

Family Meals Along the Way, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. x6070513
Acts 16:9-15 and John 17:20-26
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Picture your family seated around the dinner table when you were growing up. Do you remember the placement of family members around the table? Do you have any particularly fond memories? Do you have any special feelings about those people, or those empty seats?

I still remember where everyone sat around my family table. There were six of us children, eight altogether. I remember some funny incidents and some serious conversations. My brother and I were frequently in trouble with my little sister who sat between us.

It was important in my household when our girls were growing up, to have family meals together. We made it a point to have dinner together. I resisted meetings between 5:00-7:00 p.m.; that was time for me to be home with Sue and the girls. It was a time to "check in," to find out what was going on in each other's lives, and what happened during the day. When one of our girls told of an argument at school with friend, or when one of us adults shared a frustration we had had that day, it was easier to understand the presence of a short temper or long face. It was a time to discuss major issues or events in our family such as upcoming trips, plans, problems and coordination schedules.

When I perform a wedding and the couple requests communion, I introduce it as their first meal together as a new family. It is meal with Christ present. Hopefully, they will eat all meals in their home with Christ present!

Family meals together don't come easily when the children get older. There are more demands upon everyone's time: sports activities, baby sitting, and dates. Dad, intent upon climbing the corporate ladder, comes home late. It is easy to allow other things to take precedence over sitting down together.

Family meals are important "Along the Way"... along the way of life. Meals are important as physical nourishment. Meals are important as a time of conversation. Deeper than that, we can become intimate and connect with one another. They are a time of emotional nourishment. They are a time to practice politeness and manners. "Don't begin eating until all have been served."

"Don't talk with your mouth full."

"Don't get up from the table until all are finished."

"Listen to each other."

Jim Ashbrook, a teacher of mine in my doctoral work years ago, said that food is intimately tied up with emotions. "If an experience of students away from home not good, the first thing they will complain about is the food," he said. Cookies from home taste so good not because they taste so good, but because they are a direct communication from home. Their message is, "you are cared for and emotionally supported by us even if you're far away." For diplomats, eating together makes negotiating go more smoothly.

"Family Meals Along the Way." We are pilgrims in life. What is pilgrim? I picture a walker. I picture a person on a Holy mission. Jerusalem is filled with pilgrims. I picture the Exodus. The Hebrews were pilgrims through the desert on their way to a promised land. I picture the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock.

The word *pilgrim* is a derivative of the Latin word for "alien" or "foreigner." It implies that we are foreigners here. This is not really our home. We are journeying here for a time. Our real home, our eternal home, is with God.

Luciano Pavarotti was quoted as saying, "One of the very nicest things about life is the way we must regularly stop whatever it is that we are doing and devote our attention to eating."¹ Our meals are important as times we stop and get bearing on living, and stop and check in with one another about how they're doing.

Family meals along the way mean an opportunity to be refreshed. To gain strength for the journey, and to taste what eternal life in God's divine realm will be like.

There is a story in the book of Acts that describes Paul, Silas, and Timothy's being beckoned to serve in a new land on a new continent. There, while worshipping, they met Lydia, a businesswoman. She heard their message and was baptized as a follower of Jesus Christ. She invited them to stay at her house. She demonstrated that great quality mentioned throughout the Bible, hospitality.

Lydia, her household, and Paul, Silas, and Timothy shared meals together as family. All of the Christian family joins in a family meal. Around our church dinner tables gather people from many different family situations. Some are young families with children. Some are single-parent families. Some are single, period. Some are aging and have lost most of their family members.

Here at church, we are family for one another. Young families with grandparents distant find local loving substitute grandparents. They watch out for each other. They take care of each other. They support each other. We find out what's going in each other's lives and then, we can understand and love. Church fellowship meals and communion are important times of spiritual, emotional, and physical refreshment as we pilgrims journey along the road through life.

John chapter seventeen contains part of what is termed Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. This occurred at the Last Supper, a meal with the disciples. Jesus' prayer was a prayer for Unity. He prayed that his followers would all be one.

I see our unity in Christ in three ways. One form of unity is in the family. Take time to share meals together around a table. As you listen, share verbally with one another and become more closely knit as family.

One form of unity is in the congregation. Our congregational dinners are important as times when we share our feelings, dreams, and difficulties, with each other. As we eat together, we become more closely-knit as a congregation.

One form of unity is in the church throughout the world. When we remember that Christ invites us to the table along with all other confessed Christians, we affirm the unity of Christ's body today. As we do that, we break bread together across blood lines and political lines and we become a testimony to the world so they may also believe in God's love.

Share in family meals along the way!

¹ *Reader's Digest*, March, 1989 p. 33