

A PLACE AT THE

TABLE

FOR EVERYONE

**ADULT
BIBLE STUDIES**



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When You Give a Banquet, Invite...

CBF OGM BIBLE STUDY

FIELD PERSONNEL FOCUS: Scarlett Jasper, Rick Burnette (Florida), & Brooke and Mike (Southeast Asia)

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Luke 14:12-14

INTRODUCTION

I'm grateful for the opportunity to join with you as we dig a little deeper into the idea of what it means to connect in the work of our CBF field personnel. We join their work by learning more of their life-giving, long-term presence in the communities in which they lovingly serve, by allowing their stories to impact our own journeys and our missional work as churches, by prayerfully supporting what they do by holding their stories and ministries close to our hearts and by giving to the Offering for Global Missions to ensure their vital presence continues. As you prepare for these opportunities for learning, discipleship and growth, here are some things to keep in mind for each session.

OUR THEME

While each session will have a complementary Biblical passage on which to reflect, I encourage you to begin each session with this year's theme, *When you give a banquet, invite...* from Luke 14:12-14 (CEB):

¹² Then Jesus said to the person who had invited him, "When you host a lunch or dinner, don't invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. ¹³ Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed because they can't repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected."

Here are some thoughts on this theme to help you prepare for these studies.

- This text comes in the middle of a gospel story from Luke that takes place at the home of a leading Pharisee. It is the third story from Luke's gospel that takes place at a dinner in the home of a Pharisee. The first verse of the chapter tells us "they (some of the Pharisees) were



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watching him closely.” At this point in the gospel narrative, more and more people were drawn to Jesus as he taught, as he healed, and as he reached beyond those with status and place and invited people from the margins of life into community and into a more vibrant experience of the love of God. As Jesus’ ministry became more scrutinized by those in power, many religious leaders sought to find ways to eliminate this perceived threat to their power. Jesus’ words, then, about whom to invite to the table, were charged with energy and a challenge to the status quo.

- Our focal text comes from an interesting collection of thoughts from Jesus while at this dinner party that the Common English Bible calls “Lessons on Humility and Generosity.” Many Biblical scholars have pointed out, however, that this is far more than a lesson on manners and graceful dinner party etiquette. Fred Craddock, in his commentary on this text, wants us to take note of the “radicality” of this text, saying that care of the poor and disabled is not an option for the church or synagogue, but is a constitutional part of the DNA for followers of God. In other words, out of our faithful experience of God *should* come a desire to invite others into relationship, into the experiential love of God through Jesus Christ. As you hear the stories of our CBF Field personnel, I hope that you are blessed by their faithful response to God’s call and that you’re challenged to think more of how you’re likewise called to invite others into God’s deep and abiding love.
- As I thought about this text my mind went back to 2006 and a sermon I heard from South African pastor Trevor Hudson at a CBF General Assembly.² In it, Hudson preached from Romans 8, about all of creation “groaning as in the pains of childbirth,” and encouraged us not to ignore the “groans” of the communities in need around us. One of the images that stuck with me was a challenge he made to some of the hymns I had grown up singing (and still sing). His words helped me to think differently about our responsibility to be concerned for those whom we invite to the table. He referenced the hymn, *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*: “...and the things of Earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.” Hudson’s encouragement to us was to never let the needs of our sisters and brothers grow dim, but that communion with God should shine more light on those for whom we need to have concern and invite to the table. As I hear the stories of our CBF field personnel, I am grateful for their work of love and concern, and how they each, uniquely with their own gifts and stories, invite others to the table of God.
- Consider sharing in a time of communion at some point during your Bible Study time, focusing on the invitation to the table and our call to *invite* others to the table.



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¹Craddock, Fred B. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Luke*. John Knox Press, 1990. Pg. 177.

²<https://www.baptiststandard.com/archives/2006-archives/hudson-step-out-of-bubble-and-hear-god/>

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Study Theme: Luke 14:12-14

- As you begin, start with an overview of Luke 14 (see Introductory Notes) and highlight the text “*When you give a banquet, invite...*” which will be the theme that we will return to throughout this study.

Conversation Starters

- What are some of the invitations you have received in life that stick out in your mind? Which were most exciting? Most fear-inducing? What did it mean for you to be included and welcomed?
- Conversely, have you ever been left out, or left off an invitation list? Have you been excluded or not welcomed? If you’re comfortable sharing, what did that mean for you?
- Gordon Light’s hymn text, “Draw the Circle Wide,” most notably put to music by the gifted United Methodist musician Mark A. Miller, invites us to look outward, to be ever expanding the circle of God’s love by inviting others into loving community. The song is easily searchable online with lots of videos should you want to share it in your study. It helps us to think about our role in inviting others, particularly those who have no one to stand with them, into our circle of God’s deep love.

Video

- As time permits, show as much as you can from the Offering for Global Missions video resources to best communicate the story of Scarlette Jasper’s work in Kentucky. (I will be referencing the Impact Story *Darrell*.)

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 15 (Common English Bible)

Who can live in your tent, Lord?

Who can dwell on your holy mountain?

² *The person who*

lives free of blame,

does what is right,

and speaks the truth sincerely;

³ *who does no damage with their talk,*

does no harm to a friend,

doesn’t insult a neighbor;



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⁴ *someone who despises
those who act wickedly,
but who honors those
who honor the Lord;
someone who keeps their promise even when it hurts;*

⁵ *someone who doesn't lend money with interest,
who won't accept a bribe against any innocent person.
Whoever does these things will never stumble.*

COMMENTARY

Walter Brueggemann, in a commentary titled “Living by the Word” in the *Christian Century*, noted that the last phrase, translated in the CEV as “will never stumble,” could also be translated as “to totter,” or “be destabilized.”³ Instability is a common experience for many of the people whom Scarlette Jasper ministers alongside in Kentucky. As life “totters” on the edge of ruin for many people, Scarlette offers an invitation into relationship that epitomizes what the psalmist says that we who yearn to one day be with God on the “holy mountain” should do: She speaks truth sincerely; she doesn’t damage those with whom she ministers; but she builds them up, helping them move their lives in a better direction.

Scarlette’s welcoming invitation issued into Darrell’s life brought about a beautiful change in him, moving him to become an active participant in welcoming others into community. It spurred a change in Darrell that is now impacting others.

Brueggemann sums up where the power of Psalm 15 is for us: “The communion of Psalm 15 knows that the ‘glue of reality’ is attentive to neighbor relations (Torah), which are not an optional extra but belong to the covenantal core of created reality. In order to enter the presence of God, the community must struggle with and for the human infrastructure.”⁴ In other words, all throughout Holy Scripture, including this Psalm, are stories that remind us that out of our acceptance into the covenantal relationship with God must come a concern for inviting others into that relationship. There is an expectation of fruit from a life of faith that should demonstrate concern for our sisters and brothers. Scarlette’s ministry in Kentucky shows us that fruit.



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³ Brueggemann, Walter. *The Christian Century*, July 29-August 5, 1992. “Living By the Word” Pg. 710.

⁴ Ibid.

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Bringing It Home

- As life *totters* for people in your community, what can we learn from Scarlette Jasper's presence in Kentucky? What ministries in your community involve similar work and how can your church better support Scarlette's work and the ministries in your hometown?
- Where has a story like Darrell's happened in your life, when you have received an invitation into something better and then passed that blessing on beyond yourself?
- As you return home this evening, and in the coming days, think about the ministries in your community that, like Scarlette's, invite others into relationship, as Psalm 15 says—that do no harm, that speak truth, and that build up your community. If there are ways that you or your church could be a part of that, what would that look like?
- What fruit from your loving experience with God can you offer? How are you drawing that circle ever wider? Who needs an invitation into God's love from you today?

Prayer

As you conclude, pray for the ministry of Scarlette Jasper. Pray for Scarlette as she ministers to those in her community with mental health issues, those families with food insecurity, those seeking affordable housing, and those seeking employment. Pray for the transformational development that is happening in the lives of men, women and children through Scarlette's invitation to the table.



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Study Theme: Luke 14:12-14

- As you begin, start with an overview of Luke 14 (see Introductory Notes), and highlight the text “*When you give a banquet, invite...*” which will be the theme that we will return to throughout this study.

Conversation Starters

- Do you have a vegetable garden at home? What do you plant? Do you share with neighbors when you’re overrun with okra or tomatoes? What stories come to mind when you think about cultivating a garden?
- Do you pay attention to where your supermarket produce comes from? Have you ever thought about how far that tomato that you picked up in February had to travel to get to you? Or, more generally, have you ever thought about the process of how fresh produce arrives in your town, particularly in the dead of winter?

Video

As time permits, show as much as you can from the Offering for Global Missions video resources to best communicate the story of Rick’s work in Florida. I will be referencing the Impact Story, *Miguel*.

Scripture Lesson: Luke 14:1-6 (CEV)

14 *One Sabbath, when Jesus went to share a meal in the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees, they were watching him closely.² A man suffering from an abnormal swelling of the body was there.³ Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, “Does the Law allow healing on the Sabbath or not?”⁴ But they said nothing. Jesus took hold of the sick man, cured him, and then let him go.⁵ He said to them, “Suppose your child or ox fell into a ditch on the Sabbath day. Wouldn’t you immediately pull it out?”⁶ But they had no response.*

Commentary

I grew up in farming communities and still live in an area full of home gardens and locally-sourced produce stands. I love the growing season and the produce of the land. I watched my parents, grandparents and neighbors toil in gardens doing the hard work on just a small plot of land to provide supplemental food for our table; and today I’m still in awe of folks who give so generously of their abundance of crops to me for my table.

⁵ Vinson, Richard B. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Luke. Smyth & Helwys, 2008. Pg. 481.

⁶ Tidsworth, Mark E. Farming Church: Cultivating Adaptive Change in Congregations. Pinnacle Leadership Press, 2017. Pg. 118.

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And yet, I often fail to recognize when I'm in the supermarket looking at the mountains of tomatoes and cantaloupes and other produce, just how remarkable the trip has been for those easily-accessible ingredients to wind up as a part of my meal.

Luke's 14th chapter begins at a dinner party in the home of a leading Pharisee when Jesus is quickly presented with a man dealing with a miserable health condition who seeks to be healed. When Jesus asks if the law had anything to say about healing on the Sabbath and those present do not respond, Jesus heals the man. Then, Jesus spoke again to the other dinner guests, asking the oft-quoted question. "Suppose your child or ox is in a ditch and it's the Sabbath, what would you do then?"

Richard Vinson, in the Smyth and Helwys commentary on Luke, points out that Jesus' question is a difficult one to answer because while a child in a pit is one thing, Jews of Jesus' day disagreed on what the law said about the oxen.⁵ Again, Luke tells us, there was no response from the dinner party.

"My ox is in a ditch," is a scriptural reference I've heard all my life from friends needing assistance. Funny how it is always the ox and not the child, that is in the ditch, in spite of the fact that Jesus also referenced a child in trouble. But regardless, being someone whom people come to with problems is to be a blessing in their life. The Impact Story of Miguel introduces us to Rick Burnette's co-laborer in Immokalee, Florida, Miguel. Miguel's life since arriving in Immokalee has become one long invitation to those who needed help with food or with filling out confusing paperwork, or with any variety of needs. He has been a welcoming, helpful neighbor to them. Mision Peniel, and the shared work of Miguel and Rick Burnette, show us how to answer our neighbor's call "my ox is in a ditch, can you help me out?"

As I heard the stories of Rick's ministry in Immokalee, Florida, I thought back to a book written by Mark Tidsworth called *Farming Church: Cultivating Adaptive Change in Congregations*. Throughout the text, Mark uses farming language to encourage church leaders toward adaptive change. There's a chapter on "Cultivating Urgency" in the church that reminds us that we, as a church, should "cultivate urgency by regularly holding up the aspirational, compelling vision" of what the church can and should be. The story of what is happening through Cultivate Abundance, the ministry of Rick and Ellen Burnette in Southwest Florida, is a compelling, hopeful story that we can hold up and celebrate, and one that we can work toward in our own communities. Their work addresses urgent, vital needs in the lives of farmworkers who provide so much of our day-to-day sustenance, but who struggle to provide that same vital need for themselves. This urgent living out of Jesus' command, "when you give a banquet, invite..." is something to which each of us can aspire.



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Bringing It Home

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture has an online database called the Food Access Research Atlas that can identify places near you that are food deserts, or places with difficult or expensive access to healthy foods. You can access this information at <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/> Spend some time on this site, learning about your own community or places near you where individuals have difficulty accessing healthy foods. What could your response be to this? What are some ways that you or your church are or could be addressing these issues?
- What other things can we learn from Miguel's and Rick's ministry to help our neighbors when their "ox is in a ditch"?
- Rick's ministry is one that collects from abundance and shares it lovingly, in Jesus' name, with neighbors. What could that look like in your community?

Prayer

As you conclude, pray for the ministry of Rick Burnette. Pray for the farmers who give of their abundance so that others in their communities can have access to fresh, culturally appropriate produce. Pray for Miguel as he pastors and as he and Rick work to "get their neighbors ox out of the ditch." And through it all, pray for the work of Cultivating Abundance that is creating a beloved community of diverse, meaningful partnerships that meet the physical and spiritual needs of their neighbors.



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CBF OGM BIBLE STUDY #3

BROOKE AND MIKE,
SOUTHEAST ASIA

Study Theme: *Luke 14:12-14*

- As you begin, start with an overview of Luke 14 (see Introductory Notes), and highlight the text “*When you give a banquet, invite...*” which will be the theme to which we will return throughout this study.

Conversation Starter

- Think of a dinner table where you have experienced regular meals: your childhood dinner table, your nuclear family’s table, or your weekly table at the local joint. Describe it, maybe even sketch it, showing where everyone would sit, including possible guests who might be present. How was the food prepared and served? What memories come back of the times of sharing these meals?
- Search online for a recording of Shirley Erena Murray’s “For Everyone Born.” Choose a recording to share as you begin. Discuss what this song means to you today.

Video:

As time permits, show as much as you can from the Offering for Global Missions video resources to best communicate the story of Brooke and Mike’s work in Southeast Asia. I will be referencing the Impact Story of *Yuliana*.

Scripture Lesson: Hebrews 13: 1-2, 20-21 (CEV)

13 *Keep loving each other like family.² Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it.²⁰ May the God of peace, who brought back the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus, from the dead by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with every good thing to do his will, by developing in us what pleases him through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory forever and always. Amen.*

Commentary:

This fascinating imagery from the conclusion of the letter to the Hebrews brings the story home in a powerful way, doesn't it? Tom Long puts it this way: “Whenever the church shares a meal together—or any other aspect of its life—it is to continue to show ‘mutual love,’ that is, love for the other members of the congregation....But this love should not be so ingrown that the church does not make a place at the table for the stranger, ‘for by so doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.’”⁷

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We come together out of our shared bond in Jesus Christ and we love each other as family. One of my New Testament professors, Dr. Todd Still, often reminded us, particularly as we read the epistles, to keep in mind that the original hearers of these texts had “one eye on the Parousia,” or the Second Coming of Christ. This text, then, served as a “while you’re waiting,” message, and perhaps it still does today. How should we live until Jesus returns? Our waiting should be in love, always looking to invite others to the banquet.

The long-term presence of Brooke and Mike in Southeast Asia has allowed them to live into that calling of table invitation beautifully. Yuliana’s story of finding community in the opportunity to gather with a faith community and learn to weave, and to speak of the commitment made through the long-term presence of Brooke and Mike, is a perfect illustration of the Hebrews text “keep loving each other as family.” God has equipped Brooke and Mike with all that they have needed to offer light, to offer community, to offer a place at the table. Through Mike’s role at a local university, they have access to people and technology that can offer light and clean water and, through those relationships, more communities have found an opportunity to offer light and hope to their neighbors, expanding the table and inviting more into the loving relationship of a faith community. The beauty of what God has done through their presence at a university and in the local community, through the support of the Offering for Global Missions, is a profound testimony to God’s faithfulness.

Bringing It Home

- The imagery of the church being a central place in the community is one that many of us grew up experiencing or idealizing, even if it is not the case today in our own communities. The story that Brooke and Mike can tell of churches becoming central to fellowship in their communities through light and water is a beautiful one. In what ways could your church offer light in your community today? Yuliana found not only community and grace, but new life skills that have blessed her with stability and hope. What skills can you offer to God today that could impact someone else’s journey?
- Brooke and Mike serve in an area with multiple cultures and cuisines and even multiple languages. What could your church do to cross cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, or religious barriers to meet needs and invite others into relationship and community?

Prayer

As you conclude, pray for Brooke and Mike, as well as CBF field personnel serving in nearly 20 countries around the world who are bearing witness to the love of God through Jesus Christ. Pray for the university students with whom they work, and who then have opportunities to bless others in their own community with light and clean water. Pray for the churches they assist with projects, so that those churches can invite others to the table of God’s grace. Pray that the light of God shines more brightly in this world, and that these stories of faithful, missional service will impact our own stories.