

ALL THE BELIEVERS DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES' TEACHING, AND TO FELLOWSHIP, AND TO SHARING IN MEALS ... AND TO PRAYER.

- Acts 2:42 (NLT)



magine a long, beautifully prepared table where everyone has a seat. You find your name card and sit between two people you've never met before. The cutlery glistens in the light of flickering candelabras as slow murmurs of conversation begin. After awkward introductions, bread is broken and passed around. Soon, laughter and easy conversation flow.

As you eat, the French woman beside you tells a story about her young daughter's first day of school and how she cried while waving her little one off.

Over dessert, the man on your other side talks about growing up in **Ghana, West Africa**. He says he remembers the smell of home — cocoa and bonfire smoke — and tells you how much he misses it.

You share your story, too, finding it easier than you anticipated to tell two strangers your thoughts and feelings, your hopes and dreams.

It's odd: Even though you've just met them, no one here feels like a stranger.

This is the table. This is the kingdom of God at work.

Scripture is God's beautiful invitation to all of humanity to come to his table. Through Jesus, we have a seat at this table — but not because we've earned it.

As Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us: "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it" (NLT).

Even though God sent the invitation out to all, some people don't know they've been invited to his table. That's where we come in.

We invite you to explore what it means to be part of the kingdom of God; we'll take a look at some unique table "decor" that symbolizes the ways God sees us participating in his kingdom here on earth.

Pull up your chair, and let's begin!

- » Who's one person you'd love to have dinner with?
- » How does it feel to know you've been invited to the table of God's kingdom?
- » Think about one person in your life who doesn't yet know they're loved by God and invited to the table. How can you pray for him or her this week?

G L O B E



JUST AS YOU SENT ME INTO THE WORLD, I AM SENDING THEM INTO THE WORLD.

— John 17:18 (NLT)

when you travel? Maybe you enjoy bringing back handmade gifts like jewelry or clothing, or you might prefer souvenirs in the form of food.

One of the best things about traveling is that when we return home, we bring a piece of the place we visited with us and get to share it with others!

We can get glimpses of the kingdom of heaven when we allow ourselves the chance to experience cultures that differ from ours — when we eat different foods, engage with people who speak different languages and learn from their experiences.

God values each and every one of the approximately 7,000 languages in the world. In fact, Scripture tells us that someday the kingdom of heaven will be filled with people from every spoken and signed language on earth, praising God (Revelation 7:9-10). What an amazing picture!

The kingdom of heaven is vast and diverse. And our call as followers of Christ on earth is to be reflections of the kingdom of God. Regardless of whether you'd use the word to describe yourself, you're a missionary. Your life is a testimony to God's goodness and faithfulness to your family, neighbors, friends, coworkers and really anyone God puts in your path!

What are you doing with your global calling?

- » If you could travel to any country in the world right now, where would you go?
- » What have you learned from interacting with someone whose culture is different from yours?
- » What's one way that you can step outside of your cultural comfort zone? (We have a few ideas on how to live cross-culturally if you're stuck!)

WASH BASIN

AND SINCE I, YOUR LORD AND TEACHER, HAVE WASHED YOUR FEET, YOU OUGHT TO WASH EACH OTHER'S FEET.

— John 13:14 (NLT)

ometimes in a wedding ceremony in the U.S., the bride and groom will take part in a tradition demonstrating unity — they'll light a candle, take communion together or pour two different kinds of sand into a jar to represent their two lives becoming one.

You might even attend a ceremony in which the bride and groom choose to wash one another's feet. This act is a demonstration that each spouse promises to serve the other with humility, just as Christ did.

God demonstrates his value for humility by reminding us that at the table, no seat is better than any other.

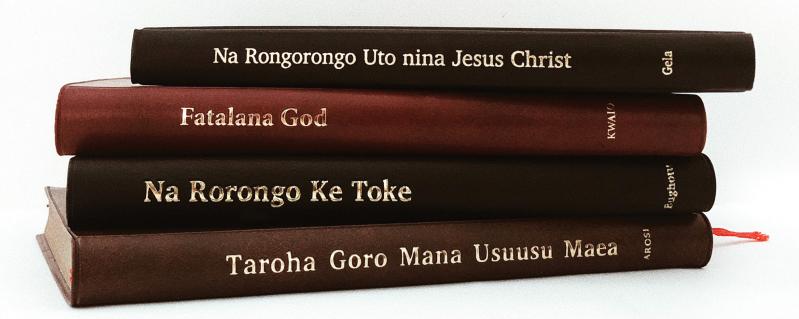
There is no hierarchy in the kingdom of God. We're all equal — our accomplishments, accolades, education and status all fade when we're face-to-face with our Creator.

Those who belong to the kingdom of God exhibit humility. But true humility is self-sacrificial and we can struggle to obtain it because our natural inclination is that of self-preservation and achievement.

So God often allows circumstances or people (or both!) to humble us. Think about ways you've seen him do that in your life and what he's taught you about his character and kingdom.

- » How would you define "humility"?
- » Why do you think humility is an important trait of those who belong to God's kingdom?
- » Who's one person in your life who demonstrates Christ-like humility?

B I B L E



THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT LANGUAGES IN THE WORLD, AND EVERY LANGUAGE HAS MEANING.

− 1 Corinthians 14:10 (NLT)

ave you ever tried to communicate with someone who didn't use the same language as you?

It can be a comical experience at first — each person wildly gesturing to items, like trying to play a game of charades. But the longer you don't feel understood, the more your frustration will likely grow. Neither you nor the person you're attempting to communicate with are at fault — you simply don't express yourselves using the same language.

With at least 7,000 languages in the world today, you're bound to meet people who prefer a different language than you! God created and knows each of those languages. To sit down at the table of his kingdom is to rub elbows with someone from Papua

New Guinea who speaks Mekeo, a Deaf sign language speaker from Romania or a woman who speaks her Peruvian language of Napo Quechua. Earth is filled with languages, and they all matter to God (1 Corinthians 14:10).

People form a relationship with God through his Word when they have it in a language or form they understand. 1 Corinthians 14:9b says it this way: "If you speak to people in words they don't understand, how will they know what you are saying? You might as well be talking into empty space" (NLT).

Our call, as followers of Christ, is to share the gospel with others. That looks like meeting people where they are and introducing them to the God who speaks their language.

- » What language do you wish you could speak?
- » Who are some people who have helped to shape and grow your faith?
- » How is your life different because you have access to the Bible in your own language?

T H EFISHING NET

AGAIN, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A FISHING NET THAT WAS THROWN INTO THE WATER AND CAUGHT FISH OF EVERY KIND.

- *Matthew 13:47 (NLT)*

for bedtime stories about adventures and make-believe worlds.

As we grew, we never really stopped wanting to tell or hear stories. We still talk about our travel adventures and recount how we met our significant others. We read books and watch movies. No matter who we are or where we come from, it seems that we all share a universal love of story.

So it's no surprise that Jesus often told stories and used vibrant imagery.

Living in an agrarian culture, Jesus often related to his listeners by using metaphors about farming or fishing. People understood the imagery. In Matthew 13:47, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a fishing net.

Jesus' imagery of a net was purposeful and not just to relate to the people or culture. It was meant to connect with us too. Picture a net with vast and intricate webbing. A net like this catches all kinds of fish.

The kingdom of God isn't just for people who are elsewhere; it's also for people in your communities and neighborhoods who might feel like outsiders. It's for people from broken homes, for those who are grieving and for those who've been rejected. As followers of Christ, we have the privilege of reminding people that they've been created in the image of God and pointing them to his great invitation of salvation.

Are you casting a "wide net" in your own life?

- » If Jesus was going to use a parable to speak to you today, what kind of imagery do you think he'd use?
- » Why's it important for you to cast a wide net?
- » Think about people you know who are considered "outsiders." How could God use you to show them love today?



AND THOUGH WE ARE MANY, WE ALL EAT FROM ONE LOAF OF BREAD, SHOWING THAT WE ARE ONE BODY.

− 1 Corinthians 10:17 (NLT)

very Thursday on social media, people around the world post photos and tag them #ThrowbackThursday (or #tbt).

These might be photos from a person's childhood or memories that were captured as recently as a few weeks ago. The point in posting something with #ThrowbackThursday is to remember — to think about where we've been and how we've grown and changed along the way.

It's in our nature to want to share stories and memories with those around us. Doing this helps us see how far we've come. Communion is just as much a celebration as it is a solemn act of remembrance. When we

take communion together, we have the opportunity to rejoice in the life we have through Jesus. That celebratory act connects us as a body of believers.

1 Corinthians 10:17 reminds us that " ... Though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body" (NLT). Communion helps us recognize that we're bonded together through Jesus, and he's why we each have a place in the kingdom.

When we participate in communion as a community, we're able to reflect on all that God has brought us through while also pointing each other to the eternal freedom, hope and joy that Jesus' life and sacrifice brings!

- » What's one of your favorite childhood memories?
- » Have you ever thought about communion as an act of worship? Why or why not?
- » Think about a recent trial or difficult experience.
 How did you see others demonstrate God's love and compassion to you?



hink about the last time you gathered around a table and shared a meal with those close to you.

Maybe it was a birthday celebration with cake and laughter. It could've been a dinner with friends where you passed around tapas and traded stories. Maybe it was a candlelit date with your significant other and some crème brûlée.

The table is a reflection of God's kingdom, reminding us that we each have a place and that it's God's design for us to sit, share meals and worship together.

Scripture contains God's invitation for us to join the table. His plan for salvation, love, truth and goodness spills over every page and story. Many of us already know that we've been invited to participate in a story bigger than ourselves.

But what about those who don't know they've been invited?

Romans 10:14-15a asks, "But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent?" (NLT).

God's prepared a beautiful feast. Christ is seated at the table, inviting all to sit and dine with him. Those of us who've been given the Word and received it are called to be Jesus' ambassadors to deliver the invitations. We get to invite people to the table and point them to the host of the best dinner party in history.

The kingdom of heaven is for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord and accepts his invitation.

You have been invited.

Who are you going to invite?

- » Think about a time you heard about a party you weren't invited to. How did it make you feel?
- » In what ways have you experienced God's table?
- » What's one way you can help invite those who are waiting for God's Word in a language and form they can understand?

