

A FREE TABLE GUIDE

Six Evenings at a Table

A free guide for a few people who left the church but didn't leave Jesus.

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About 25 minutes an evening, then eat or go home.

godismysanctuary.com/guides/six-evenings/

How to use this

People who still love Jesus and no longer have a church. Some of you left over hurt, some over exhaustion, some just moved. Some of you are still going somewhere and are not sure why. All of that fits at this table.

WHAT YOU NEED

- A table. A kitchen table is the right size.
- Three to eight people. Two is fine to start.
- This guide, printed or on one phone.
- About 25 minutes an evening. Then eat, or go home.

WHAT YOU DON'T NEED

- Someone to run the evening. Nobody is in charge here. Whoever is holding the page reads.
- A rented room, a name, a schedule beyond the next evening.
- Agreement on anything. People at this table left for different reasons and believe different things about what comes next.
- Money. Nothing here costs anything, and nobody at this table should ever be asked for any.

HOW A TABLE STARTS

Most tables start with one person handing this to one friend who has no church. That is the whole invitation: "I'm going to read something and pray with a couple of people on Tuesday. Want to come?"

This table is not a church, and this guide will not make it one. We can't baptize you, marry you, bury you, or give you communion. Those take a body of people with accountability. If, after six evenings, you find you want that, it is a good thing to want, and the last page says where to look.

The first evening: how to start cold

Somebody has to say the first sentence. Here it is, and you can read it word for word.

Thanks for coming. None of us is in charge here. We're going to read something short, sit with it, talk if we want to, and pray. About 25 minutes. Then we eat, or we go home. Nobody has to say anything.

THE FIVE THINGS WE AGREE TO

1. Nobody has to talk. Passing is a full answer.
2. Nobody fixes anybody. If someone tells you something hard, the right reply is "thank you for saying that," not advice.
3. We ask each other to keep what is said here at this table. That is a promise between friends, not a guarantee, and if something you hear worries you about someone's safety, get help. The page called "if it gets heavy" says how.
4. Coming once does not sign you up for anything. You can leave any evening, no explanation owed. A visit is not a vow.
5. Nobody at this table is a project, and nobody is being recruited to anything, including back to a church.

Then turn to Evening 1.

Grief, for what was lost

For the evening when you have not yet said out loud what you lost.

Leaving a church, or being left by one, is a real loss, even when it was the right thing. Tonight is for naming it.

READ THIS OUT LOUD

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalm 34:18, NIV

THREE QUESTIONS, NO RIGHT ANSWERS

1. What did you lose when you left, or when it left you? Name one thing. A person, a Sunday, a song, a version of yourself.
2. Where, if anywhere, have you felt God close since? It can be small.
3. This verse says God saves the crushed. What would being saved look like this month, small and real?

PRAY THIS TOGETHER

Lord, my heart is broken and my spirit is crushed. But You are close to me. You save those in my condition. Draw near as I draw near to You.

Close to the Brokenhearted, from the grief or despair prayers at godismysanctuary.com

You do not have to feel better tonight. You said it out loud, and someone heard it. That is the whole evening.

Broken trust, and the anger under it

For the evening when a leader, or a place, let you down.

Say only as much as you want to. Nobody here needs the details to sit with you.

READ THIS OUT LOUD

Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.

Psalm 146:3-4, NIV

THREE QUESTIONS, NO RIGHT ANSWERS

1. Who or what did you trust, and what did it cost when it broke?
2. What did that person or that place stand in for, that belonged to God all along?
3. Is there anger in it? What would it mean to carry the anger to God tonight, instead of leaving it on the people at this table?

PRAY THIS TOGETHER

Lord, I learned the hard way not to put my trust in human leaders who cannot save. Their plans come to nothing. But blessed am I whose help is the God of Jacob.

Do Not Put Trust in Princes, from the broken trust or betrayal prayers at godismysanctuary.com

AND IF THERE IS ANGER IN IT

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:15-16, NIV

Jesus, You understand my anger and frustration. You were tempted in every way, yet without sin. I bring my rage to Your throne of grace, confident that You will give me mercy and grace to handle these emotions righteously.

Throne of Grace

If there is anger, the second prayer on this page is for it. Read it out loud, or let it sit on the table unread. Both count.

Shame that was handed to you

For the evening when you are still carrying something you were taught to carry.

Some shame you were not born with and did not earn. It was taught, in God's name, by people who should have known better.

READ THIS OUT LOUD

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28, NIV

THREE QUESTIONS, NO RIGHT ANSWERS

1. What were you taught to be ashamed of that Jesus never said a word about?
2. What are you still carrying that was handed to you? Would you be willing to put it on the table tonight, just to look at it?
3. Jesus offers rest, not a to-do list. What would rest look like this week? One thing.

PRAY THIS TOGETHER

Jesus, the church taught me to be ashamed of who I am. I carry shame that was never mine to bear. Free me from toxic shame and show me how You truly see me - beloved and accepted.

Healing from Religious Shame, from the shame prayers at godismysanctuary.com

Nobody at this table gets to hand you a new shame in place of the old one. Not even yourself.

Loneliness, and being known by name

For the evening when nobody has used your name and meant it in a while.

Maybe church was the last place where everyone knew your name. Tonight, use each other's.

READ THIS OUT LOUD

But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

Isaiah 43:1-2, NIV

THREE QUESTIONS, NO RIGHT ANSWERS

1. When was the last time someone said your name and meant it?
2. What is the deep water right now? The thing you are walking through, not around.
3. Is there one person outside this table you could tell what you told us tonight? Not a group. One person.

PRAY THIS TOGETHER

God, in my loneliness, I hear You calling my name. You created me. You redeemed me. I am Yours. You are with me through every flood and fire.

Called By Name, from the loneliness or isolation prayers at godismysanctuary.com

Say each other's names once before you leave. It sounds small. It is not.

Doubt, both halves at once

For the evening when you believe and do not believe in the same breath.

A father once said the most honest thing ever said about faith, and Jesus helped him anyway.

READ THIS OUT LOUD

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Mark 9:24, NIV

THREE QUESTIONS, NO RIGHT ANSWERS

1. Say both halves out loud: what you believe right now, and what you don't.
2. What did you used to be sure of that you are not sure of anymore? Is that a loss, a relief, or both?
3. If Jesus helped your unbelief the way he helped that father, what would help look like?

PRAY THIS TOGETHER

Lord, I believe; help me overcome my unbelief! This is my honest prayer. I have faith, but it is mixed with doubt. Strengthen what faith I have.

Help My Unbelief, from the doubt prayers at godismysanctuary.com

Doubt said out loud at a table is not the same thing as doubt alone at 2 a.m. You just proved that.

Fear, and what now

For the last evening, when the question is what happens after this.

Paul's answer to anxiety is oddly practical: tell God what you need, with thanks mixed in, and let the peace stand guard.

READ THIS OUT LOUD

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:6-9, NIV

THREE QUESTIONS, NO RIGHT ANSWERS

1. What are you anxious about that you have not said out loud yet?
2. What is one true, good thing from these six evenings that you want to keep thinking about?
3. What now? Not a plan. One next thing.

PRAY THIS TOGETHER

Father, I present my anxieties to You with thanksgiving. I choose prayer over worry. Let Your peace, which transcends all understanding, guard my heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Help me think on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable.

Peace That Transcends, from the fear or anxiety prayers at godismysanctuary.com

Then turn to the last page together.

If someone cries

- Let them. Do not rush to fix it, and do not fill the silence. "Take your time" is a complete sentence.
- Pass a tissue or a glass of water. That is enough. You do not have to touch anyone.
- If they want to stop talking, stop. If they want to leave, walk them to the door and say you are glad they came.
- Tears at this table are not a problem to solve. They are usually the reason the table exists.
- If what they said worries you about their safety, or anyone else's, the next page is for you.

If it gets heavy

Sometimes what gets said at a table is bigger than a table. If someone talks about wanting to die, or about hurting themselves or someone else, stop the evening and get a real person on the line with them. That is not a failure of the table. It is the table doing its job.

If someone is in crisis right now, please don't work through it alone with a guide.

- **CALL OR TEXT 988** The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Free, confidential, and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- **TEXT HOME TO 741741** The Crisis Text Line. Text back and forth with a trained counselor.
- **CALL 911** If you are in immediate danger, please call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room.

In immediate danger, call 911. Sanctuary is a faith companion, not a counseling or crisis service.

The last evening

1. Read the blessing on this page out loud, all of you, once.
2. Go around: one thing you are taking with you. One sentence each. Passing still counts.
3. Decide together what happens next. The honest options are three: stop here, and a good ending is not a failure; start another six evenings; or keep meeting without a guide. Nobody owes anyone a yes.
4. If what you found here makes you want more than a table, a body of people with accountability, that is a good thing to want. Our page called Find your people has the questions to ask before you walk into one, and the signs to walk back out over. We will never tell you a group is safe, because we can't know that.

THE BLESSING

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13, NIV

God of hope, fill me with all joy and peace as I trust in You. Let me overflow with hope by the power of Your Holy Spirit, even in this season of grief.

Overflow With Hope

If you want a table and have none: godismysanctuary.com/find-your-people/ has the questions to ask before walking into one, and the red flags to walk back out over. If you already host one, tell us at godismysanctuary.com/host-a-group/.

Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV. The prayers are from the Sanctuary prayer library at godismysanctuary.com, where each one has its own page.

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