even if the prayer pause is brief. *Together We Pray* helps families to take that pause, and to do it in the most profound and lasting way—together as a family. The book is organized into three sections: Table Prayers for Mealtime, Devotional Prayers of Joy and Care, and Memory Bedtime Prayers. Each prayer is fashioned around a Psalm verse.

*VeggieTales Family Devotional.* Cindy Kenney and Doug Peterson. Franklin, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2005. [[www.bigidea.com](http://www.bigidea.com)]

The *VeggieTales Family Devotional* contains 52 devotionals organized into seven parts: The Faith Connection, The Communication Connection, The Love Connection, The Trust Connection, The Time Connection, The Joy Connection, and Holiday Lessons. Each devotion includes a Veggie story, a Bible story, discussion questions, guided prayers, family activity, and a "think-link-act" connection to help everyone find a practical way to apply God's messages to their lives every day.

# Eating Well Home Activities

## Meal Time Activities

### Blessings

Use mealtime prayers as a way of teaching your children to recognize that God is the creator and sustainer of life. Prayers can be ones you write as a family, a traditional favorite, a spontaneous one, or a song. Mealtime prayers provide an opportunity for children to practice praying publicly. Try rotating the leadership role. Don't hesitate to pray when guests are present, rather welcome them into your family's rituals.

### Home Alone

Pick a regular night once a week when everyone will be present for dinner with no guests invited. This means making a family commitment to not working late, attending meetings or after school activities. Make sure everyone has a task to perform in the planning, preparation and/or cleaning.

### Centerpieces

Create table centerpieces. They can be made of anything such as flowers, an arrangement of small toys or dolls, or an art project. If possible, create them together from family activities such as nature walks.

### Weekend Cook-off

Can't get together for supper? Create a Saturday or Sunday morning cook-off. Prepare a full meal (such as a casserole, muffins, and dessert) or a couple of main dishes to be eaten later in the day and/or week. Select recipes and ingredients in advance. Make sure everyone has a task in the planning, preparation and/or cleaning. Consider ending with a brief blessing of the food. That spaghetti sauce eaten alone after soccer practice will taste "better" if its prepared at the Cook-off.

### Weekly Rituals

Whether its Friday Pizza Night or Tuesday Sundaes, they're fun to look forward to! One family we know, short on preparation time and cooking skill, uses restaurants as a regular place to catch up on each other's lives.

### Feed the Hungry

If food is important to your family, then you can understand the feelings of those who go hungry. Many of us participate in programs to feed the hungry during the holidays, thus it is especially important to support these programs in the "off season". Many churches offer opportunities for families to help prepare and serve a meal at a local meal program. How about at your next family get-together asking families to bring canned goods for each member of their family? Later take the food to a local food bank or shelter. Another suggestion is to make a simple supper, eliminate dessert or those Sunday donuts, and as a family determine a local charity to donate the money.

### The Ritual of Lighting Candles

The ritual of lighting candles is more than a means of decoration. Candles speak of warmth, love, and celebration. They can be a powerful sign of the presence of God in times of trouble, suffering as well as times of celebration. They can also be lighted at a time of great joy, distress,



or out of need for another. Candles also can be representative of family members who are away from home.

Before, during or after an evening meal, hold a family candle-lighting ceremony to symbolize that Christ is the Light of the World and also its hope. Read Isaiah 60:19-20 and John 1:14. Invite each family member to light his or her candle and pray the following prayer:

### **Candle Prayer for a Dinner Celebration**

May the warmth of fire and light  
that radiates from these candles  
reflect its glow on all who sit at this table,  
blessing this meal and our conversation.  
May the memory of this gathering linger  
long after these candles have been extinguished.

### **Baking Day**

Consider making Saturday morning a baking day. Pull out your cookbooks and browse through to find something exciting you'd like to make together. Decide on a particular recipe, get out the aprons and have fun! At mealtime, enjoy telling your stories about the activity and make a big decision together: does the recipe go or stay?

### **Meal-time Litany**

At mealtime, at the end of the blessing, our family would always say, "God bless Mom and Dad and Pat and individually name each person in the family. It eventually developed into a blessing for others -- for anyone whom a family member wanted to remember, such as a friend at school who was having a hard time, or maybe someone who had a death in the family. Now we have grandchildren. When they come to the house, they like to include their little friends from kindergarten. It has been very rewarding. Our married children are continuing this ritual in their families.

### **Ethnic Night**

Every family has favorite foods that it enjoys together. It may be as simple as an evening bowl of popcorn or as unpredictable as homemade ice cream. Cooking together is also a great family activity, especially if you're working to produce one of your specialties. You are not simply producing the food which disappears in minutes; you are also creating memories that last a lifetime.

It is always a valuable experience to learn about other cultures. Sometimes the simple act of having a different kind of food can lead toward appreciation of another people's ways.

**Make It Yourself.** Get the whole family involved in shopping and preparing food you've never cooked yourself. Most big cities have ethnic grocery stores. Visit one with the family and ask the proprietor for dinner suggestions. It can be educational to tour the aisles of these grocery stores.

**Decorate.** It adds to the experience to use as many cultural trappings as you are able. For example, when eating a Chinese dinner, use chopsticks. You may also want to use a wok to prepare foods. On Mexican night, hang a pinata over the table. If you don't have time to make a traditional one, try decorating a large paper bag using markers. Fill the bag with candy. Tie it at the top with a string. Suspend the bag from a broomstick or hand it in a doorway. Blindfold children and let them take turns trying to break it with a plastic baseball bat. Make your own placemats and allow it to become a family project.

**Go American!** When considering other cultures, don't forget all the variety right here in the United States. Get out your bibs and plan a New England seafood supper complete with clam chowder and steamed lobsters! On the Pacific coast there is king crab, salmon, apple candy and wild berries. The Southwest have specialties like enchiladas, tamales, chili, and garbanzo salad. In the South there is grits, black-eyed peas, biscuits and gravy, shrimp creole, jambalaya, pecan pie and chicory coffee. The Midwest boasts of navy beans with ham hocks, cornbread, Chicago deep-dish pizza, persimmon pudding and hot biscuits.

It's a nice extra to have a member of the family do a little research on the history of the people whose food you are enjoying. Where do they live? What kind of jobs do they have? What are some of their customs? Is there a reason they eat the kind of food they do? This job can rotate among family members.

## Mealtime Blessings

Loving Father, we thank You for the family gathered around the table, the friends who extend your goodness, the food which nourishes our bodies and the Faith that strengthens our souls. Keep us ever mindful of these blessings, and may this food inspire us to bring these blessings to those who go without family, friends, food and faith. We ask all of this through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Father Leo E. Patalinghug, *Grace Before Meals*)

Lord God and Giver of All Good Gifts, we are grateful as we pause before this meal, for all the blessings of life that You give to us.

Daily, we are fed with good things, nourished by friendship and care, feasted with forgiveness and understanding.

And so, mindful of Your continuous care, we pause to be grateful for the blessings of this table. (*Pause for silent reflection*)

May Your presence be the "extra" taste to this meal which we eat in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen

The day is coming to a close, and, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we pause to break bread together.

May our eyes be opened, and, in this act of common sharing, may we see the risen Lord in one another.

May we see the Lord of Life in our food, our conversation and lives shared in common.

May these gifts strengthen us to continue your work in our world.

May the blessing of God, His peace and love, rest upon our table. Amen

We thank you, our God, for the food you have given us.

Make our sharing this bread together lead to a renewal of our communion with you, with one another, and with all creatures.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Lord, you feed every living thing.

We have eaten together at this table; keep us in your love.

Give us true concern for the least of our sisters and brothers, so that as we gladly share our food with them, we may also sit down together with them at the table of the kingdom of God.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Lord, you have fed us from your gifts and favors; fill us with your mercy, for you live and reign for ever and ever. Amen

## Celebrating a Family Meal

### Materials

- Your family should first determine the type of meal at which they would enjoy celebrating. Would they like to dress up the best china, have breakfast, plan a picnic, or order a pizza?
- The meal's menu should be determined ahead of time with each family member having input. Everyone should have preparation, cooking and/or cleaning task(s).
- Each family member should bring an object for the table that symbolizes the family. These symbols could be photos from the last vacation, a family Bible, a plate to symbolize hospitality, an item from a favorite family hobby, or a candle to symbolize warmth and closeness.
- An uncut loaf of bread or large roll.

### Environment

Have everyone gather when no one will be interrupted. Arrange the symbolic objects as a centerpiece or on a table next to the dinner table.

### Opening Blessing

If your family prays a special Grace before eating, please use it. Otherwise, pray this prayer:

*Loving God, we thank you for allowing us to come together as a family. Please help sustain our lives and love by blessing this food. We ask this through, Jesus our brother. Amen.*

### Activity

When everyone is finished eating the main meal, clear the table, and spread all of the objects out in the middle. Each person should share what object they brought and why they chose it. When everyone is finished, did anyone notice any common threads? Is there any object that you would all agree best symbolizes your family?

The Leader should now turn everyone's attention to the loaf of bread explaining how Christians for generations have broken bread together as a sign of their fidelity and love, and how today it is a symbol of our Christian faith. The leader should break off a piece of the bread thanking God for something about the family. Do not eat the bread. Each family member in turn should do the same. The bread can be consumed when all have prayed.

The Leader should ask everyone to thank each other for the time spent together. Ask each member to share one thing they learned about the family or family members today.

Have dessert!

### Closing Prayer

*Loving God, we thank you for nourishing our body and soul through this meal and discussion. We are grateful to be part of the larger Christian family. We ask your blessings on our family as we seek to grow closer to You through our love for each other. We ask this through Jesus our brother. Amen.*

### Suggestions for Action

1. Sundae-making or another "fun eating" activity can be substituted for a meal.
2. This activity can be adapted to extended family reunions or gatherings by having each family bring an object to symbolize the larger family.
3. This activity could be held once a year to recap the year's activities and growth. Have each family member bring a symbol of the year.

## Advent Table Prayers

### Daily Prayers for Advent—Week One

Sunday	Dear Lord, help me to always be ready. I do not know when you will come. (see Matthew 24:44)
Monday	Holy God, your glory is shelter and protection, you are my shelter from the storm and the rain. (see Isaiah 4:6)
Tuesday	Just as the water fills the sea, the land will be filled with people who know and honor the Lord. (see Isaiah 11:9)
Wednesday	I praise you, Lord. People who have never spoken now speak; you heal the lame, the cripple can walk and the blind can see. (see Matthew 15:31)
Thursday	Lord, my faith in you is firm. Give me perfect peace! (see Isaiah 26:3)
Friday	One thing I ask, Lord: that I may live in your house all my life. (see Psalm 27:4)
Saturday	Loving God, help me to take the gift I have received and give it as a gift. (see Matthew 10:8)

### Daily Prayers for Advent—Week Two

Sunday	Wondrous God, you give me the bread that I need and the water for which I thirst. (see Isaiah 30:20)
Monday	Loving God, may your name be blessed forever, as long as the sun remains. (see Psalm 72:17)
Tuesday	I believe that I will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of my God. (see Isaiah 35:2)
Wednesday	“Clear a path in the desert! Make a straight road for the Lord, our God!” (Isaiah 40:3)
Thursday	“With all my heart I praise the Lord, and with all that I am I praise his holy name!” (Psalm 103:1)
Friday	Dear Lord, you are the Lord, my God. You are holding my hand, I am not afraid. You are here to help me. (see Isaiah 41:13)
Saturday	Jesus, you are the light for the world. (see John 8:12)

### Daily Prayers for Advent—Week Three

Sunday	Lord God, all powerful, make me strong again. Smile on me and save me! (see Psalm 80:19)
Monday	O Lord, help me to steady my heart and wait for you. Your coming is at hand. (see James 5:7-8)
Tuesday	Lord, show me your paths and teach me to follow you. (see Psalm 25:4)
Wednesday	“I will always praise the Lord.” (Psalm 34:1)
Thursday	“Let peace and justice rule every mountain and hill.” (Psalm 72:3)
Friday	Your promise, O Lord, came true; he is called Emmanuel, God is with us. (see Matthew 1:22-23)
Saturday	O Lord, you have taught me since I was a child and I never stop telling about your marvelous deeds. (see Psalm 71:17)

### Daily Prayers for Advent—Week Four

Sunday	Holy Mary, the Lord is with you! (see Luke 1:28)
Monday	Wondrous God, you make my heart glad because I trust you, the only God. (see Psalm 33:21)
Tuesday	I proclaim the greatness of the Lord, my spirit is joyful in God, my savior. (see Luke 1:46)
Wednesday	“I offer you my heart, Lord God, and I trust you.” (Psalm 25:1)
Thursday	“Praise the Lord, the God of Israel! He has come to save his people!” (Luke 1:67)
Friday	“Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God!” (Luke 2: 14)



## Advent Table Prayer—Week One

*A family member lights the first candle on the Advent Wreath. Alternate prayer leader and candle lighter throughout the week.*

Come, Lord Jesus! Open our minds and hearts and souls as we wait for you to be born anew in our lives and in our family. Help us to experience your love in our family today.

*Family members each share one way they have experienced the love of the Lord Jesus in their home today.*

As we prepare for the coming of your Son, O God, we give you thanks for the love of your son, Jesus, which we have experienced in our home today.

We give you thanks for this food and drink, signs of your gracious love.

May this meal strengthen us to share your gifts with the hungry

And all who look for your justice and mercy.

Grant this through Christ our Lord,

All: Amen.



## Advent Table Prayer—Week Two

*A family member lights the first and second candle on the Advent Wreath. Alternate prayer leader and candle lighter throughout the week.*

Come, Lord Jesus! Bring peace and healing in our family and our world. May we hear again your own prayer "that we may be one." May we prepare the way for you by being generous and forgiving.

*Family members share how they have experienced generosity and forgiveness today.*

As we prepare for the coming of your Son, O God, we thank you for the blessing of your generosity and forgiveness.

We give you thanks for this food and drink, signs of your gracious love.

May this meal strengthen us to be generous and forgiving. May it strengthen us

To share our gifts with the hungry and all who look for your justice and mercy.

Grant this through Christ our Lord,

All: Amen.



## Advent Table Prayer—Week Three

*A family member lights three Advent candles, including the pink or white candle. Alternate prayer leader and candle lighter during the week.*

Come, Lord Jesus! Come and stay with our family and friends—and all who are dear to us. May your light shine brightly so we can see you everywhere. Help us to spread your light and joy by giving freely and happily to all we meet.

*Family members share how they have seen the light of the Lord Jesus today.*

As we prepare for the coming of your Son, O God,  
We give you thanks for your light which shines brightly among our family and friends.  
We give you thanks for this food and drink, which nourishes us to be your light and  
strengthens us to share your gifts with the hungry and all who look for your justice  
and mercy.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord,

All: Amen.

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## Advent Table Prayer—Week Four

*A family member lights the first and second candle on the Advent Wreath. Alternate prayer leader and candle lighter throughout the week.*

Come, Lord Jesus! We hunger, we thirst, we wait for you! Come, Lord Jesus and do not delay!

*Family members share a time when they have seen the Lord Jesus present in the home or community today.*

As we prepare for the coming of your Son, O God,  
We are hungry and thirsty for signs of his love in our lives.  
We give you thanks for this season of waiting and hopefulness for Jesus to be even more  
present in the life of this family.  
We give you thanks for this food and drink, signs of your gracious love.  
May this meal strengthen us to love each other and our neighbors as we wait for the  
coming of your Son, Jesus.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord,

All: Amen.

## Christmas Table Blessing

Leader        Glory to God in the highest.

All             And peace to God's people on earth.

Leader        We continue to celebrate the coming of the Lord Jesus among us. As we light our candle, may the Spirit of God that shone on the star of Bethlehem grow even brighter in our hearts and home.

*A child lights the candle.*

And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of God's only Son, full of grace and truth.

All             The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

Leader        O God of gentleness, in love you gather us at this table. We celebrate your great gift to us, Jesus Christ, your son.

Lord Jesus, hold us close to each other. In the peace of this Christmas season may the hungry be filled and homeless sheltered, and may the unremembered be united especially through your love and peace at work in each of us.

We remember especially those who have loved us in a special way today—those people who have brought Jesus' love to us.

*(Names may be said aloud or in silence.)*

All             Lord, bless our food, our family, our friends. Help us to share our love. Amen

## Lent Table Prayers

### Daily Prayers for Lent—Week One

Ash Wednesday	It isn't too late, we can still return to the Lord with all our heart. (see Joel 2:12)
Thursday	If I want to follow you, Lord, I must forget myself and put others first. (see Luke 9:23)
Friday	"Create pure thoughts in me and make me faithful again." (Psalm 51:10)
Saturday	Lord, I hear you say, "Come with me." (see Luke 5:27)

### Daily Prayers for Lent—Week Two

First Sunday of Lent	We cannot live only on food. We need every word that God has spoken. (see Matthew 4:4)
Monday	You are the Lord, our God. You are holy, and we must be holy too! (see Leviticus 19:2)
Tuesday	Our Father, in heaven, help us to honor your name. (see Matthew 6:9)
Wednesday	"Wash me clean from all of my sin and guilt." (Psalm 51:2)
Thursday	Lord, help me to treat others as I want them to treat me. (see Matthew 7:12)
Friday	"With all my heart, I am waiting, Lord, for you! I trust your promises!" (Psalm 129:5)
Saturday	Help me, Lord, to love my enemies and to pray for those who mistreat me. (see Matthew 5:44)

### Daily Prayers for Lent—Week Three

Second Sunday of Lent	"Lord, it is good for us to be here!" (Matthew 17:4)
Monday	"Our God, you keep us safe. Now help us! Rescue us." (Psalm 79:9)
Tuesday	O Lord, help me be the servant of others. (see Matthew 23:11)
Wednesday	"You are faithful, and I trust you because you rescued me." (Psalm 31:5)
Thursday	Lord, you bless those who trust in you. (see Jeremiah 17:7)
Friday	I trust you, O Lord, and I remember your miracles and wonders in my life! (see Psalm 105:5)
Saturday	"With all my heart I praise the Lord, and with all that I am I praise his holy name!" (Psalm 103:1)

### Daily Prayers for Lent—Week Four

Third Sunday of Lent	O Lord, we have heard you ourselves, and we are certain that you are the Savior of the world! (see John 4:42)
Monday	"In my heart, I am thirsty for you the living God. When will I see your face?" (Psalm 42:2)
Tuesday	"Show me your paths and teach me to follow; guide me by your truth and instruct me." (Psalm 25:4)
Wednesday	Help me, oh Lord, to follow your commands, to teach them to my children and to my children's children. (see Deuteronomy 4:9)



Thursday	We worship the Lord with thankful hearts and songs of praise. (see Psalm 95:2)
Friday	Lord, that I may love you with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. (see Mark 12:30)
Saturday	Lord, our prayer is that we may do our best to know you today. (see Hosea 6:3)

### Daily Prayers for Lent—Week Five

Fourth Sunday of Lent	“You, Lord, are my shepherd. I will never be in need.” (Psalm 23:1)
Monday	“I prayed to you, Lord God, and you healed me, saving me from death and the grave.” (Psalm 29:2)
Tuesday	“The Lord all-powerful is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.” (Psalm 46:11)
Wednesday	Lord, you will never forget me. (see Isaiah 49:15)
Thursday	“Remember me, Lord, when you show kindness by saving your people!” (Psalm 106:4)
Friday	Lord, you are there to rescue all who are discouraged and have given up hope. (see Psalm 34:18)
Saturday	“You, God, are my shield, the protector of everyone whose heart is right.” (Psalm 7:10)

### Daily Prayers for Lent—Week Six

Fifth Sunday of Lent	Lord, you are the resurrection and the life. (see John 11:25)
Monday	“Lord, your kindness and love will always be with me each day of my life.” (Psalm 23:6)
Tuesday	Lord, help me to have faith in you for who you are. (see John 8:24)
Wednesday	Lord, I pray to know the truth, the truth that will set me free. (see John 8:31)
Thursday	“The Lord is our God, bringing justice everywhere on earth.” (Psalm 105:7)
Friday	“I sing praises to you Lord. You rescue the oppressed from the wicked.” (Jeremiah 20:13)
Saturday	You, O Lord, are our God. We are your people. (see Ezekiel 37:27)

### Daily Prayers for Lent—Holy Week

Palm Sunday	Hosanna! Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord! (see Mark 11:9-10)
Monday	You, Lord, have called me for the victory of justice. You have grasped me by the hand. (see Isaiah 42:5)
Tuesday	The Lord chose me and gave me a name before I was born. (see Isaiah 49:1)
Wednesday	“I didn’t turn aside when they insulted me and spit in my face.” (Isaiah 50:6)
Holy Thursday	Lord, help me to understand what you have done for me. (see John 13:1-15)
Good Friday	Father, I put my life in your hands. (see Psalm 31)
Holy Saturday	And God saw that it was good. (see Genesis 1)
Easter Sunday	I rejoice in this day that the Lord has made! (see Psalm 118)

## Table Prayers for the Easter Season

### Easter

Leader We bless ourselves with the sign of our faith.

All In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

*A family member lights the candle.*

All Dying you destroyed our death. Rising you restored our life.

Lord Jesus, come to this home so that we may continue to grow in our love for each other.

### First Week of Easter

Reader "Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is so good, and by raising Jesus from death, he has given us new life and a hope that lives on." (1Peter 1:3)

Leader Glorious God, the darkness of Lent is over, and the light of Easter shines on us. We praise you because you have shown us your power in the resurrection. We rejoice in you because you have refreshed us in the waters of baptism. We glorify you because you have given us hope for eternal life. We love you because you have loved us.

Blessing over

the Food Loving God, bless those who gather around this table. Help us to spread the light of your son, Jesus, to those who are hungry today. Amen.

### Second Week of Easter

Reader You are my Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

Leader Reassuring God, When we hear about the Resurrection, we are like the disciples. We believe. But when we feel pain and when we see suffering, we are like Thomas. We have doubts, we wonder where you are. Give new life to our faith. Help this family to trust in you. Help us to hear those who give witness to your love. Help us to believe in the Resurrection and become your presence for others.

Blessing over

the Food Loving God, bless those who gather around this table. Help us to reach out to the pain and suffering we see around us. Amen.

### Third Week of Easter

Reader After Jesus sat down to eat, he took some bread. He blessed it and broke it. Then he gave it to them. At once they knew who he was, but he disappeared." (Luke 24:30-31)

Leader Dear God, the disciples did not recognize Jesus when they walked with him. How could they be so blind? They knew him. They had seen him with their own eyes. Sometimes I am blind. I know Jesus, but I fail to see him. Help me to see with the eyes of faith. Help me to recognize Jesus in my friends, my family, my co-workers.

Blessing over

the Food Loving God, bless us that we may recognize you. Bless too, this food that it may nourish us to recognize you in the stranger, in the lonely, in the forgotten. May we reach out to them in love and service. Amen.

### Fourth Week of Easter

Reader "I came so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest." (John 10:10)

Leader Dear Jesus, you are the gate and you are the shepherd. What does that mean? It means that we come to new life through you. You are the one that we must follow. Find us when we are lost. Help us to hear your voice and to follow you. Help us to understand how much you love us. Bring us to new life.

Blessing over  
the Food

Wondrous God, you guide us always in the ways of love. You gently care for us and encourage us to follow your son, Jesus. Bless those who gather around our table. Help each one of us hear your voice and follow you. Help us too, to hear your voice in the hungry people of our community and world, and to reach out to them in love and service. Bring us all to new life. Amen.

### **Fifth Week of Easter**

Reader "Have faith in me when I say that the Father is one with me and that I am one with the Father. Or else have faith in me simply because of the things I do. I tell you for certain that if you have faith in me, you will do the same things that I am doing."  
(John 14:11-12)

Leader Dear Jesus, you tell us that you are "the way, the truth, and the life." Help us to choose the roads in our lives that will lead to you. Help us to pursue truthfulness, help us to do all that is life-giving. Bless our faith in you. Oh, how we want to do as you do!

Blessing over  
the Food

Dear Jesus, you say that if we have faith in you we will do the same things that you do. You forgave, you reached out to the lonely, the poor, the forgotten, the hungry. You brought peace to people's lives. Bless us that we too may do as you do. Bless this food that it strengthen us to be your presence in the world. Amen.

### **Sixth Week of Easter**

Reader "If you love me, you will do as I command. Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. The Spirit will show you what is true." (John 14:15-17)

Leader Dear Jesus, you prepared the disciples for the day you would leave. You promised to send them a helper. All you asked of them was that they remain faithful to you. All you ask of us is to remain faithful to you. Help us to understand all of what that means. Help us to be faithful in our work and our play. Help us to be faithful when we are with others and when we are alone. Let us never doubt your love for us.

Blessing over  
the Food

Holy God, your Spirit brings light to our world. Your Spirit renews and energizes us to carry on the work of your son in our family, in our neighborhood and in our world. Bless us as we gather to share food and companionship. Bless us for the work we continue to do in our faithfulness to your Son, Jesus. Amen.

### **Seventh Week of Easter**

Reader "Eternal life is to know you, the one true God, and to know Jesus Christ, the one you sent." (John 17:3)

Leader Dear Jesus, you are one with your Father, and you tell us that we are one in you and the Father. You point us to the type of relationship we are to have with each other—"then they will be one with each other, just as you and I are one." Help us to bring glory to you by the life our family lives, together.

Blessing over  
the Food

Loving Lord, we belong to you. Bless our efforts to be a family of faith, bless our efforts to love as you love. Bless this food to strengthen us to live as one. Amen.

## **Week of Pentecost Sunday**

Reader "On the day of Pentecost all the Lord's followers were together in one place. Suddenly there was a noise from heaven like the sound of a mighty wind! It filled the house where they were meeting." (Acts 2:1-2)

Leader Dear God, you promised to send the world a savior, and you sent Jesus. Jesus promised to send the disciples a helper, and he sent the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit continues to be with us today. Thank you for keeping your promises. Help us to keep our promise to be faithful to you. Let us be open to the work of the Holy Spirit working within us. Help us to recognize our gifts and to use them to serve you.

Blessing over the Food Come, Holy Spirit, and kindle in us the fire of your love. Holy God, send the blessing of your Spirit upon us as we break bread together. Strengthen and empower us to go forth from this table ready to praise and serve your Son, Jesus. Amen.

## **Table Prayers for the Summer Season**

Lord, behold our family here assembled.  
We thank you for this place in which we dwell,  
For the love that unites us,  
For the peace accorded us this day,  
For the hope with which we expect the morrow;  
For the health, the work, the food and the bright skies  
That make our lives delightful;  
For our friends in all parts of the earth.  
Amen.

Bless our heart, O Lord  
That in the breaking of the bread  
We may hear the song of the universe.  
Amen.

## **Table Prayers for Fall**

In peace, let us pray to the Lord.  
Holy and awesome God, you bless us continuously with your goodness—and we are thankful.  
In a few moments of silence, let us each be mindful of all we have for which to give thanks: friends,  
food, hopes, health and happy memories.  
*(A moment of silence)*  
Thus in giving thanks, our family is blessed.  
Amen.

In peace, let us pray to the Lord.  
Holy and awesome God, you bless us continuously with your goodness—and we are thankful.  
Let us each be mindful of all we have for which to give thanks: friends, food, hopes, health and happy  
memories. Each of us now shares one thing for which we are particularly thankful today.  
*(Family members share that for which they are thankful.)*  
Thus in giving thanks, our family is blessed.  
Amen.

## Thanksgiving Day Prayer

Leader: God is Lord.  
All: God made us; we belong to God.

Leader: Come now with thanksgiving to offer praise to God.  
All: Thank you, God, and blessed be Your name, now and always.

Reader One: We thank you for all your gifts, gracious God, and for gathering us gratefully to remember all the ways you bless us.

*Share the ways God has blessed you this year.*

Reader Two: And if we do not remember them all, let it be because your kindness' are so many they cannot be counted, and not because we are not thankful.

*Share about the kindness the Lord has showed you this year.*

Reader Three: When we are tempted to take for granted your gifts to us, lift our eyes to see, our hearts and minds to understand, and our voices to tell the ways you have sustained our family and our friends, the ways you have provided for us and have showed us the breadth and depth of your caring.

*Share about the way the Lord has cared for you this year.*

Reader Four: Strengthen our gratitude. Help us to never forget our companions in life, close at hand or away from us. Make us generous in responding to their needs.

*Offer special prayers for each other, and for those not with them now.*

Reader Five: For all your goodness to us, for your care of your whole creation, for being God and making us one with your people throughout the world, we thank you now and always.

All: We make our thanksgiving prayer through Christ, our Lord, Amen.