

feed the 5000

St. Mark's Gillingham
Bible Study Notes
2018



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BRINGING GUESTS
HOME
AN ARTICLE

VICAR'S NOTES

REV SAJU MUTHALALY

I hope you are looking forward to 'Feed the 5000'. It is individuals and families at St. Mark's pledging to have either a meal, coffee, afternoon tea, a BBQ, cheese and wine or similar with someone during 2018. Anyone can be fed - a homeless person, a flatmate, a neighbour, someone on your frontline, a refugee, a student in a mountain of debt, a stranger... especially a stranger. Our aim as a church is to feed 5000 people.

The emphasis is on building relationships and learning about each other. Small groups could organise socials. Families may invite individuals or other families to join them for a meal. It could be young inviting not so young, the not so young inviting the young, crossing barriers of age, race and class.

Starting in January and running up to Easter, our focus will be on hospitality in the book of Luke where it seems to me that Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal or coming from a meal! Scholars have commented: 'Jesus ate his way through the Gospels.' Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley even claim: '... they killed him because of the way he ate; because he ate and drank with sinners.'

I do hope you will find these study notes enriching in your walk with Jesus. Since half our church are in small groups and the other half not, these notes are designed to be used either for individual study or in small groups. This term we will also be exploring the purpose and vision of our small groups.

My hope is that many people will encounter the extravagant love of Jesus in our church but also around tables in our homes, as we continue to live out our purpose of living for Jesus, loving Gillingham and learning together.

THREE SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

1) As you begin each study, pray that God will speak to you through his Word.

2) Read and reread the Bible passage to be studied. Each question is designed to help you consider the meaning of the passage.

3) If you journal, write your answers and responses to the questions in a personal journal. Writing out your responses can bring clarity and deeper understanding of yourself and of God's Word.





TEN SUGGESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

1) Come to the study prepared. Follow the suggestions for individual study mentioned above. You will find that careful preparation will greatly enrich your time spent in group discussion.

2) Be willing to participate in the discussion. The facilitator of your group will not be lecturing. Instead, she or he will be asking the questions and encouraging the members of the group to discuss what they have learned.

3) Stick to the topic being discussed. These questions focus on a particular passage of Scripture and our focus as a church this year. This allows for everyone to participate on equal ground and for in-depth study.

4) Be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively when they describe what they have learned. You may be surprised by their insights! Each question assumes a variety of answers. Many questions do not have “right” answers, particularly questions that aim at meaning or application. Instead, the questions push us to explore the passage more thoroughly.

5) When possible, link what you say to the comments of others. Also, be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.

6) Be careful not to dominate the discussion. We are sometimes so eager to express our thoughts that we leave too little opportunity for others to respond. By all means participate! But allow others to also.

7) Expect God to teach you through the passage being discussed and through the other members of the group.

8) Pray that you will have an enjoyable and profitable time together, but also that as a result of the study you will find ways that you can take action individually and/or as a group.

9) Pray for the 5000 people who are being fed this year, that they will encounter the risen Lord Jesus.

10) Be vulnerable. Laugh a lot. Cry a lot. Enjoy each other's company. Love One Another!



Luke 5:27-32

BANQUET AT LEVI'S HOUSE



1) REFLECT on meals in your home. What are those times like? Do family members eat together regularly? What minor changes would allow you to accommodate guests more frequently?

2) READ Luke 5:27-39

3) Who are the characters and what are the points of tension present in the reading?

4) In what ways are verses 31-32 a “mission statement” for Jesus?

5) Luke 5:34 describes a party—the first of many in Luke’s Gospel—and like all Jesus’ parties it is a sign of the new age. It is, for those with eyes to see, a miniature messianic banquet. Luke then attaches to this story a string of short sayings in 5:36-39. How do these sayings reflect how new his kingdom message actually is?

6) The challenge of this passage and the whole fifth chapter is to see where people are living as though the old age was still the norm, as though the new life of the gospel had never burst in upon us. Where in your life do you still live as if the old age was in effect?

7) Looking back over the reading, what would it look like for you to live in the promise of the new kingdom?

8) PRAY Sit in silence for a few moments and ask the Lord to touch you and other members of the group in the light of what we discussed. Pray for the new kingdom and the power of Jesus to reign in this place and in the church.

9) PRAY for our India Engagement Day on Sunday, January 21st, 2018

Luke 7:36-50

DINNER AT SIMON'S HOUSE



1) **SHARE** personal experiences of wonderful hospitality. What were the components? Were you a stranger, guest, or host? Who has made room for you? When have you made room for someone?

2) What are some of your fears or uncertainties about welcoming strangers?

3) **READ** Luke 7:36-50

4) What we think of as “private life” in the modern Western world was largely unknown in Jesus’ time. Doors would often remain open, allowing beggars, extra friends or simply curious passers-by to wander in. So the woman enters, it seems, with the intention of anointing Jesus. What do we learn about Simon, the woman and Jesus in our reading?

5) In what ways does this story reverse the normal expectations of what would happen when God brought in his kingdom?

6) How is hospitality understood in the church today? How does this differ from the biblical accounts? Reflect on the significance of these differences.

7) Describe an incident in which you felt like the outsider (e.g., a visit to the hospital, changing schools, a visit to a foreign land). What reinforced your feelings of separateness? What part of that experience helped you to be more aware of the needs and feelings of strangers in similar situations?

8) Read Exodus 23:9, Leviticus 19:33-34, and Deuteronomy 10:17-19.



9) Discuss the significance of the Israelites' experience of having been vulnerable strangers in someone else's land. Why was it important that they remember their feelings and experiences?

10) PRAY for our Tearfund Sunday and especially our Tearfund partner Saahara. Eight people from the India 2018 team are going to be visiting the Saahara project in Mumbai from 17th -20th April. The 8 people are Helen Standing, Lucy Williams, Terry Whittaker, Lesley Boast, Lucy Wheatley Ann Keene & Saju Muthalaly. Pray for them as they learn, bless and represent us among one of the most vulnerable people in the world.

For information on Saahara, our Tearfund partner, speak to Monica Shergill or Lesley Boast or visit:

<https://connected.tearfund.org/en/partners/sahaara/>

feed the 5000 @ St. Mark's

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WHO ARE
YOU
THINKING
OF
INVITING
IN 2018?

Babette's Feast

A Film Review by Mary Ann Brussat

This Danish film, which won the 1987 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, is based on a short story by Isak Dinesen. Written and directed by Gabriel Axel, this literate and lovely-to-look-at film compels us to meditate upon the needs of the flesh and the needs of the spirit. It is also about choices, talent, gratitude, friendship, grace, and hope.

Martina (Vibeke Hastrup) and Philippa (Hanne Stensgard) live with their father, the Vicar (Pouel Kern), in a small fishing village on Denmark's Jutland peninsula during the late nineteenth century. He is the founder of an austere religious sect that has renounced all earthly pleasures. The sisters are devoted to the Vicar and have remained unmarried. The young women's beauty and purity, however, does not go unnoticed, and two visitors to the community are changed forever by knowing them.

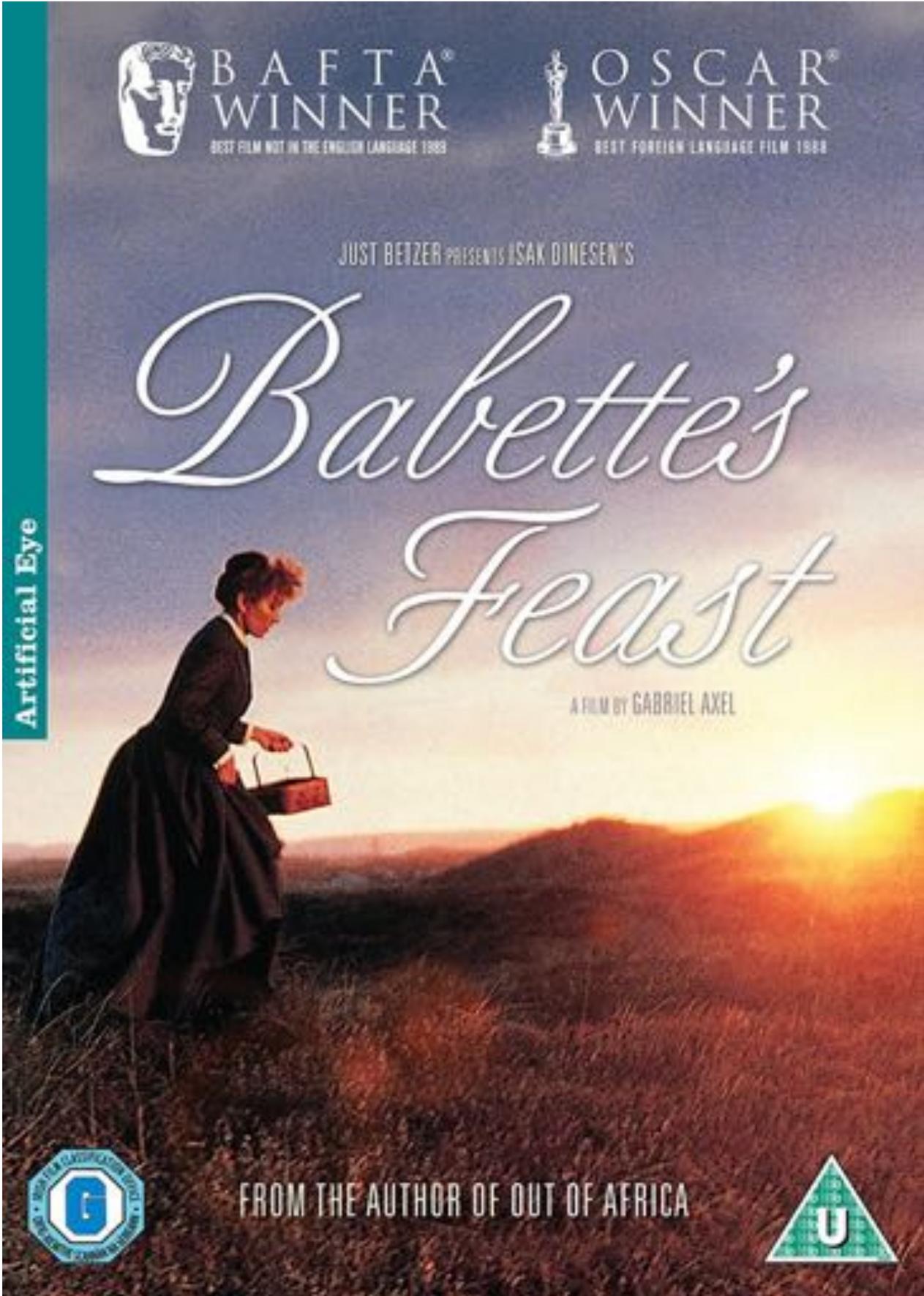
Lorens Lowenhielm (Gudmar Wivesson) is a handsome cavalry officer staying with his aunt in a nearby manor. While out riding, he sees Martina. Infatuated, he gains admittance to the Vicar's prayer circle to be close to her. When Lorens realizes that he can never be accepted, he leaves, telling Martina that "some things are impossible."

After Babette has been there for fourteen years, she receives word from Paris that she has won the lottery. She asks the sisters' permission to use her own money to prepare a "real French dinner" for the upcoming celebration of the anniversary of the Vicar's birth. They agree to grant her this favor, but as the event approaches, they are overcome with doubts, confused about what to expect at the extravagant meal.

With the other members of their group, they decide to avoid temptation and not say a word about the food and drink.

On the day of the celebration, they receive word that Mrs. Lowenhielm will bring her nephew, none other than Lorens. The table is set with china, silver, linen, lace, and candles. Babette has imported from Paris all the ingredients, including a selection of fine wines. While the members of the religious community keep their vow of silence about the meal, Lorens articulates their joy and surprise in Babette's feast.

D. H. Lawrence once stated: "The sense of wonder, that is our sixth sense. And it is a natural religious sense." This film speaks lovingly to all six of your senses.



Artificial Eye

BAFTA®
WINNER
BEST FILM NOT IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE 1989

OSCAR®
WINNER
BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM 1989

JUST BETZER PRESENTS ISAK DINESEN'S

Babettes Feast

A FILM BY GABRIEL AXEL



FROM THE AUTHOR OF OUT OF AFRICA



Luke 10:38-42

HOSPITALITY AT THE HOME OF MARY AND MARTHA



1) The world knows (or should know) what Archbishop Desmond Tutu achieved in South Africa through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. When the racist policies of apartheid ended in South Africa and Nelson Mandela was elected president in the 1990s, the Commission, headed by Tutu, heard white security forces and black guerillas both confess in public their violent and horrific crimes during the repressive period of South Africa's recent history. The fact of such a body even existing, let alone doing the work it has done, is the most extraordinary sign of the power of the Christian gospel in the world in our lifetime. We only have to think for a moment of how unthinkable such a thing would have been twenty-five years before, or indeed how unthinkable such a thing would still be in Beirut, Belfast or (God help us) Jerusalem, to see that something truly remarkable has taken place for which we should thank God in fear and trembling. When barriers are broken down, when those who were previously enemies are reconciled, it is truly a work of God.

What barriers and boundaries do you observe in the culture around us, in our community and even in our church?

2) READ Luke 10:38-42

3) Jesus moves from one boundary-breaking episode with the lawyer to another in the story of Mary and Martha. In Jewish culture to sit at someone's feet meant to be their student, not to exhibit a devoted, doglike adoring posture. (Thus Saul was said to have "sat at the feet of Gamaliel" in Acts 22:3.) To sit at the feet of a rabbi was what you did if you wanted to be a rabbi yourself. In this context of a very traditional culture, why would Martha have found Mary's actions so shocking and objectionable?



4) Jesus affirms Mary's right to be his student. How does this further extend Jesus' agenda of peace, of breaking down barriers between separated groups? What are ways our church can break down the barriers of privilege or tension that might be found between people?

5) When hospitality is viewed as entertainment, the house is never ready. How is entertaining different from making people feel welcome and at home?

6) Imagine designing a home or church that embodies hospitality or makes hospitality easier. What would it look like? What are the dangers of thinking that the only way to offer hospitality is to get it perfect or to make it beautiful?

7) PRAY Spend time in praise over the boundary-breaking call and power of Jesus. Give thanks for the ways in which Jesus has broken barriers in your own life and in our community. Finish by praying for the courage to step out and live out this call on your frontline

8) PRAY this week for the Eritrean church that meets at St. Mark's each Tuesday evening.

Luke 11:1-13

DAILY BREAD



1) Old Testament stories of Abraham and Sarah, Lot, etc., demonstrate the importance of individual hospitality to strangers at one's door. Old Testament law made care for strangers and the poor a communal responsibility. Read Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 14:28-29. Who in the life of Israel needed special care and why? What provisions were made for sojourners?

2) "Strangers, in the strict sense, are those who are disconnected from basic relationships that give persons a secure place in the world. The most vulnerable strangers are detached from family, community, church, and work." Who are such strangers in our neighborhood in Gillingham? Discuss what might be required to help these people find a place.

3) READ Luke 11:1-13.

4) The laws of hospitality in the ancient Middle East were strict, and if a traveler arrived needing food and shelter, one was under an obligation to provide it. There are all sorts of ways in which God is not like the sleepy friend, but on what point of comparison is Jesus focusing?

5) What does the example of God as a father in these verses teach about the character of God?

6) How does the prayer in these verses also describe what Jesus is seeking to accomplish?



7) In the fourth/fifth century John Chrysostom urged members of his congregation, "Make for yourself a guest-chamber in your own house: set up a bed there, set up a table there and a candlestick.... Have a room to which Christ may come; say, `This is Christ's cell; this building is set apart for Him.'" Such a room, according to Chrysostom, is not just for prayer but would be for the "maimed, the beggars, and the homeless" Discuss how viewing our spare rooms or guest rooms as belonging to Christ might affect our decisions about how we pray and whom we welcome and how we welcome them.

8) PRAY. Spend time praying specifically for people you have invited so far or are going to invite in the coming months.

Luke 11:37-52

DINNER AT A PHARISEE'S HOUSE



1) Discuss the images of hospitality we encounter every day. How have these images shaped our understandings of hospitality? In what ways would a Christian understanding of hospitality challenge our regular practices?

2) There are a number of reasons why offering hospitality to strangers can be difficult. Why is it sometimes also difficult to offer hospitality to family, friends, and acquaintances?

3) Luke 11:37-52

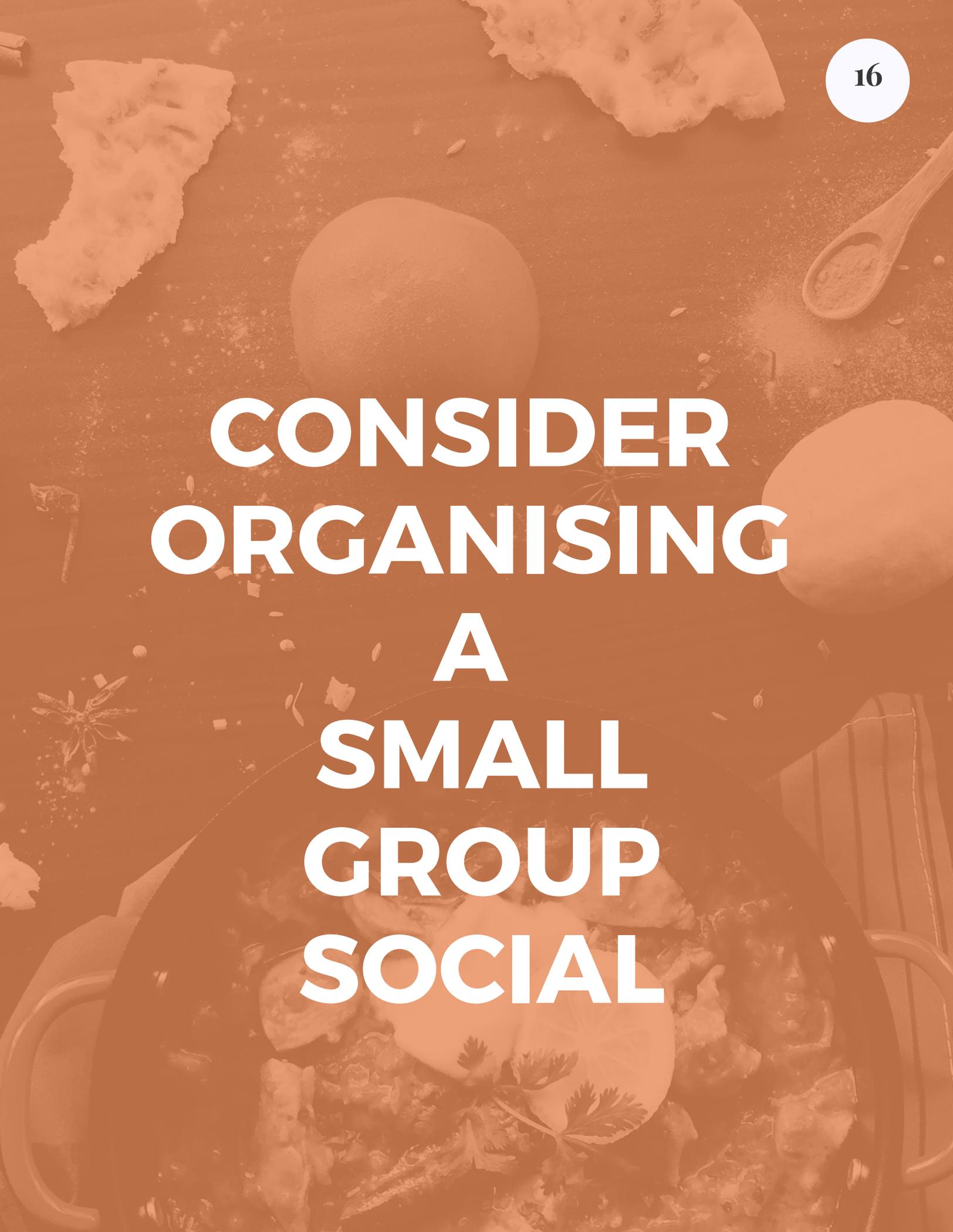
4) Jesus is irritated with the Pharisees. What is at the heart of all the “woes” that Jesus proclaims in verses 42-54?

5) Jesus saw clearly that there were many self-appointed teachers in the world of first-century Judaism who were using their learning partly for their own political and theological ends. In what ways do we see this same pattern in our society today?

6) Where do you see the tendency in your own life to hold firmly to ideas, political views or other agendas that are not consistent with Jesus’ message of peace and light for the world?

7) We can minister in many different ways to people in need. Often those of us with material resources can give money to a charitable organisation. Christian hospitality demands much more than that. What does it involve?

8) PRAY Use the prayer time as an opportunity for repentance. Jesus called the Pharisees and religious leaders to an agenda of repentance from their flight into national rebellion against Rome and their theological rebellion against God. Confess the areas of rebellion in your own life.



**CONSIDER
ORGANISING
A
SMALL
GROUP
SOCIAL**

Luke 14:1-35

SABBATH MEAL AT A PHARISEE'S HOUSE



1) Share stories about how a shared meal helped build community and friendship.

2) What kinds of people does Jesus welcome (e.g., Mark 10:46-52; Luke 5:27-32, 18:15-17)?

3) READ Luke 14:1-35.

4) Looking at verses 1-11, in what ways do Jesus' conversation and parable address those in his day who were jostling for position in the eyes of God?

5) There is a wider meaning in the first fourteen verses for the first readers of Luke, who was writing perhaps forty years after Jesus' death. Thousands of non-Jews had become Christians—had entered, that is, into the dinner party prepared by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Many Jewish Christians had found this difficult to understand or approve. They were so eager to maintain their own places at the top table that they could not grasp God's design and grace for others. How do people in the church today exhibit a jostling for position?

6) The parable in verses 15-24 also speaks to those around Jesus, to those in the church in Luke's day and to the church today. How is the parable a description of what Jesus has been doing up to this point within Galilee?

7) What do you notice about the excuses people are giving for why they cannot attend the banquet?

8) What does it mean for the church today to go out into the "streets and lanes of the town" in order to bring people to the banquet?



9) Think about our church community. What would a stranger to our church see that confirms our value and commitment to welcoming?

10) The Christian writer, Chritine Pohl writes, "Churches that have not nurtured a common life among members often find it difficult to offer hospitality to strangers. On the other hand, churches that have a rich common life can overlook the importance of offering hospitality to strangers. Discuss the various reasons that hospitality and strangers are problematic in each case.

11) 9) PRAY specifically for Paul Smith, who leads our Foodbank, for Medway Foodbank Team, and guests who use the services.

Luke 15:11-32

PARABLE OF THE SURPRISE PARTY



1) Imagine moving into a new house in a new neighborhood, and on the very first night you are there, a loud, chaotic party occurs down the street. Imagine the loud music, the amplified voices and the long hours of wondering if this was going to be a regular occurrence in your new neighborhood. That kind of experience illustrates how one person's celebration can be really annoying for someone else, especially if they don't understand the reason for the party. The parables in Luke 15 are told because Jesus was making a habit of having celebration parties with all the "wrong" people, and some others thought this was a nightmare. All three stories in chapter 15 are ways of saying, "This is why we're celebrating!" In and through these stories we all get a wide-open window on what Jesus thought he was doing—and, perhaps, on what we ourselves should be doing.

Recall something you lost and were frustrated that you couldn't find. What did it feel like when you were looking, and if you found it, how did you react then?

2) READ Luke 15:1-32.

3) What problem do the Pharisees and the teachers of the law have with what Jesus had been doing (vv. 1-2)?

4) What might Christians do today that would make people ask in surprise, "Why in the world are you doing that?" just as the Pharisees asked about Jesus' parties?

5) Looking at the parable of the two sons, describe all the ways in which the younger son brings shame to his family just in verses 11-16.

6) What makes the father the most remarkable character in this story?



7) Look closely at what the older brother says in verses 25-32. What do you notice in his language about his perspective and attitude?

8) In verses 25-32, what is Jesus' saying to his critics, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law?

9) The story, of course, is unfinished. We naturally want to know if the older brother is persuaded by his father if he is reconciled to his brother, how the younger brother behaves from now on. Of course, at this point in the Gospel, the story of Jesus and the Pharisees is unfinished as well. But sometimes a storyteller leaves much that is open-ended to invite us to consider how we fit into the story and what our response is. Which role in the final parable do you and your church find comes most naturally to you, and why?

Luke 19:1-10

HOSPITALITY AT THE HOME OF ZACCHAEUS



1) Read Genesis 19:1-3, 1 Kings 17:10-13, Luke 5:27-29, and Acts 16:11-15. All of these passages describe encounters among strangers who eventually go home together. Notice where the conversation first begins. Where do we encounter strangers? Why do we need to pay more attention to places that bridge public and private space?

2) Read Acts 18:27, Romans 16:1-2, and 1 Corinthians 16:3. Discuss how the early church reduced the risk of welcoming strangers into the community. Why

3) READ Luke 19:1-10.

4) Why would everyone in Jericho have disliked Zacchaeus?

5) Here Jesus doesn't tell a parable as he has been doing, like that of the prodigal son. Rather the tax collector himself speaks to Jesus in public. In what ways does Zacchaeus give evidence of his extravagant repentance in this story?

6) How is the story of Zacchaeus a kind of balance to the previous story of the rich ruler?

7) How do these stories speak to how we should view and deal with our possessions and money?

8) PRAY for India 2018 team going in April. The team are: Amanda Maskall, Andrew Mann, Ann Keane, Ben Towers, Chris Cordle, Helen Standing, Jon Friday, Lesley Boast, Lucy Wheatley, Lucy Williams, Mic Aldington, Saju Muthalaly, Sarah Mann, Shane Cordle, Terry Whittaker, Trevor Dyer & Wayne Hickmott

Luke 22:14-38

THE LAST SUPPER



1) Discuss your understandings of the Lord's Supper we celebrate together as a church.

2) A shared meal is an activity most closely tied to the reality of God's Kingdom, just as it is the most basic expression of hospitality. Do you see the communion we celebrate in our church as a significant expression of hospitality? How is the hospitality we receive at God's table connected to the hospitality we offer in our homes?

3) Read Luke 22:1-38.

4) In what ways is the event in verses 1-23 a story of both celebration and betrayal?

5) Many helpful theories have been proposed over the centuries about how it was that Jesus dealt with our sins. At this point, however, Jesus did not give his followers theory but an act to perform. This meal was, first and foremost, a Passover meal (Luke 22:1). Hundreds of years before, when the powers of evil that were enslaving God's people were at their worst, God acted through Moses and Aaron to judge Egypt and save Israel. And the sign and means of both judgment and rescue was the Passover: the angel of death struck down the firstborn of all Egypt, but spared Israel as the firstborn of God, passing over their houses because of the blood of the lamb on the doorposts (Exodus 12). What does this tell us about the meaning of the meal Jesus ate with his disciples and of Jesus' death?

6) How does Jesus' idea of greatness contrast with that of the world in verses 24-30?



7) How does Jesus show his care for others in Luke 22:31-32, even as he was facing the most intense trial of his life?

8) In Luke 22:36 Jesus quotes from the last verse of the great Servant Song of Isaiah. Jesus was fulfilling and knew he was fulfilling, the scriptural prophecies about this figure who suffered injustice for others and was abandoned and seemingly defeated, exactly as the Scripture had foretold. How do we see the sheer aloneness of Jesus throughout the Last Supper?

9) PRAY Spend time in confession. Jesus entered the darkness and the horror to bring redemption for all of us and rescue us from our sin. Lay before him the places where you have acted in rebellion, unbelief, and sin like the characters in this chapter.

Luke 24:13-35

ROAD TO EMMAUS



1) When were you surprised—even stunned—by something?

2) READ Luke 24:13-35.

3) Why was the crucifixion so devastating for the followers of Jesus?

4) The couple on the road to Emmaus may well have been husband and wife, Cleopas and Mary (see John 19:25; “Clopas” there is probably the same person as “Cleopas” here). What kept Cleopas and his companion from recognizing Jesus?

5) How can this story of Jesus’ encounter with the pair offer a model for us as we find ourselves in difficulties, confusion or grief?

6) Jesus explained to the confused pair what had to happen to the Messiah from the whole Old Testament, beginning with the five books of Moses. Just as God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt at the first Passover, now at this last Passover Israel was redeemed by God. Liberated from pagan domination, sin, the power of the evil one and death itself, the new Israel was set free in a new exodus to serve God in peace and holiness. He now invites his followers on a journey to a new promised land. The two on the road had been seeing the history of Israel as the story of how God would redeem Israel from suffering, but it was instead the story of how God would redeem Israel through suffering. Perhaps Luke is saying that we can only know Jesus, can only recognize him, when we learn to see him within the true story of God, Israel, and the world. How can we grow in our ability to see Jesus this way?



7) What are the similarities and differences between the meal in verses 28-35 and the very first meal recorded in the Bible in Genesis 3:6-7?

8) Luke intended that his readers should see the simple meal here pointing forward to the breaking of bread, which quickly became the central symbolic action of Jesus' people. Jesus was recognized by the couple in the breaking of the bread (v. 35). How is he also made known to us in the Lord's Supper or Communion? The story of the couple on the road to Emmaus frames the entire Gospel with the story of another couple at its beginning in Luke 2:41-52. There, after three days, Mary and Joseph also find the Jesus they thought they had lost and are also greeted by his strange words about what had to happen, that it was necessary to do his Father's work.

9) Luke's Gospel ends, as it began, in the temple at Jerusalem. Worship of the living God, now revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, is at the heart of Luke's vision of the Christian life. Worship him.



Bringing Guests Home

Hospitality is a fundamental function of the Jewish home. This practice is also central in the Hebraic heritage of the Church. Schooled in a rich rabbinic background, Paul inculcates this teaching in his readers. He instructs the church at Rome to “practice hospitality” (Rom. 12:13). Here Paul reflects a sacred duty that was present from the earliest Old Testament times. Biblical law specified that it was an obligation to extend hospitality and love to the ger, “alien” or “stranger,” for the Hebrew people themselves once were “aliens [gerim] in Egypt” (Lev. 19:34). Isaiah states that a genuinely righteous person will heed the obligation to “share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter” (Isa. 58:7). In his personal statement of ethical vindication, Job claims, “no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler” (Job 31:32). The term used in rabbinic literature for hospitality is *hakhnasat orhim*, literally “bringing in of guests” or “gathering in of travelers.”

Rabbinic literature provides considerable insight into the practice of *hakhnasat orhim*, the very term used in Franz Delitzsch’s classic Hebrew New Testament translation for Paul’s teaching on hospitality in Romans 12:13. First, the rabbis considered hospitality one of the most important functions of the home. “Great is hospitality; greater even than early attendance at the house of study or than receiving the *Shekhinah*” (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 127a). Indeed, hospitality is listed first among six virtues, “the fruit of which man eats in this world” (Shabbat 127a). Second, one was not to discriminate in the showing of hospitality. Whereas some people entertain only the rich, or people from a certain social or racial status, the rabbis taught that the home was to be open to all classes and kinds of people. There was a custom in Jerusalem to place a napkin over the doorway. “All the time the napkin was spread, guests (travelers) could enter” (Tosefta, Berakhot 4:9 [Tosefta is Aramaic for “addition” and refers to a collection of material that expands or comments upon the Mishnah]). Another practice in Jerusalem was to display a flag to show that a meal was in progress (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 93b). The rabbis also stated, “Let your house be open wide, and let the poor be members of your household” (Mishnah, Abot 1:5).

It was said of Rabbi Huna that “when he used to sit down to a meal, he opened the doors and exclaimed, ‘Let whoever is in need enter and eat’” (Babylonian Talmud, Taanit 20b). Third, children were taught to be hospitable. They were instructed when answering the door to invite guests to enter and to dine with the family. “Teach your household humility—so that if a poor man stands at the door and asks: ‘Is father in?’ they will respond: ‘Yes, come in.’ As soon as the poor man enters, let the table be set for him” (Abot of Rabbi Nathan 7 [this source, sometimes abbreviated ARN, is a commentary on the Mishnaic tractate Abot, and is often termed an “extracanonical” minor tractate of the Talmud]). Fourth, guests were to be received graciously and cheerfully. Whereas many Westerners today avoid hospitality altogether, begrudgingly endure it, or tolerate it as a necessary evil, Middle Easterners have always considered hospitality to be a sacred obligation to be done with cheer. Rabbinic literature particularly emphasizes this obligation. “Let your house be wide open to guests. Receive people graciously.

Lavish hospitality accompanied by a sour disposition means far less than modest hospitality which is extended cheerfully” (Abot of Rabbi Nathan 1). Finally, guests had a responsibility to the host. Some food was expected to be left on the plate (Babylonian Talmud, Erubin 53b). They were not to take advantage of the host’s kindness, but to be grateful (Berakhot 58a) and offer a special prayer for the host at the conclusion of the meal (Berakhot 46a). In addition, guests were not to ruffle the host or cause him anxiety: “A guest who unduly troubles his host is considered unworthy” (Derekh Eretz Zuta 8:9). The Christian community must never consider the concept of hospitality to be optional. It is at the heart of the social consciousness of the Christian faith. The book of Hebrews reminds New Testament believers, recipients of the Jewish heritage of *hakhnasat orhim*, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2; cf. Jas. 2:14-17; 1 John 3:17).

Marvin R. Wilson

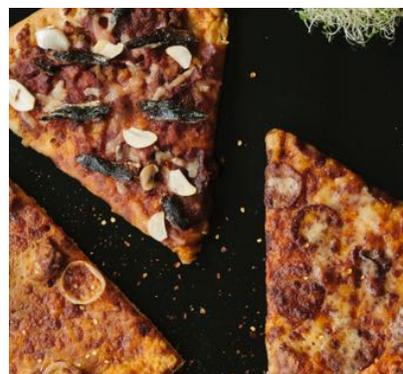
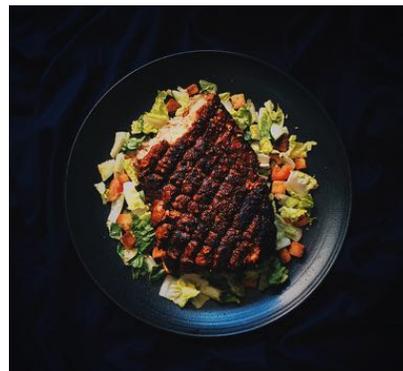
Author, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO
N. T. WRIGHT
FORMER ANGLICAN BISHOP OF DURHAM
AND
CHRISTINE POHL,
PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS AT ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.
THEIR REFLECTIONS, THOUGHTS AND IDEAS ARE USED IN THE PRODUCTION OF THIS BIBLE
STUDY NOTES.

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HOSPITALITY MEANS PRIMARILY THE CREATION OF FREE SPACE WHERE THE STRANGER CAN ENTER AND BECOME A FRIEND INSTEAD OF AN ENEMY. HOSPITALITY IS NOT TO CHANGE PEOPLE, BUT TO OFFER THEM SPACE WHERE CHANGE CAN TAKE PLACE. IT IS NOT TO BRING MEN AND WOMEN OVER TO OUR SIDE, BUT TO OFFER FREEDOM NOT DISTURBED BY DIVIDING LINES.

Henri J.M. Nouwen