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Build a Bigger Table

ACTS 2:41-47



GOAL

By experiencing a shared meal and stories around the table, children make connections with the practices of the faith community.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

God present in every moment, come make the essential and the everyday holy. Help me break bread with sacred intention and listen for stories of faith all around me. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Food is essential to human life. As we gather to refuel our bodies, mealtimes become adorned with culture and ritual. How we eat, what we eat, and who we eat with tells a story about who we are.

Eating together becomes a part of life and the life of faith. In this session, the parts of a shared meal are used as a vehicle to teach about the faith practice of feasting and listening to the stories of our faith.

THE BIBLE STORY

Jesus used mealtimes with his disciples for teaching and reflecting on their work. The early church in Acts followed this practice, making shared meals a part the rhythm of their faith. Breaking bread together gathered them, modeled their communal lifestyle, provided a tangible act of love to show others, and let them teach about the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this way, the necessity of eating becomes intertwined with the spiritual necessity of living in community.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Our need to eat is like a built-in, biological sabbath. We start to feel hungry, a signal that it's time to rest from our work and eat. When we can gather and share a meal together, it can be even better. For some, the idea of a shared meal might be new to them. But sharing isn't new, and stories aren't new. Don't assume young children know all the trappings of a shared meal, but do assume that they are excited to learn about it from you.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Resource Page 1 (p. 20): Prepare the “courses” for this session. This session is set around food and eating together. Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options. The *courses* of this shared meal should be simple. You shouldn't need to cook anything, unless desired. The goal isn't to feed the children a full meal but to use the food and the act of eating as teaching tools. While many of the activities in the session suggest extra preparation, it is to indicate the food items that are needed.
- “Singing Together” (p. 16): Obtain the lyrics to “O Look and Wonder” written on newsprint from session 1. Keep the newsprint for sessions 3 and 4.



GETTING STARTED

During this entire session you'll be simulating a kind of dinner party using each part of a meal (drinks, hors d'oeuvres, salad, appetizers, main course, and dessert) to illustrate the faith practice of feasting and listening together.

- Water cups
- Paintbrushes
- Outdoor sidewalk or area with concrete, or brush stroke paper (bit.ly/FMBrushStroke)
- Picture frames or frames made from cardboard

CAN I GET YOU SOME WATER? A X

As each child enters, welcome them as warmly as you would dinner guests to your home. Explain to the child how you are going to pretend to be at a dinner party to learn about the faith practice of eating together and sharing stories. Tell them that the first thing you always do when someone comes over to your house is offer them a glass of water.

Provide water cups, paintbrushes, and picture frames. Explain that the water is not to drink but to use for painting with water. Invite them to place the picture frame on the concrete or brush stroke paper and paint with the water. Either will show the water for a moment and then evaporate, providing opportunities for more painting. Suggest that the children paint pictures of their favorite foods.

- Prepared newsprint with lyrics to the song "O Look and Wonder" from session 1
- Internet-connected device (optional)

SINGING TOGETHER M T X

Display newsprint with the lyrics to the song "O Look and Wonder." Talk through the words to the song, then listen to the tune. If the whole song seems too ambitious, just sing the refrain, and perhaps the first verse in this session. Repeat it several times, especially the refrain.

To hear the tune, go to bit.ly/FMOLookTune (0:21). To sing along in Spanish (words not provided on the video), show the YouTube video "*Miren que Bueno* (O Look and Wonder)" (bit.ly/FMMiren, 1:52). Try to sing the refrain in English and Spanish.



Keep the newsprint with the lyrics for sessions 3 and 4.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE


- Prepared string cheese or cheese sticks with toothpicks
- Serving plate
- Cup
- Smartphone or tablet

HORS D'OEUVRES F C X

Invite the children to sit around the table you have set up. Ask if anyone knows what *hors d'oeuvres* are. Explain that they are little bites, often passed on plates or trays. They aren't about feeding you a whole meal but welcoming people as they gather, talk, and share stories together leading up to the meal.

Pass the plate of cheese bites around, asking them to serve their neighbor before themselves. Invite the children to say in their fanciest voice, "Would you care for some cheese?" and respond equally fancy, "Why, yes, thank you!" Tell the children to hold onto their toothpicks or put them on the table in front of them for now.

Special meals, with special people, are extra special because of the stories shared around the table. Explain to the children that they are going to tell a progressive story together (and collect the toothpicks at the same time). Put your toothpick in the cup and tell the children that you are going to start a story and each person is going to add one line to the story as you go. For example, you could say, “Once upon a time, walking by the sea was a . . .” and pass the cup to the next child, who puts their toothpick in the cup and adds a sentence or two to the story. Continue passing the cup so that everyone gets a turn. Then all together say, “The end!”

 Put a smartphone or tablet in the middle of the table and make a “voice memo” recording of the story. The children will enjoy hearing their voices and the whole story.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

SALAD COURSE

F X

Give each child four or five carrot sticks. Invite them to listen for the word *share* or *shared* as you read the adapted Bible story from Acts 2:41–47 on Resource Page 2. Each time they hear one of those words, they should take a bite and crunch their carrots! Read the story.

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- Carrot sticks
 - Serving bowl
 - Napkins
 - Resource Page 2

DINNER THEATER

D

The Bible story from Acts 2:41–47 describes lots of actions of the early church. Help the children remember some of the things the early church did by having them act them out. Have the children stand in a circle and, as you read the story again, invite them to show you what they think that action looks like. For example, you might say, “Show me what you think ‘got baptized’ looks like.”

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- Resource Page 2

FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

PALATE CLEANSER


F C X

Gather the children around the table. Tell the children that, sometimes in very fancy dinners, there is a course called a “palate cleanser.” Explain that it is usually a simple food that makes your mouth and body ready for what is to come.

In the center of the table, place one piece of bread, or a small loaf depending on the size of your group, and one clear glass of grape juice. Ask the children what they know about the story that Jesus tells using bread and grape juice. Tell them, if necessary, that Jesus ate a special meal with his friends and asked them to remember him whenever they ate the bread and drank the juice because it showed his love for them. We do the same to remember and give thanks for Jesus’ love for us then, and now, and always.

Take the bread and tear it in half. Show the children how you can keep breaking the bread so that everyone has some, even if it is just a little. Give each child a piece of the bread to eat. Do the same with the juice by pouring it into little cups so that everyone has some. Tell the children that this little meal tells the story of God’s big love for everyone.

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- Slice of bread, or small loaf for larger groups
 - Grape juice in a clear glass
 - Napkins
 - Small cups

 If tearing the bread by hand is not a practice you wish to do, cut small pieces of bread ahead of time and have them on a covered plate so each child may have one.

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- Glory to God* hymnal, a hymnal with the song “I’m Gonna Eat at the Welcome Table,” or internet-connected device

WELCOME TABLE

M T

Teach the children the one or more verses of the song “I’m Gonna Eat at the Welcome Table” (*Glory to God*, #770) or show the YouTube video “Dan + Claudia Zanes—The Welcome Table—Social Isolation Song Series #9” (bit.ly/FMWelcomeTable, 3:34). The verses on the video are a little different and use “we’re” instead of “I’m,” making it a song including all. Key words for the video’s verse are in the note below. Invite the children to sing along as they feel comfortable. Wonder together what a *welcome table* might be and what it might look like. Invite the children to describe it with as much detail as they can.



We’re gonna sit at the welcome table . . .
We’re gonna feast on milk and honey . . .
We’re gonna walk beside our neighbor . . .
All God’s children gonna sit together . . .



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- Six prepared paper plates with pictures from Resource Page 3
 - Snack, such as graham crackers, fish crackers, or fruit
 - Napkins

MAIN COURSE

F G C X

Place the six paper plates with the pictures adhered to the bottoms on the table so the children do not see the pictures yet. Tell the children that it is time for the main course, but before you serve it, you would like them to tell you a story using pictures. Have them turn over the six plates and put the plates in order to tell a story. Let them work out how the story goes. It is all right to let them talk it out among themselves and make decisions, but you can offer hints if they get stuck. It is also all right if they put the pictures in their own order as long as they can make them tell a story.

Serve the *main course* snack and invite the children to share stories as they eat, about times they have had a special meal with family or friends.

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- Paper
 - Crayons, colored pencils, markers

DINNER GUESTS

A C

Invite the children to imagine a dinner party they would like to have. Wonder together who they would have at their party to share a meal and tell stories. Encourage them to think about the *welcome table* where there might be people from their church, their school, their neighborhood, or other activities in which they participate.

Provide drawing supplies and have the children draw a picture of their dinner party with guests and foods they would like to have.

As the children are coloring, ask them to share what stories they might tell their dinner guests. Wonder what questions they might ask.



FOLLOWING JESUS

DESSERT: A PLACE IN THE CHOIR



Serve the children something simple and sweet and tell them that, sometimes, the practice of faith is just like dessert. It's a sweet thing that brings you joy and delight.

Lead the children in singing or saying the chorus to the song "All God's Creatures."

Show the children the YouTube video "A Place in the Choir Lyric Video" (bit.ly/FMAIICreatures, 2:52) and invite them to sing along with the chorus as it becomes familiar.

Or, have the children repeat your words and actions to the chorus of the song. You may want to incorporate this with the singing of the chorus as the children become more familiar with the tune and pace of the song. To begin, invite the children to choose an animal and make a movement or sound like it. Explain that will be what they do to respond to the first line. (If you are using the motions with the song, this will go very fast!)

All God's creatures (*make animal actions and/or noises*) /
got a place in the choir. (*move hand out from mouth and sing*

"Laaaa!") /

Some sing low (*crouch down low*) /

and some sing higher. (*stand on tiptoes*) /

Some sing out loud (*move arms open wide*) /

on a telephone wire. (*move hands from center outward as if holding a thin wire*) /

Some just clap their hands, (*clap hands*) /

or paws, (*clap hands*) /

or anything they've got now. (*clap hands on each beat*) /¹

After the song, close with the following blessing:

You are not creatures, but beloved children of God.

May you always take your place in God's family choir
gathered to sing out grace, hope, peace, and love.

- Sweet snack, such as fruit snacks or candies
- Internet-connected device (optional)

1. "All God's Creatures," © Bill Staines. All rights reserved.

Setting Up the Courses for This Session

This session is set around food and eating together. Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options. Set up a table in your space like you might for a dinner party. Use a centerpiece, name cards, a tablecloth, and so forth. You don't need to provide place settings. Most food items will use napkins.

Depending on your choices, you will need:

For “Can I Get You Some Water?” (p. 16):

- Water cups, paintbrushes
- Concrete sidewalk or area for painting or brush stroke paper (purchased or homemade)
- Picture frames or frames made from cardboard

If a concrete sidewalk or area is not available, purchase brush stroke paper (bit.ly/FMBrushStroke) for each child. As a do-it-yourself option, you can make your own brush stroke-type paper by taping some tissue paper onto the outside of a rigid, black, three-ring binder. When using this alternative, suggest that the children use less water on their brushes.

Obtain picture frames or make frames from cardboard. The sizes don't matter as long as they are big enough for the children to use as a temporary frame for a picture.

Singing Together (p. 16):

- Prepared newsprint with lyrics to the song “O Look and Wonder” from session 1
- Internet-connected device (optional)

For “Hors D’oeuvres” (p. 16):

- String cheese or cheese sticks, toothpicks, serving plate, cup
- Smartphone or tablet

Cut string cheese or cheese sticks into small pieces and place a toothpick in each piece. Place on a serving plate. Make enough so each child may have two pieces of cheese.

For “Salad Course” (p. 17):

- Carrot sticks, four or five per person
- Serving bowl
- Napkins
- Resource Page 2

For “Dinner Theater” (p. 17):

- Resource Page 2

For “Palate Cleanser” (p. 17):

- Slice of bread or small loaf for larger groups
- Grape juice in a clear glass
- Napkins
- Small cups

For “Welcome Table” (p. 18):

- *Glory to God* hymnal, a hymnal with the song “I’m Gonna Eat at the Welcome Table,” or internet-connected device

For “Main Course” (p. 18):

- Six prepared paper plates with pictures from Resource Pages 3 and 4
- Snack, such as graham crackers, fish crackers, or fruit
- Napkins

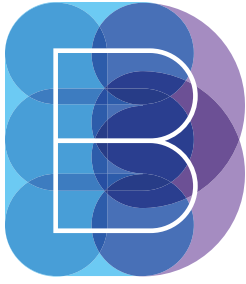
Cut the pictures apart from Resource Pages 3 and 4 and glue or tape one picture each to the bottom of six paper plates.

For “Dinner Guests” (p. 18):

- Paper
- Crayons, colored pencils, markers

For “Dessert: A Place in the Choir” (p. 19):

- Sweet snack, such as fruit snacks or candies
- Internet-connected device (optional)



BIBLE STORY

BASED ON ACTS 2:41–47

There used to be a time when there were no churches like our church. There were no churches at all. Jesus never formed a church. People who followed Jesus made the first churches.

A person named Peter **shared** with others about how Jesus did amazing things and gave everyone the gift of grace. People heard, believed, and got baptized to show they had received Jesus' gift of grace. One time, three thousand people did this in one day!

These new people **shared** their beliefs and learned more from people like Peter. They became a community as they learned, **shared** meals, and **shared** prayers together. They all **shared** a sense of wonder at all the amazing things and powerful stories God **shared** with the community through people like Peter. All these people felt like they belonged together so they **shared** everything. Things they couldn't **share**, they sold and **shared** the money with people who didn't have enough.

Every day, they **shared** time together in the temple and **shared** meals in each other's homes. They **shared** joy, and they **shared** simple meals. They **shared** praise for God. They **shared** God's goodness with everyone. They **shared** and **shared**, and God grew their community.

Kind of sounds like a church, huh?

