



WHATEVER
happened
TO DINNER?
Recipes and Reflections for Family Mealtime

Study Guide
by
Melodie M. Davis



Introduction: Whatever Happened to Dinner?

SCRIPTURE:

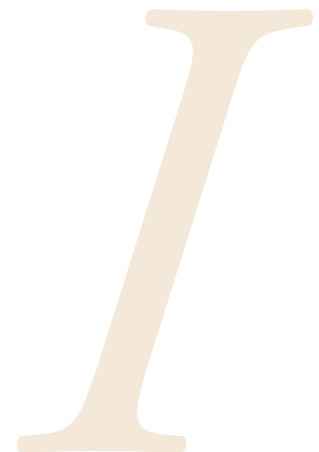
Exodus 12:31-39

Think about how you would have felt leaving your home of many years under the conditions described in Exodus 12. What three things would you want to take along if leaving your home suddenly and forever? If this had happened to your ancestors (and maybe it did), how would you hear this passage? What memories would it stir up?

1. How does affluence detract from family mealtime?
2. How does poverty detract from family mealtime?
3. Share and discuss your family of origin's normal meal structures. Who did the cooking? Were children expected to help prepare and get meals on the table? Who cleaned up?
4. Compare those patterns to your patterns today. Are they different or similar?
5. What are some of your most-treasured memories of family mealtime?
6. How many hours a week did your parents work? How many hours a week do you and your spouse work? How long is your commute? How long was your parents commute?
7. How does a car or mass transit contribute to the fracturing of your family life?
8. Do you permit the TV to be on during meals? What about texting or being online via mobile devices?
9. Do you think keeping regular mealtime helps kids avoid drugs, gangs and crime? Why do you think it helps? Why not, if you don't agree (see page 22)?
10. Do you know of families where the opposite came true, where a dedicated family with dinner together every night still had kids who got into drugs? Discuss why this happens.

ACTIVITY:

For one week, keep a meal diary of what meals were fixed (or grabbed), when they were eaten, and what foods were prepared. Compare with group members next week.



Chapter 1: Even Cave Kids Knew What Dinner Was

SCRIPTURE:

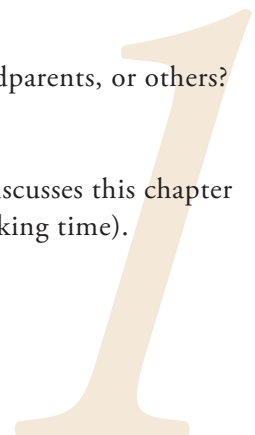
Matthew 13:33

Read this very short scripture passage at least three times, slowly. What strikes you about this parable? What is going on in this passage? Why did Jesus tell it?

1. Think back to your grandparents or great-grandparents. What stories do you know that tell you about their family eating patterns? If you don't know and they are still living, ask about their patterns and customs. Record their stories on video or audio.
2. What is your favorite meal of the day? Why? What makes this meal your favorite? The foods served? The companionship? The solitary time over Bible and study materials?
3. Do you enjoy large group meals at holidays or other occasions? Why or why not?
4. What does having guests do to your meal or fellowship experience?
5. When you think of family eating together, do you think of your immediate family or of a larger group of relatives?
6. How much responsibility do you feel for your larger family? How does that show?
7. Do you think earlier generations had more or less time for dinner? Why? Do you think they worked more hours or do you?
8. If you have lived or worked in countries or settings other than your current one, what did you observe about mealtimes in those places? What did you like or dislike? What can we adapt or learn from those settings?
9. What makes mealtime difficult in your family? How have you worked at that issue?
10. Have you observed uncivilized behavior at the table? How do you work at incorporating good manners and polite behavior? Is politeness overrated?
11. What is your kids' go-to food? What will they always eat?
12. What foods did you like or dislike growing up?
13. How did you fare when visiting friends—did you like their food? What did you do if you didn't?
14. Did you take your lunch to school? Discuss that tradition or memory. Is it nostalgia to think those days were better? What did you like that the school cafeteria fixed? Are the foods served today better or worse nutritionally? Taste wise? Have you ever observed the amount of food wasted in school cafeterias? What can be done about that?
15. How did you learn to like new foods?
16. How can family dinners be like the yeast in Matthew 13:33?
17. Can you recall a favorite blessing for mealtime, from your family, grandparents, or others?

ACTIVITY:

Stir up Jodi's quick honey wheat bread (5 minutes) and bake it while your group discusses this chapter and then enjoy the bread at the end of your time together (55 minutes average cooking time).



Chapter 2: The Family That Gardens Together Eats Together

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 13:3-9

Read the parable of the soil or sower. What is this parable called in your Bible (compare several translations or paraphrases)? Why did Jesus tell it? What do you know about the cultural and religious situation of the day that would have connected with the original hearers? What does it say for your life? How is any effort at spreading God's good news potentially miraculous?

1. Did you enjoy gardening as a child? Do you enjoy it today?
2. Do you agree that teaching children how food grows is important? Why or why not?
3. How does an awareness of how food is grown help families?
4. How can you become more aware of the cycles of nature?
5. What trends have you observed among family and friends regarding an awareness of where food comes from or an appreciation for locally produced food?
6. Is there a thriving farmers' market in your area? How does this help children who have no experience in gardens or farming?
7. Do you observe different food likes and dislikes among your young adult children or other family members today versus when you were their age? What kinds of foods do they like to cook and eat? What can you learn from them? Do they eat more healthful foods than you? What kinds of food did your parents cook?
8. How can you eat more "in season" foods?

ACTIVITY:

For a snack, bring only what foods might be in season. Lacking anything fresh, bring food from someone's freezer or pantry of locally grown foods.



Chapter 3: Work: The Real Enemy of Families



SCRIPTURE:

Luke 12:13-21

Read the parable as a simple readers' theater with someone taking the part of Jesus, the voice in the crowd, the rich fool, and God. With which character do you most identify? (It is okay to identify with Jesus or God in the sentiments expressed.) What is God saying to you through this passage?

1. Use the questions on pages 62–63 as the basis for discussion in the first part of this chapter.
2. What do you think is the real enemy of family life? What threatens you the most?
3. How much does culture impact your family?
4. An Old Order or Amish bishop might caution his church not to rub shoulders too much with neighbors and acquaintances who are not Old Order. What do you think of this? How we can strike a balance with children in terms of protecting them from influences that draw them away from Christian faith while not totally withdrawing from the world?

ACTIVITY:

List your family's weekly or monthly "extra" commitments: clubs, athletics, exercise, church committees, meetings, lessons. Beside each item, list how much time you spend each week or month traveling to these activities. Add up the time. Are you happy with this amount of activity? Would you like to do more or less? Discuss as a family or group.



Chapter 4: Eating on the Run—Taking Charge of “Fast” Food

SCRIPTURE:

Mark 6:30-44

Read this well-known passage aloud and focus your thinking on who learned the most from this miracle. The crowd or the disciples? How would you have felt if you were a disciple? Do you think the crowd even knew what happened? How does this story speak to you about reliance on God supplying our needs? What is God saying to us about our seeming need to follow the culture to even more activities and involvements that take us away from home?

1. How much time do you spend in the car (or other transportation) each day or each week?
2. How much of that time is spent ferrying kids to activities? Are there activities where you wouldn't really need to go every time?
3. Make a list of all the activities and involvements that were made possible by the invention of the car. How would your life be different if you drove a buggy? What if you only used a bicycle, walked, or used public transportation—would it change your life? Discuss.
4. What are your first memories of eating out? Of fast food?
5. What traditions or activities stand out to you about eating with your family of origin on vacations or excursions?
6. Visualize a family excursion or vacation spot from your childhood. Where did you eat? What was your favorite place? What smells come back to you?
7. What ideas do you have for succumbing less often to the lure of fast food?

ACTIVITY:

For one month, keep track of how many times you eat out or away from home. You can also consider adding up the calories or costs of these experiences. What is surprising? Would you like to eat out less or more? Discuss as a family or in the group.



Chapter 5: Comfort Foods and Memories: Macaroni and Cheese and Saturday Night Hamburgers

SCRIPTURE:

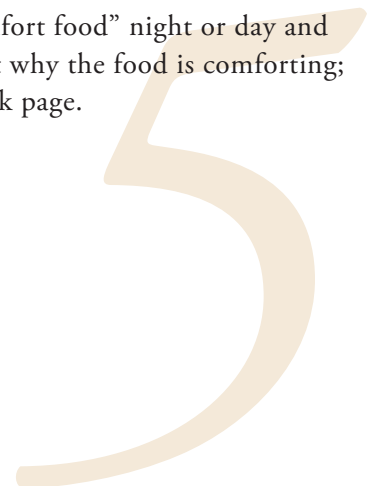
Genesis 25:24-34

*h*ave you ever given up a godly blessing for quick satisfaction, as Esau did in this chapter? Think of examples when we all do this. What can we learn from Esau's somewhat dysfunctional family? Is it any comfort to realize that their dysfunctional family was still used for God's purposes and remembered down through the ages for faith and steadfastness in following God's ways? What does that say to you in your family situation?

1. Is there any food or meal that you have delicious memories of from childhood but found disappointing when you experienced it again as an adult?
2. What did you eat as a child that you wouldn't eat now? What have you learned to like as an adult?
3. What foods do you crave? How do you deal with such cravings? If you've ever been pregnant, was there a food you craved?
4. Are you addicted to certain foods? Is that as bad as being addicted to cigarettes or alcohol? Why or why not?
5. What is your favorite comfort food and why do you find it comforting? Do you eat when depressed? Why or why not?
6. Do you have good memories of Thanksgiving, Christmas, or birthday meals? What makes them special? Is it the food or the people?
7. Do you have a regular weekly menu in your family? How did it become a tradition?
8. Are there any traditions you tried to carry over from your family of origin that didn't work for your own kids? How did you handle it?
9. Ponder why food is comforting. What do you think? Do you ever use food as solace when you've argued?
10. Have you ever offered food to your kids when they were disappointed or sad? Why is that good or bad?

ACTIVITY:

Set a time when your small group or Sunday school class can have a "comfort food" night or day and each bring one dish of favorite comfort food. Bring a story to share about why the food is comforting; write up the story and post on the *Whatever Happened to Dinner* Facebook page.



Chapter 6: Making Dinner Work



SCRIPTURE:

Luke 10:38-42

*d*o you like this story? Does it make you feel guilty or smug? With whom do you identify? Do you wish you would be more like Mary or Martha? How can you change? How does this apply to more than making meals or doing housework?

1. Is family dinner worth keeping and working to maintain? Why or why not?
2. Do you think having a family business or being your own boss makes it easier or tougher to keep and establish family mealtimes?
3. Have you ever staged a “cook’s rebellion” where you served just crackers and cheese, bread, or cereal to kids who refused to try new things?
4. How does the story of Martha and Mary apply to your own setting? What would happen if we were all Mary’s, every evening? Who would cook? What is the point of the story?
5. How do we make time for the “better things” while still getting necessary work done? What is necessary work? Who defines it for your family?
6. Who does most of the cooking in your home? Are all parties happy with that arrangement? How do you best use everyone’s skills and time? Do you teach boys and girls to cook?

ACTIVITY:

Decide whether you will sign up for the six month challenge to “Make Dinner Work” at the Facebook page for this book. If you do, make plans to follow through.

And/or: Pick a “Supper Surprise Night” activity from this chapter, selecting as a family from which possible “surprises” you will draw. When the meal you are fixing is nearing completion, draw out what your surprise will be and finish fixing the table in whatever manner the surprise indicates.



Chapter 7: So What If Dinner Isn't Picture-Perfect?

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 19:1-10

*W*hy did Jesus want to go to Zacchaeus' house (we presume Zacchaeus fed him, too)? What did the self-invite signify? How can you be open to hosting guests from different countries, income levels, lifestyles, political persuasions, or religions? What if others consider your guests to be "sinners" or "lost"? What does the story of Zacchaeus say to this situation?

1. What bad or sad memories do you have of mealtime?
2. Have you disciplined children at the table? With what results? Have you ever made children sit at the table until they tried a food? How do you handle cell phones or texting at the table?
3. Have you noticed signs of a food disorder, or have you dealt with a food disorder, in your family? What does that do to family mealtime?
4. What ideas do you have to focus more on the relationships and fun in a family gathering and not as much on the food or a perfect table?
5. Have you ever decided to spend a holiday away from extended family? Why? How did that work out?
6. Do you have different political or religious opinions in your extended family? How does that affect holiday mealtimes and what can you do about it? How do you deal with differences?
7. How can you be more thankful for the blessings you have?
8. What are your special holiday foods or traditions? Share with each other.

ACTIVITY:

Have each group member bring a photo from a holiday or family meal, either a photo of their current family or their family of origin. Ask each one to share what was going on in the photo, what was really going on (the undercurrents of who argued with whom), and a bit about the particular personalities and quirks of those in the picture.



Chapter 8: Eat My Grits! The Kitchen Culture Wars

SCRIPTURE:

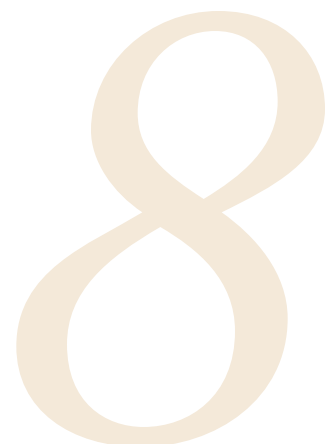
1 Samuel 25:1-44

Read this passage silently (since it is long). What stands out as you read this story? Do you remember reading it before? Read or reread the paraphrase from the book, pages 126–27, to better understand what is going on in the story. How did God use Abigail? Was there ever a time when you felt God used you to keep the peace? Share.

1. How do you know when a dish is not going over with your spouse or family? How do you feel? How can you not feel personally rejected?
2. How do your family's regional differences or backgrounds affect food likes and dislikes?
3. Have you ever felt you were serving a "peace meal" like Abigail's? Share.
4. What does cooking together in community groups do for you, your family, or community? Do you enjoy it? Can you cook or work well in that setting or do you enjoy cooking by yourself the most?
5. Do you enjoy helping children learn to cook or do you prefer doing it yourself? How can you learn patience for teaching kids to cook?
6. Do you and your spouse cook together? Does that work? Why or why not? Share tips for making it work.
7. Have you experienced the joy of community cooking? Tell why.

ACTIVITY:

Plan for an experience of cooking a meal together as a group in the next month. Go to the home of a group member for this. When finished with the meal and clean up, discuss the experience. What went well? What did you like or dislike? What did you learn?



Chapter 9: Snowball Cake, Coffee Cookies, and Other Cooking Disasters

SCRIPTURE:

Exodus 16:1-32

*W*hat does the manna story teach us about food? About God's provision? What does it teach us about human nature to always complain? In what ways would you like to learn to be happier with what you have been given?

1. Did you or your family ever make a major mistake cooking? Share about such a time. Has this become a good memory or a sore point in your family?
2. What do you remember about learning to cook? How have you taught your children to cook? Did your mom or dad allow you to help in the kitchen?
3. Could your son or daughter cook a complete meal at age 12?
4. One of the Sachs' children (story in chapter 9) had severe allergies and always baked her own gluten-free cupcakes to take to other kids' birthday parties. How can you help your children be responsible for their own food needs?
5. How can you teach cleaning up and organizing skills to go along with cooking?
6. Do you think it is important to help children learn to cook?
7. What was one of your favorite things to bake or cook as a child?
8. Did you ever have a truly bad or frustrating experience with kids cooking—the kind of experience you never want to repeat? (See Jodi's gingerbread cookie story with her recipe, page 148.) What did you learn?

ACTIVITY:

Consider planning a “learn to cook” night or “let's make cookies night” for families with young children at your church. If your group is older, invite the children of the church (or a particular age group if your church is large) to an evening of fun and fellowship with the goal of making two or more batches of cookies to keep or share. Their parents get a free night of childcare and you get to know the children of your church. Organize and plan carefully so there won't be complete chaos!

If your group is currently parenting youngsters, the goal would still be the same, to have a communal cookie baking night and then swap batches of cookies so everyone takes home several different kinds of cookies for their freezer. This could be before Christmas or any time you feel like it!



Chapter 10: Getting Kids to Like Okra and Moo Goo Gai Pan

SCRIPTURE:

Genesis 18:1-15

Read this familiar story aloud. Read it again, slower. Talk about what stood out for you or stopped your thoughts. With whom do you identify? Have you ever responded with a lack of faith to an opportunity that presented itself? Share stories. What did you learn?

1. Do you have picky eaters? Were you a picky eater? Share stories and memories.
2. How do you encourage children to try new foods? What works? What doesn't work?
3. Why is it important to expand the palates of children?
4. How has the food culture changed in your town or city in the last twenty years?
5. Do you agree that our culture dumbs down foods for children (see page 152)?
6. Have you observed whether parental expectations related to children's food likes and dislikes seem to affect kids' own tastes? Why do kids become picky eaters or are they born that way? How can you keep from making food a battleground?
7. How have you dealt with unexpected company? Are you open to sharing hospitality on the spur of the moment, or only when you've cleaned the house and prepared a meal in advance?
8. How can instant hospitality become a gift you are more able to give?

ACTIVITY:

Plan an evening or Sunday lunch out at a restaurant offering different fare than you normally cook, whether it is Thai, Indian, Cuban, Chinese, or whatever. Have group members try at least one new dish that they don't remember ever trying before. Share likes and dislikes along with learnings. If children are involved, have them promise to do the same thing if they want to go along. Is it easier and more fun to try things "on a dare" from a group, especially for children?

10

Chapter 11: Eating All Day for the Price of One Grande Caffè Latte

SCRIPTURE:

1 Kings 17:7-24

What do you like about this story? Did you ever find yourself in a similar situation, or know anyone who did? Did you ever help someone who didn't have any food, and what did that mean to you? How can you be more aware of "widows" such as the one whom Elijah helped?

1. Review the list of foods on pages 163–64. What items do you want to consider cutting back from or eliminating?
2. How much do you think you are affected by the lifestyles of those around you regarding your food choices: what you buy, eat, or where you eat out? Do you go to the trendy places even though they are beyond your budget?
3. If you subscribe to a simple lifestyle, how does it affect your entertainment choices (eating out is often entertainment)?
4. How can your family (including children) get to the place where cutting back leads to sharing more with others?
5. Sometimes we assume that everyone we know has enough. In a Sunday school class at my church, a teacher made the statement, "None of us have ever really known hunger." A young mother timidly spoke up and said, "Well, yes, I have." She had been divorced; when she was a single mom there were many times when she fed her children and skimmed on food for herself to the point that she was frequently hungry. Do you know anyone who suffers from malnutrition or who doesn't really have enough money for food?
6. What is one idea from this chapter that you want to incorporate into your lifestyle? Or talk about why you don't feel a need to do that or why you don't like this idea.
7. What additional ideas do you have for frugality?
8. Are the recipes in this chapter truly frugal? (The food editors struggled with that question.) What recipes or dishes do you make that don't cost much money?
9. How do you creatively use leftovers?
10. Did you ever substitute something in a recipe that turned out better than expected?
11. Do you run to the grocery store, change menus, or change a recipe when you discover that you are out of something? Does it matter?
12. A number of recipe "stories" end with the description, "I often take this to church potlucks and rarely have any left" (page 173 and many others). Is this the mark of a good cook? A badge of pride? Discuss your feelings.
13. Do you ever experience guilt or feeling left out when your dish is not readily consumed at a church potluck? How can you make people in your church or group feel welcome, included, and not as second-rate participants if they bring food from a deli or straight out of a store?

ACTIVITY:

Pick five ways from the list in this chapter to realistically cut back and save money. Put the saved money aside for some agreed-upon helping project for your community, church, or family.

Or, pair up with a friend or group member to swap leftovers once a week (like Jodi and Carmen did as they cooked their way through this book; see preface).

Chapter 12: How Food, Packaging, and Waste Impact the Planet: What You Can Do

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 15:29-39

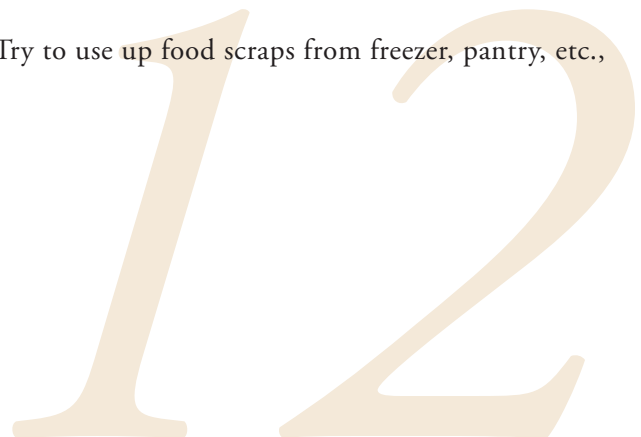
Compare and contrast this story of a miracle feeding with the one studied in chapter 4 (Mark 6:30-44). How is it different or alike? What do you think happened to the leftovers? Did you ever focus on that before studying this story?

1. We assume you don't literally litter. Yet how much garbage does your household contribute to landfills or other disposal systems every week?
2. Do you recycle? Why or why not?
3. How did you parents or grandparents dispose of garbage?
4. Have you lived or worked in a country other than the United States or Canada? How was garbage and trash disposed of there?
5. Discuss the impact of the economy in your community. Are your streams and other bodies of water affected by the inability of local governments to adequately repair sewer or water systems?
6. While God's power was no doubt at work in the feeding of the multitudes by supplying a bounty of food, the disciples also helped Jesus accomplish the miracle. What is our role in helping now with the miracle(s) needed to change attitudes and lifestyles related to waste and the environment?
7. How are you "taking care of the earth" or being a steward of the resources God has given you?
8. How do you creatively use leftovers?
9. Would you be bothered by a chicken coop next door to you in the city or suburbs? Why or why not?

ACTIVITY:

One church held a community clean-up day—ranging from floating down a river to pick up garbage along its sides to a sewing group that made reusable grocery or shopping bags out of cloth remnants. Does this chapter and discussion inspire your group to take action? If so, make plans for what you will do.

Or, have a leftover night for your group or family. Try to use up food scraps from freezer, pantry, etc., without buying anything new.



Chapter 13: Why You Don't Eat Ham with Your Fingers at a Banquet

SCRIPTURE:

John 2:1-11

This story is often remembered as the first miracle story in the Bible. Jesus changed water to wine. What can you learn anew by focusing on the art of hospitality as illustrated in this parable? How is hospitality an expression of your Christian faith? How does it involve the concepts of sharing and community? Why is hospitality more than just about a Martha Stewart table?

1. Have you ever been embarrassed by your children's manners? Or your own?
2. Do you enjoy having company? How is extending hospitality important for Christians? Maybe cloth napkins and china is not your style, but what is? Share your experiences.
3. What are your rules or expectations for family mealtime? Have you ever discussed them in a calm, rational time rather than the heat of the moment? Discuss the difference in results between these two approaches.
4. How do you encourage friendly family table conversation?
5. What unspoken lessons have your children picked up from you—or could if you are not careful?
6. Have you ever run out of food for guests? This is a major stressor for some people when they invite guests. How did you handle it?
7. Have you ever lived in a culture where a wedding went on for days or a week or more? What did you observe and learn about hosts and guests and hospitality?

ACTIVITY:

Have a class party to sample foods. Group members should try making a sample-sized treat or food they haven't tried before. Bring enough for everyone to taste. Or go to www.ShapingFamilies.com and check the archives of recipes there for new ideas.

13

Chapter 14: Waiting for the “Ping”: The Joys of Preserving Foods

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 22:19-20

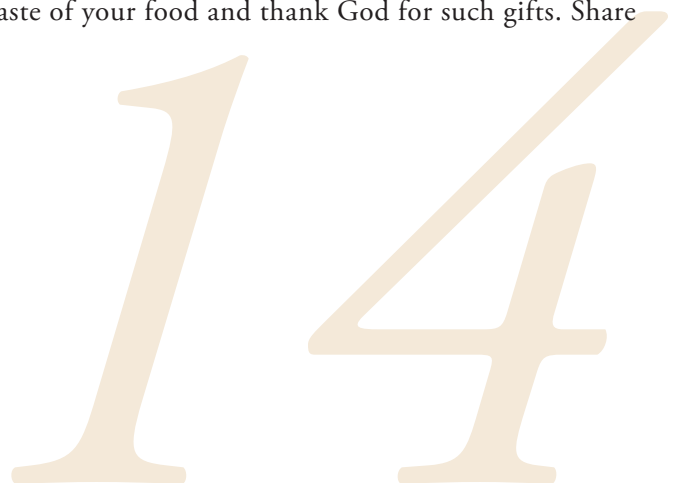
*W*hy do we usually practice communion in a group? What does being with a community of Christian believers mean to you? What do you usually think about when you are taking communion? Why are we asked to examine ourselves before taking this holy meal? Do you do so? How can we be more faithful and honest in doing that?

1. Do you preserve foods? If no, why not? If so, why do you? Have a discussion of practices in your group, without one group or side feeling superior or inferior to the other.
2. What happens to our motivation to eat healthily when a loved one who has eaten super-healthy foods all their life and exercised regularly dies at a too-early age of cancer or heart attack?
3. Any locavores or vegetarians or vegans in your group? Discuss your food lifestyles and why you have chosen to eat the way you do.
4. What was the food lifestyle of the family in which you grew up? How does that compare to your current household?
5. Is preserving foods only for rural people? Why or why not? Discuss expense, time, and benefits of eating locally produced foods versus other factors.
6. If you grow food, what is your favorite crop for harvesting and preserving? What is your least favorite?
7. Why do we usually practice communion in a group? What does being with a community of Christian believers mean to you?

ACTIVITY:

If appropriate, close your group or class on this topic with a simple communion meal. Use the words from pages 212–13 as simple “words of institution” along with reading the Scripture included there. Focus on savoring the taste of the bread and juice. Think about being connected to Jesus and God’s Holy Spirit through this experience.

Or, resolve to fully enjoy each and every bite of your next meal. What kind of focus does that take? Enjoy conversation as well, but truly enjoy the taste of your food and thank God for such gifts. Share experiences with your group.



Chapter 15: Saving Table Grace

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 6:9-15

*i*f you have never studied the Lord's Prayer in depth, consider doing so as a group or class sometime in the future. It contains a wealth of inspiration and teaching packed in so few words. For now, just take apart the phrase "Give us this day our daily bread." Go around the group and assign one word to each person, or to groups of two or three if your group is larger. What all is encompassed with the word "Give"? What comes to mind as you say the word "us," and so on? Each group or individual can study and reflect on just one word for 5–6 minutes. Then share your thoughts.

1. Share stories and memories of table grace practices at your home, both in your family of origin and in your family today. Any funny or tender moments with children praying?
2. Are these practices different for you than when you were growing up? How?
3. Did you or do you observe regular family devotions or Bible reading and prayer? How can you incorporate devotions into your family's practices: once a week, during special seasons of the year (Advent, Lent), or whenever possible?
4. Did you practice table grace while in college or away from home? Do you pray aloud or silently? Do you think this is making a show of prayer? Why or why not?
5. Do you pray before meals in restaurants? At the fast-food window? Why or why not?
6. Do you have bad memories of prayers said at meals? Sermons in the form of prayers? Share if you are willing. Why did some impact you so negatively?
7. Have you ever preached a sermon in a prayer? How can you avoid doing that?
8. Are you comfortable praying aloud in a group? Why or why not?
9. Do you think praying aloud as a family or child helps with that or not?
10. How can a regular family mealtime help your family pray more regularly together? Is it important for Christians? Why or why not?
11. Do you think it is uncivilized to eat without pausing for grace?
12. Do you like to be thanked when you cook a meal or doesn't it matter if people forget? How can you teach children to be more grateful for daily blessings of food and family?
13. Ask your group or yourself the questions on page 229.

ACTIVITY:

Bring or share your favorite grace or blessing. They could be sung or spoken. Sing any new graces to learn them, or have members read aloud any blessings they brought as a way of bringing your study to a close.

