

Jesus, Unleashed

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Chapter Four:

When Jesus Comes Over For Dinner

The table used to speak of friendship, fellowship, and intimacy; it used to be the place of openness and transparency, of sharing and being shared. Today, we are too busy to sit down and enjoy one another over a home-cooked meal where open hearts and vulnerable lives come together. It is so much easier to hide behind TV, computers, or other things and activities than it is to be together and enjoy each other, as family.

When Jesus reclined at the table to share his last meal with his disciples, he said, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.” (Luke 22:15, KJV) The words “desire” and “desired” in this text speak of an ardent “longing or lust” from the heart and even go so far as to speak of sexual desire. Of course, we know that Jesus was not sexually attracted to his disciples (to the pure all things are pure). However, these two words provide us with a profound revelation of Jesus’ affection for those in whom he had invested his whole life. In many ways, they were “his baby,” and he cared for them like a mother cares for her children and more. In the Message Bible, Jesus says, “You’ve no idea how much I have looked forward to eating this Passover meal with you...” and truly the disciples had no idea how much Jesus loved them like no child can begin to fathom the love his or her parents have for them. This is why his heart was set on being with his disciples; he dearly loved them and wanted to spend time with them before he went to the cross.

Have you ever wondered what kind of guest Jesus would be if he came to your home for dinner? After studying the Gospels for a number of years, I noticed that it was not at all uncommon for Jesus to be invited by someone to have dinner in their home. And as I looked close at each instance, I started to see what kind of guest he really was in each situation. Then, I asked myself: How would he behave, and what kind of things would he say if I invited him over for dinner in my house to eat with me and my family and friends?

Wherever he went, the Father went. When he entered a house, the Kingdom poured out through him in blessing, healing, deliverance, and truth. His words and actions were always unusual, depending on who surrounded Him. But when we understand everything he said and did, from Heaven’s perspective, it all reveals the grace of love and restoration.

He always had a way of making things interesting.

For example, his first miracle took place at a wedding feast where he turned water into wine. Apparently, Jesus loved parties because, in those days, if the wine ran out the party stopped (John 2:1-10). Then, there were two occasions, after his resurrection, while eating with his disciples, that he cooked a fish-n-bread breakfast, asked hard questions, opened spiritual eyes, and delivered some of his most profound teachings (John 21:9-23; Luke 24:30-31). And there were other times, in people’s homes, when he cast out demons, healed the blind and mute, forgave sin, restored paralytics, taught hard truths in strange ways, behaved like a madman,

rebuked the religious, denied sign-seekers, and judged the wicked (See Matthew 12:22-13:1; Mark 2:1-12). He certainly had a way of making every meal supernatural (Luke 24:36-49).

As you read over the following short-stories ask yourself the following questions:

Would I invite Jesus over to my house for dinner? What would he be like if he came to my house and had dinner with me and my loved-ones? What would happen? What would he say? What would he do? How would I response? What if he wasn't the ideal guest who met all the standards of social propriety? What if he wasn't at all what I expected? What if he made me look bad in front of everyone?

This study will give us a foretaste of the nature of Jesus Christ in personal visitation. When he appears in the manifestation of his divine Presence, to meet with us in the place of personal and corporate visitation, he is always himself, but not like you may think.

The time will come when Jesus will get very close to you, and when it happens, he will get in "your space." Are you ready for that? Well, perhaps the following stories will help you prepare for that moment. I pray it helps you as it has helped me.

"Pete's Diner"

After "church" one day, Jesus went to Peter's house and saw his mother-in-law lying down, sick with a fever. This obviously troubled the entire household, including Peter and his wife. But what did Jesus do? How did he respond? He brought the Kingdom of God to her life - he broke the fever by touching her hand. He lifted her up and made her whole again, in more ways than one. Then, after immediately being healed, she got up and, out of gratitude, started fixing dinner for Jesus and everyone who was present. Later, after word had spread that Jesus was in town, after the sun had set, crowds of people began to descend on that house, bringing their sick and demon possessed to be healed by him (Matthew 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-39). They gathered at the door, waiting for the chance to be changed forever. Can you imagine this scene in your mind? Can you picture it happening in your average house, in your average little town, anywhere in the world? Can you imagine it happening in your home?

Jesus cast out all the demons with "a word" and healed everyone who was sick with various diseases. He exercised unlimited authority over the powers of darkness without breaking a sweat. Can you fathom the excitement of that evening? That house, hours earlier in the day, wasn't special in any way compared to any other house, but when Jesus came in he made all things new and changed the lives of all who filled it.

But then again, Jesus had a knack for changing everyone he ever touched, including the religious leaders. As far as we know, Jesus was invited on three separate occasions by Pharisees to eat in their homes. Each story has its own twist, showing a different side of Jesus each time.

Pharisee #1: Dinner at Simon's (When the whore became holy)

In Luke 7:36-50, Jesus was invited by Simon, a Pharisee, to eat dinner at his home. After accepting his offer Jesus went to Simon's house, sat down at the table, and within moments was approached by the local harlot. Can you imagine how this looked to everyone present? Obviously, this woman would never have done this if Jesus wasn't there in the first place, because the religious leaders were legalists when it came to sinners. But now after seeking love in all the wrong places (both in the "church" and on the street), she was with Love Himself and all she could do was worship. After she heard that Jesus was a guest in this Pharisee's home, she mustered up all the courage she had within herself and took a leap of faith. She entered the house, walked past all the judgmental eyes, stood at his feet behind him, and with the tears that were pouring from her eyes, she washed his feet, kissed them with all the affection she had in her heart, and oiled them with costly perfume.

When Simon, the Pharisee, saw this, he thought within himself, "If this guy was truly prophetic, he'd know what kind of woman this is who is kissing and fondling his feet so inappropriately in front of everyone. Does he not realize how bad this looks?"

Apparently, Simon had no idea, at that moment, how intuitive Jesus really was; if he had, he would have known that Jesus heard every critical thought he just had. But then, he had a rude awakening when Jesus said, "Simon, I have something to say to you." I can almost hear Simon taking a deep gulp as he replied, "Oh? What is it?" I think deep down inside Simon knew his dinner guest was about to rock his legalistic boat. So Jesus told him a story that beautifully illustrated to everyone the motivation behind this sinner's actions: gratitude. For the first time ever, after being consistently rejected by the religious establishment, she finally found someone who loved her beyond her mess, beyond her faults and filthiness; for the first time she was safe with someone she could trust with all her heart, who would make her brand new from the inside out; for the first time, she found forgiveness, and this single act of worship was the only way she could possibly say, "Thank you." She had no words to express what she felt; all she could do was show it. So she subjected herself to unspeakable scorn when she walked into that dining room full of self-righteous bigots in order to get to her savior, and she sacrificed the perfume which was perhaps her most valuable commodity. But Jesus was on her side. So he put Simon in his place and turned to the woman who was still weeping and kissing his feet and said, "I forgive you," for all to hear. Of course, this upset the dinner guests who immediately started murmuring behind Jesus' back, saying, "Who does this guy think he is to forgive sin? What arrogance! Does he think he's God?" But Jesus was unmoved. He ignored them, and with all the grace of restoration behind him, said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

I'm sure Simon had no idea what he was in for when he invited Jesus over for dinner. I suppose he thought they would have a civilized, religious conversation that would appeal to everyone. I suppose he thought Jesus would bless, encourage, and grace them with his presence. The truth is he did, but not as they had hoped. Jesus always had a way of shattering religious expectations and blessing people in ways that felt like anything but a blessing. When Jesus entered that home, he brought the Kingdom with him and changed everything: he rebuked the religious and purified the prostitute; he judged the judgmental and forgave the judged.

What if Jesus came over to your house for dinner? Would you invite him over as your guest of honor?

Pharisee #2: The Legalists & the Unsavory Guest

In Luke 11:37-54, after Jesus gave one of the strongest words of judgment he ever gave, he was invited by another Pharisee to join him at his home for dinner. Why? What did he want? Was he not paying attention to his last sermon? Apparently, he thought Jesus wouldn't "be himself" in his home. Well, he was sadly mistaken (as the religious crew always was and still is).

When Jesus accepted the invitation, he went to the house and sat down at the table without washing his hands, which was a no-no according to Jewish custom. Needless to say, this shocked his host and all the other guests. Certainly, Jesus knew that when you are invited to someone's home for dinner, you ought to respect "the rules of the house." How could Jesus be so rude and uncivilized? Where were his manners? Why would he do such a thing? Didn't his mom raise him better than that? Obviously, he owed his host an explanation.

And that is exactly what he did when he said, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside you yourselves are full of greed and robbery and extortion and malice and wickedness. You senseless (foolish, stupid) ones [acting without reflection or intelligence]! Did not He Who made the outside make the inside also? But [dedicate your inner self and] give as donations to the poor of those things which are within [of inward righteousness] and behold, everything is purified and clean for you. But woe to you, Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every [little] herb, but disregard and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone. Woe to you, Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and [you love] to be greeted and bowed down to in the [public] marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like graves which are not marked or seen, and men walk over them without being aware of it [and are ceremonially defiled]" (Luke 11:39-44, Amplified)

Well, Jesus really knew how to sweet-talk someone didn't he? He was invited by this religious leader into their home for dinner, and Jesus verbally slapped him and his religious buddies in front of God and everyone. Can you imagine if something like this were to happen in the house of your average religious leader today? What do you think the response would be? If you were there, would you stand with or against Jesus? Would you think he was being too heavy-handed, too harsh, too mean? Where was "sweet and gentle Jesus"? Obviously, Jesus was right in what he said and how he said it, but at the time it sure didn't "feel" right to everyone. We know this because one of the religious lawyers then piped in and voiced his outrage; they knew what Jesus was saying to the Pharisee applied to all the religious leaders, and they did not like it. They didn't appreciate being insulted and exposed. But Jesus didn't hold back:

"Woe to you, the lawyers, also! For you load men with oppressive burdens hard to bear, and you do not personally [even gently] touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you are rebuilding and repairing the tombs of the prophets, whom your fathers killed (destroyed). So you bear witness and give your full approval and consent to the deeds of your fathers; for they actually killed them, and you rebuild and repair monuments to them. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and apostles, [some] of whom they will put to death and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be charged against and required of this age and generation, from the blood of Abel to the

blood of Zechariah, who was slain between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against and required of this age and generation. Woe to you, lawyers (experts in the Mosaic Law)! For you have taken away the key to knowledge; you did not go in yourselves, and you hindered and prevented those who were entering” (Luke 11:46-52, Amplified).

Jesus knew the oppressive nature of the religious leaders – he had observed the byproducts of their religious system over the course of thirty-years of living side-by-side with it – and now he was calling them out, divulging their wickedness. But of all the places he could have chosen to have this show-down, why did he choose dinner-time in the house of a Pharisee? Why did he use a time that was and is usually meant for food and light-hearted fellowship? Why would Jesus insult the host and his religious associates while in his home? Did he not know how it was going to end? Did he think they were going to repent after being brow-beaten and publically mortified? Did he not know that they were going to be enraged by his words so much that they began to plot against him? Well, they did, and it eventually took his life.

So, again, what if Jesus came over to your house for dinner? Would you invite him over a second time?

Pharisee #3: The Test

On a third and final occasion, Jesus shared a meal in the house of another Pharisee, who was actually one of the top leaders of the Pharisee sect (See Luke 14:1-24). But this particular get-together was a trap from the beginning, covered up by the debris of a seemingly innocent dinner invitation!

From the moment Jesus entered the house, the host and all his religious guests had their eyes on him, closely watching his every move. They didn’t really want to spend time with him because they liked him or because he had something they wanted. They had heard his words, seen his actions, and knew where he stood, and now they were up to no good. So they lured him in and ambushed him with human bait. They put a man who was massively swollen in his joints right in front of Jesus to see what he was going to do. Of course, they didn’t make it obvious that this was a test, but Jesus knew it and purposefully failed it, for everyone’s benefit. They wanted to see if Jesus would actually break their Sabbath law by healing this man, and that is exactly what he did but not before he asked his host and fellow guests, “Is it lawful and right to cure on the Sabbath or not?” (Amplified) Of course, the religious leaders had nothing to say. They were stumped. So Jesus, instead of debating with them, showed them the “right” thing to do. He touched the sick man, healed him, and sent him on his way. Then to seal the deal, he asked his audience, “Which of you, having a son or a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not at once pull him out on the Sabbath day?” (Amplified) Again, no one could answer him, but their silence spoke louder than words ever could. They loved the law more than the hurting but loved their children, donkeys, and oxen enough to break their esteemed law. Somehow this man with dropsy wasn’t worth their love. So Jesus purposefully exposed their hypocrisy.

He then shifted his attention to the guests who, as he had noticed, all tried to sit in the highest places of honor at the dinner table. He could tell they were high on themselves by the way they elbowed their way to the best seats in the house; to them, this banquet wasn’t about fellowship

but rather social-climbing. So, true to form, he proceeded to expose and rebuke them too, en masse, saying, “When you are invited by anyone to a marriage feast, do not recline on the chief seat [in the place of honor], lest a more distinguished person than you has been invited by him, and he who invited both of you will come to you and say, Let this man have the place [you have taken]. Then, with humiliation and a guilty sense of impropriety, you will begin to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and recline in the lowest place, so that when your host comes in, he may say to you, Friend, go up higher! Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit [at table] with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled (ranked below others who are honored or rewarded), and he who humbles himself (keeps a modest opinion of himself and behaves accordingly) will be exalted (elevated in rank).” (Amplified) Jesus knew their hearts, but they didn’t know who he was; if they had, they would have offered him the best seat in the house, way before themselves. Their actions revealed their true nature to Jesus. He saw their pride and went for the jugular.

Then, he turned to his host and embarrassed him in front of everyone by telling him who he should and should not have invited for dinner. He said, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, lest perhaps they also invite you in return, and so you are paid back. But when you give a banquet or a reception, invite the poor, the disabled, the lame, and the blind. Then you will be blessed (happy, fortunate, and to be envied), because they have no way of repaying you, and you will be recompensed at the resurrection of the just (upright).” (Amplified) In other words, Jesus said, “You invited your well-to-do friends and family and neglected the needy, for selfish gain. You give because you want not because you care; if you really cared, you would give to those who can’t return the favor. From now on, if you want to be blessed, pour yourself out for those who cannot bless you. Then my father will reward you.”

After hearing this, one of the guests said to Jesus, “Blessed (happy, fortunate, and to be envied) is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (Amplified) Obviously, this person agreed with what Jesus was saying and was affirming his words, but I also sense that they were subtly attempting to broaden the way to the Kingdom of God which Jesus was always narrowing. How do I know this? Because Jesus responded to the man by saying, “A man was once giving a great supper and invited many; and at the hour for the supper he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, Come, for all is now ready. But they all alike began to make excuses and to beg off. The first said to him, I have bought a piece of land, and I have to go out and see it; I beg you, have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to examine and put my approval on them; I beg you, have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and because of this I am unable to come. So the servant came and reported these [answers] to his master. Then the master of the house said in wrath to his servant, Go quickly into the great streets and the small streets of the city and bring in here the poor and the disabled and the blind and the lame. And the servant [returning] said, Sir, what you have commanded me to do has been done, and yet there is room. Then the master said to the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges and urge and constrain [them] to yield and come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, not one of those who were invited shall taste my supper” (Amplified).

So, when the guest mentioned how blessed are those who eat bread in the Kingdom of God, Jesus basically said, “Yes, but the only ones who will eat in my house when they are invited are

those who are desperate for help in their lives because they cannot help themselves. The self-sufficient and affluent in this world will not be blessed in my World but those who truly need me in this world will be blessed. I want everyone to be saved. I want my house to be filled to the brim. That is why I am inviting everyone to come to my table, but few are willing to pay the price. Only those who are detached from this world and the things and people of this world will come. Only the poor in spirit will inherit the Kingdom.” Jesus’ answer was an attempt to raise the bar by adjusting the religious mindset of his audience which fostered a greasy, all-inclusive entrance into the Kingdom of God. He set the record straight, separating the sheep from the goats (See Matthew 25:32-46).

So in summary, Jesus, the guest of honor in the home of one of the Pharisees’ top-dogs, single-handedly broke the Sabbath, rebuked the host, insulted his fellow guests, and exalted the reprobates of society – all in one evening. As Philip Yancey wrote in his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, “Jesus hardly made for a soothing dinner guest.”

He narrowed and straightened the way to the Kingdom of God, drawing a fine line in the sand between the legalists and the lovers, the thoughtless and the thoughtful, the selfish and the selfless, the some-bodies and the no-bodies, the needless and the needful. He looked at those who say they are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” and saw their true condition as being “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17, KJV). And he looked at those who are “the poor of this world,” who are “poor in spirit,” and deemed them “rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5; Matthew 5:3, NKJV).

So, let me ask the question again: What if Jesus came over to your house for dinner? Would you invite him over at all, knowing what you now know?

Dinner at Zach’s

On one occasion, when Jesus passed through Jericho, he was being followed by a crowd that wanted to see this man they had heard so much about. But there was a rich tax collector in the crowd who was “vertically challenged” (in other words, he was short), who couldn’t see Jesus but desperately wanted to. He sensed something in Jesus that was beyond him and his wealth. I believe he knew there was a hole in his heart and needed something or someone to fill it, and there was something about Jesus that drew him in like a magnet. So, following his heart, he climbed a sycamore tree that Jesus was about to pass by which lined him up for a God-encounter. As Jesus approached, he noticed this curious mini-man in the tree and said, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”

Can you imagine Jesus calling you by name and then insisting he stay at your house? Can you fathom the feelings that would rush through your heart? No wonder “Zach” rushed down that tree so fast and welcomed Jesus into his home so joyfully.

Of course, the crowd didn’t like this at all. They began muttering and complaining about Jesus’ choice of friends, wondering why he was lodging with a person who, in their eyes, was devoted to sin; they saw him as a thug, murderer, and reprobate.

But Zach didn't pay them any mind. He was focused on hosting this man who somehow knew him; he had spent so much of his time running after riches, but now he was with someone who had something he didn't, something money could never buy. Being in the presence of Jesus did something to him; it began to change him, from the inside out, until he was so stirred that he stood up in the middle of their time together in his home and said, "See, Lord, the half of my goods I [now] give [by way of restoration] to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone out of anything, I [now] restore four times as much." Can you picture in your mind what this looked like? What a scene! Zach and Jesus were spending time together in a room along with "the poor" and those Zach had apparently "cheated" in the past, and suddenly he gets up and starts giving to the poor and righting wrongs. What a transformation!

After being with Jesus for a short time, Zach was a changed man. He was truly "born again," and it was so genuine that Jesus declared "Today is...salvation come to [all the members of] this household, since Zacchaeus too is a [real spiritual] son of Abraham; for the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

Zach was a new man, and his whole family was saved as a result of his radical reformation; he went from being a son of greed to a real son of Abraham (I wonder what the Jews, who believed *they* were the real children of Abraham, thought about this.). He was delivered from his old life. Old things passed away and all things became new at that very moment. He didn't care anymore about "stuff" and "money" but rather became driven by righteousness and goodness through spending a few minutes with the greatest Change Agent of all time.

Like the religious leaders of his day, Zach was curious about this man, Jesus, but he was far more than curious; he was desperate to have the void in his life filled with something more, far beyond what he already had or thought he had. His heart was open to the Lord – teachable, vulnerable and honest – and the Lord rewarded him with a brand new life.

Jesus always graced the humble and resisted the proud. He invested the best of himself in those whose hearts were as good, rich ground and never cast his pearls to pigs. Zach's humility positioned him for grace from God. He laid down his greatness, because he finally found someone who was greater than anything or anyone he had ever known. He was desperate for "more," for a change, for a new life because he was tired of the endless cycle of death he was in.

Are you desperate yet? Are you ready for a complete make-over?

If not, let us take a look at another man who was changed from the inside out.

Dinner at Levi's

After healing a man who was paralyzed, Jesus moved on from that place and noticed a man named Matthew (a.k.a. Levi) who was sitting in a tax office. Luke's gospel, in the Amplified Bible, says Jesus "looked attentively" at this man who was a tax collector by trade. Like the paralyzed man Jesus had just healed, Levi was paralyzed as well, in his heart, but all of that was about to change.

What did Jesus see in Levi? He didn't look at everyone like that, but there was something about Levi that grabbed his attention in such a way that he went over to Levi and said, "Follow me!" Notice, he didn't ask Levi if he wanted to follow him – he told him. But Levi didn't seem to care that he was being ordered around by this complete stranger because, somehow, deep inside, he knew this man; something in him clicked when their eyes met. In fact, it seems Levi was so taken with Jesus (as Jesus was likewise taken with Levi), that he got up from where he was, left everything, and followed him without being together beforehand where they were going. Clearly, Jesus had something Levi wanted more than everything he already had; or there was something about Jesus that just made sense more than anything he had ever known.

So Levi hosted a large dinner at his home for Jesus. And, as always, Jesus attracted a mixed crowd of tax collectors and "especially wicked sinners" who sat down with him and his disciples at the dinner table (Matthew 9:10, Amplified). For the first time, this unsavory group of misfits had someone who really loved them and actually liked them enough to hang out with them on their level, despite their mess. This, of course, as always, offended the religious crowd who complained to Jesus' disciples that they should not have been eating and drinking with such riff-raff. When Jesus heard their murmuring, he said to them "Those who are strong and well (healthy) have no need of a physician, but those who are weak and sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy [that is, readiness to help those in trouble] and not sacrifice and sacrificial victims. For I came not to call and invite [to repentance] the righteous (those who are upright and in right standing with God), but sinners (the erring ones and all those not free from sin)." (Amplified)

Notice, Jesus didn't sweep their sin under the carpet, but neither was he passing judgment from a distance; he loved them enough to unconditionally love them into freedom through companionship. He surrounded himself with those who were enslaved to impurity and "the almighty dollar" because he knew he had something within him that could free them from all their bondage, if they wanted it. He saw who these people really were beyond what everyone else saw and set them up, through relationship with him, to be recipients of his higher life.

Unlike the religious leaders who were in the room, Jesus didn't require these derelicts to jump through any religious hoops before they were qualified to be in his presence. They just wanted to be with him, and he let them into his circle knowing that his presence was all they really needed to bring them into their potential in him.

But since Jesus' answer to the Pharisees first question was so good, shaming them in front of everyone by putting their true motives on display, someone cut in and asked a question that was completely off the subject; needless to say, they were bound and determined to catch Jesus off-guard:

"The disciples of John practice fasting often and offer up prayers...and so do [the disciples] of the Pharisees...but yours eat and drink." (Amplified) In other words, "All the other 'true believers' are fasting and praying so much more than you guys are. Are you guys serious about your faith?"

Jesus answered, “Can you make the wedding guests fast as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; and then they will fast in those days” (Amplified). Jesus then used two obscure parables (The new patch with the old garment and the new wine with the old wineskin) to further rebuke the religious community for mismatching spiritual disciplines with spiritual seasons; if they had noticed the “Bridegrooms” presence, they would not have been praying and fasting as if he was absent; as always, they failed to discern the signs of the times and were thus irrelevant in their day (Matthew 16:3).

Jesus didn’t pull any punches, but his attention was primarily on the sinners who were in the room. Think about it: who invited Jesus and his disciples for dinner? Levi! Who else was at the party? Crooks, sinners, and religious leaders. Who ruined the dinner-party? The religious leaders. They nit-picked everything they could find, and Jesus put them in their place in short order, right in front of everyone, because he was set on loving over legalizing hurting lives. [This story can be found in Matthew 9:9-19; Mark 2:14-22; Luke 5:27-39]

Martha & Mary

During one of Jesus’ visits to Bethany, he and his disciples were invited by Martha to have dinner in her home. Unlike most who misunderstood and rejected Jesus without even really knowing who he was, Martha saw how special he was, embraced him, and opened her home to him. She and her younger sister, Mary, both loved Jesus very much but in very different ways.

Mary spent the whole night sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening to every word he said. She wasn’t interested in fixing dinner or eating food. But she was hungry; her heart wanted something else, something more. She wanted to be with Jesus. Her affection for Jesus was extraordinary and she couldn’t hide it (See John 12:1-9).

Martha, on the other hand, was busy in the kitchen anxiously preparing a large meal for Jesus, his disciples, Mary, herself, and possibly Lazarus; she was so focused on dinner that she was distracted from her guest of honor. Then, when she noticed that Mary wasn’t helping her, she got upset, walked over to Jesus, and said, “Lord, is it nothing to you that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me [to lend a hand and do her part along with me]!” (Amplified) Notice how she blamed Jesus for not caring about her plight as the lone hostess? She accused him of being unfair and then demanded that Jesus tell her sister to pitch-in. Martha was so focused on what she was doing that she thought the whole evening revolved around her.

Now understand, in those days homes were divided into male space and female space. The kitchen belonged to the women. The main room was for the men, and it was considered improper, even scandalous, for a woman to be in there except for a short period of time. The only place where men and women could be together was the master bedroom. So, when Mary was seated at Jesus’ feet with the disciples in the public room, she “crossed the line” because she sat where only men belonged. Moreover, she sat at his feet as a disciple, which was also taboo since every rabbi in that day only had male disciples (Of course, this means Jesus also broke “the rule” since he disciplined men and women throughout his ministry).

Mary was so desperate for “more” of Jesus that she broke tradition. Of course, Martha did not understand this; she was “in her place,” slaving in the kitchen while her sister was, essentially, acting like a man! Martha understood proper etiquette and was so disgusted with her little sister’s impropriety that she demanded Jesus to make it right.

So what did Jesus do? Did he use his authority to demand Mary’s service and affirm Martha’s complaint? Did he say, “You know, Martha, you’re right! You’ve been working so hard and Mary’s been rude and too ‘spiritual’ to help you. Where are my manners? Martha, please forgive me for being so inconsiderate. Mary, help your sister.” No! Instead, he said, “Oh Martha, Martha, you’re bothered about so many things but there’s only one thing that really matters. Mary understands this and has made up her mind. She has chosen the ‘main course’ of the meal I have prepared for all of you – ME! – and it won’t be taken from her.” It seems that Jesus didn’t even notice Martha’s good intentions. Instead, he looked into her heart, saw who she really was, saw her core motivations, and brought everything to the surface. Her service was misguided because her heart was misdirected. [This story can be found in Luke 10:38-42]

Martha welcomed Jesus into her home – her world – as “the woman of the house,” and went to work trying to serve him to the best of her ability. But, when the time came to be a disciple – to sit, be still, and listen to him – when the time came to enjoy him, to be “at home” with him, she missed it. She failed to discern the purpose of that moment. Mary was concerned about “one thing” – being with Jesus and knowing him (See Psalm 27:4, 8). Jesus accepted Martha’s invitation because he wanted to be with them. He was more interested, at that moment, in intimate fellowship than in eating good food and talking about the weather. So, when Martha became distracted from the real reason they were together, Jesus basically said, “Martha, stop what you’re doing, relax, and be with me. I came to be with you.”

Closer to Home

Does *this* Jesus resemble the Jesus you heard about in Sunday School growing up? When was the last time anyone showed you this side of him? Or have you never heard of *this* Jesus?

Of course, please understand, it’s not that the Jesus we heard about was all wrong, only incomplete, thanks to the influences of our self-centered, religious, western culture. Therefore, when the topic of Christlikeness comes up, we paint an incomplete picture for “believers” of what it means to be like him. But what if we considered the other parts of his life that have been conveniently overlooked by all of us and revisited what it means to be like him, to be a true Christian? I know it can be disconcerting, to say the least, to see Jesus beyond the pigeon-holed version we’ve been fed, but if, as John said, we will become like him when we see him as he is, then will we not be transformed into his likeness and image to the degree that we see him? I don’t know about you, but I refuse to let anything keep me from seeing him more and more clearly so that I can fulfill my potential on this side of heaven.

Did you notice, after reading the stories above, the stark contrast between Jesus’ behavior toward the everyday-person and the religious busy-body? It was like night and day! He rarely had any compassion on the self-righteous folk, especially the religious clergy of his day, while he loved on the broken. He condemned the proud and spent himself on the humble. The only ones Jesus

seemed to be in sync with were those who were desperate and teachable, who needed help and deliverance. And since most people were conceited and hard-hearted (and still are), he incidentally ended up slighting most of his hosts.

So, the question that's begging to be asked is, what if Jesus came to your house? Would you like him at first and then hate him later after he loved you enough to tell you the truth, exposing your closeted skeletons in the process? Would you be meek enough to let him speak into your life even when it pains your pride or religious mind? How would you respond to Jesus' pitiable protocol? What if you made him dinner, and he repaid you with a rebuke? Would you be offended? What if he didn't let you hide or run from the Truth in your house, your domain? Would you ever have him over again?

Well, let's bring this closer to home...

What if a real Christian – a truly Christ-like individual (Romans 8:19) – came into your house? What if they entered your personal space and, like Jesus, only spoke what they heard our Father saying and only did what they saw our Father doing? What if they treated you the way you needed to be treated instead of the way wanted to be treated? How would their words and actions affect you? Would you get defensive? Would your feelings get hurt and get in the way of receiving them for who they are to you in Christ? Would their presence in your life not be for a reason? Do you believe in divine appointments?

Those who are truly following Jesus will not be like everyone else; in fact, they will be judged in the same way Jesus was judged, as a crazy, hateful, deceived, demon-possessed individual. Few will be able to relate to them in the same way that few were able to relate to Jesus, who was like an alien from another planet. Most will stiff-arm them, except those who are broken and contrite enough to discern their hearts and the fruit of their lives.

When someone starts behaving in ways that resemble Jesus' life, as we have seen, be careful not to write them off too quickly. They may not be what you want them to be, but that doesn't mean they aren't what our Father wants them to be. Just because someone makes you unhappy doesn't mean they are displeasing to the Lord. This is why we must become more sensitive to God's heart than we are to our own and everyone else's.

I pray that we will not be afraid to become more like him, and that we will not reject others who are more like him than we are simply because we don't like their method or manner. In the end, humility will be the primary virtue that will give us the grace to keep us from running away from him, no matter who he comes through. And as he makes us more like him, his love for us will be the only thing that will keep us strong when it seems we're all alone for simply being who he made us to be.