

The miracles that take place as you eat together.

When we had our kids living with us the evening meal was a bit of a ritual. We would prepare food and all of us sit together and eat. Our family dinners became something akin to legend. People were requesting to come to ours for dinner as well as us inviting people to come.

The reason was nothing was off topic. We'd talk about everything. But it was a fun time as well. I remember the time I told my kids my "real job". It was a bonding time as well. We conducted family business. We talked about our day – what we did, who we saw, and our conversations. It was an enlightening time! To this day dinners together are fun! It was a bit of the glue that held our family together in tough times. Still does as Denise and I cook together and eat together.

We love eating with others too. Over the past few months we invited a number of folks to come and enjoy a meal together. In restaurants and at our home. It's been good. No agendas just good food, great wine and time together. Getting to know each other and them to see us up close. Always a great time. I love seeing people enjoy their food.

Not sure how this all plays out in your lives, your families and with your friends. Maybe your life is too busy with work, with kids and with other responsibilities. Maybe your week has been under siege because of shift work. Maybe you're so busy you eat in your car. Maybe your habit is for everyone to just grab some food and exit to bedrooms or to sit and watch TV. Maybe you evenings are dominated by Deliveroo and you eat separately. Maybe it was never a great time with your parents and so you've simply followed a habit set in stone for decades. Of course it could be you feel you're not a great cook and feel a bit embarrassed by your cooking. That's ok you can develop this skill with a little help from Jamie, Heston and the Hairy Bikers.

The bible says a lot about eating together. The bible seems to indicate that eating together is more spiritual than we at first thought. In God's word there are a number of times when eating together meet spiritual needs and facilitated spiritual goals.

Hospitality is an important subject in scripture. **Acts 28: 7 - 10**, "There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. His father was ill in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of those on the island who were ill came and were cured. They honoured us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed."

1. Welcomed us to his home
2. Showed us generous hospitality
3. There were needs in his family and Paul met those needs
4. Simple hospitality brought out spiritual fruit.
5. Eating together with your guest gives honour to them – there is an important spiritual need being met

Romans 12: 13 simply says, "Practise hospitality."

Romans 16: 23 speaks of a person whose hospitality became famous. "Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy."

Hebrews 13: 2 encourages us to show hospitality to strangers, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."

- Eating together shows an acceptance towards others.
- Eating together is a special sacrifice of cooking and preparing food for those who sit at your table. Cooking and preparing food shows thoughtfulness and understands there was a price to pay in pounds and in time.
- Food shows an openness to others like a warm embrace or an open hand of greeting and welcome. There is nothing more exciting than being invited to a friend's house walking in and smelling the glorious food your about to eat. Together.
- Eating together is about laughing together, talking together, sharing secrets and sharing personal things.
- A dinner table is a symbol of a place to parle and make closer a friendship.
- A dinner table is a place to get to know someone better. To dispel wrong ideas and thoughts about the other.
- You see someone when they cook for you and you hear differently when you're eating together.

Dinner parties are about to be launched in our church this next week. Their purpose is...

1. Acknowledge the biblical principle of eating together. **Acts 2:46 – 47**. "They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple ***followed by meals at home***, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved."
2. Eating together is an opportunity for your friends to see a Christian up close and personal.
3. Eating together shows the love and acceptance of Jesus to people around us.
4. Eating together is an easy invitation and after a while a simple next step is an invite to church.
5. Everyday their numbers grew as God added to the church

Inviting someone is an important first step – then finding a date that suits 4 to 8 people!! Ha!!

One of my most significant lunch experiences was back in 2003 when I invited Phil to my house along with the Christian Union group to come and make a presentation to our church. The rest is history! **Phil come and join me. Tell us about that afternoon.**

As I shared last Sunday morning, that meal changed my life. As you said, we'd just made a presentation on behalf of the Christian Union about an upcoming mission week. Or desire was to reach our campus in a relevant way. I remember you began to share about your vision to do the same, but with church – to present church in a way that would speak to my generation, that would allow people my age to connect with Jesus. I was so inspired by that prospect that I emailed you afterwards to say that if there was anything I could do to help, to let me know. And as you said, the rest is history!

Reflecting back now, I can see how the elements you're mentioned tonight made such a difference that day. Sharing a meal together allowed the time and space for you to share your vision, but it also provided a forum for us to connect – an opportunity to get to know each other. There was much that was communicated by the invite too. I think your hospitality was so significant. You didn't just invite us to your church - you invited us into your home. That meant a lot. As did knowing the time and effort involved in preparing the food; plus it showed generosity. I think those elements set up a significant conversation, a powerful conversation.

What are some of your most powerful meals together others?

I think any meal that facilitates a deeper connection can be a powerful meal – not just one that adjusts your course in life necessarily, even just one that deepens a friendship or expands a friendship group can be significant. One example that springs to mind is at a colleague's wedding recently. I was sat on

a table with a bunch of colleagues from work. We had a great time together. But was an insightful time too. We actually shared a lot about our lives – we talked about our backgrounds, our future plans, our aspirations for career and family. These were people I see all the time, but the shift in context, and the shared meal, brought a different dimension to the relationship – one which still holds significance today.

Another example that sticks in my mind was from while I was convalescing at home after I broke my leg. Rene kindly came round to cook dinner. It was so thoughtful of him to take that time out. The food was fantastic. But so was the time together. We shared very openly and honestly. It was eye-opening and inspiring and challenging. It was the kind of chat that went beyond what was possible on a Sunday. You and Denise kindly fed Helena and I over that time too – which was very much appreciated.

I think a shared meal has the potential to both deepen existing friendships and spark new ones. It can help shift someone from a casual acquaintance toward true friendship. It can turn someone you kind of know into someone you really connect with. My wife is actually really good at this. I remember going to my work Christmas meal one year. She connected with everyone present, but struck up a particularly lengthy conversation with my boss. To see how she went from not knowing that person at all to really connecting with them was significant too.

Helena come and join us. How does eating together with others develop your understanding of them?

- It is something to DO - rather than just sitting round in a room hoping that you find something to talk about. It creates a forum for conversation to get to know people.
- When there is food involved there is always something to talk about if the conversation dries up!
- Food is also a key part of people's culture. Each nation or culture has their typical dishes. We can learn a lot about people's background and about them by the kind of food they like to eat, like to cook, what they grew up eating etc. Like Phil mentioned with when Rene came round to ours and cooked us Arepas (venezuelan street food) we got to know more about him through this. We cooked and ate it together and I feel like I learnt more about him and the culture he has come from.
- I think it is one of the best fora to promote friendships. If you think about it, in normal life when you are getting to know people or socialising it often revolves around some sort of eating or drinking right? When we are building friendships we DO something together and often this is food. I'm sure many people here would have been for brunch with NCT mums, dinner with work colleagues, coffee or a beer with friends from uni etc It all helps provide a forum for conversation and friendships to develop. Its a great common ground - everyone needs to eat!
- You mentioned that eating together shows acceptance. Acceptance opens people up to share more about themselves, get a better understanding of who they are and then also perhaps let other people in to their lives.
- Ultimately, with this new venture in to dinner parties as a church, we want to help people's world's collide in the most natural and organic way possible. For their church friends and their non-church friends to meet and get to know each other. I think the best way for this is through eating together.

Meals with our churched and unchurched friends have the possibility of turning into a spiritual moment of them hearing from the first time a message about Jesus from someone they know and trust.

Invitation – is crucial. People won't just rock up to church without one, people are not going to wake up one morning and think to themselves "I think I'll go to church today."

Psalms 22:26, "I will invite the poor and broken, and they will come and eat until satisfied." Spiritual poverty is at an epidemic high in society. People are hungry for spiritual truth and don't know where to find it. They are looking for trustworthy people to inform them.

People are searching for spiritual truth and seeking meaning to life. Not always first in their priorities but it is high. People are more aware of their own brokenness, loneliness and spiritual hunger that ever before. We have the answer to their search. His name is Jesus.
The call – then go into the atrium for desert.