Group Guide: The Christmas Table

"The Table Has Been Set" - Week 1

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question:

- What's your favorite Christmas tradition, and why does it matter to you?
- Have you ever been invited to something special but made an excuse not to go? How did you feel afterward?

Key Scripture Passages

- **Luke 14:15-24** - The Parable of the Great Banquet
- **Hosea 11:1** - "Out of Egypt I called my son"
- **Matthew 2:13-15** - The fulfillment of prophecy
- **Isaiah 7:14** - The virgin birth prophecy
- **Micah 5:2** - The Bethlehem prophecy

Sermon Summary (5 minutes)

Jesus tells a parable about a great banquet where the originally invited guests make excuses and don't come. The master then invites the poor, crippled, blind, and lame—those who recognize their need. This Christmas season, we're reminded that God has been setting the table for centuries through Old Testament prophecies, preparing for the arrival of King Jesus. The feast is ready, and we're called to invite others who are broken and hurting to experience God's love.

Discussion Questions (30-40 minutes)

Understanding the Parable

1. **In Luke 14:15-24, why do you think the invited guests made excuses?** Were their reasons legitimate? What does this reveal about our own priorities?

2. **Why did the master specifically invite "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame"?** What does this teach us about who God values?

3. **The sermon mentioned that "it's only when we realize our brokenness before God that we understand the value of the feast."** What does this mean to you personally? In what areas of life do you need to acknowledge your brokenness?

The Set Table

4. **The sermon emphasized that God set the table for Jesus' birth hundreds of years in advance through prophecies.** What does this level of detail tell us about God's character and His plans?

5. **Read Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:13-15 together.** How does understanding Old Testament "typology" (events that foreshadow future realities) deepen your appreciation for the Christmas story?

6. **The pastor said, "Every detail matters" when God sets the table.** How does this truth impact how you view God's attention to detail in your own life?

Personal Application

7. **In the parable, people made excuses about fields, oxen, and marriage—all good things that became obstacles.** What "good things" in your life sometimes keep you from fully experiencing what God has prepared for you?

8. **The sermon challenged us to invite people who don't typically go to church.** Who in your life needs an invitation to experience Jesus this Christmas? What holds you back from inviting them?

9. **The master sent servants to "urge people to come in so that my house will be filled."** What's the difference between casually inviting someone and "urging" them? How can we do this with love and not pressure?

Going Deeper

10. **The religious elite (Pharisees) weren't present at Jesus' birth, but shepherds were.** Why do you think those who "had it all together" religiously often miss what God is doing?

11. **The sermon described the Christmas season as a "feast" we're invited to.** How can we slow down enough during this busy season to truly feast on Jesus rather than just go through the motions?

Key Takeaways

✓ **The table has been set** - God has been preparing for Jesus' arrival for centuries through detailed prophecies

✓ **We must recognize our need** - Only when we acknowledge our brokenness can we appreciate the feast God offers

✓ **Everyone is invited** - God especially seeks those who are hurting, broken, and feel unworthy

✓ **We are the messengers** - We're called to invite others to the feast, especially those who feel they don't belong

✓ **Prayer is essential** - Before inviting others, we must pray for their hearts to be receptive

Practical Applications (15-20 minutes)

This Week's Challenge:

1. Identify & Pray (Daily)

- Write down 2-3 names of people who don't regularly attend church or who are far from God
- Commit to praying for them daily this week
- Pray specifically that: (a) they'd be open to an invitation, and (b) their hearts would be receptive to the gospel

2. Extend an Invitation

- Plan to personally invite at least one person to the Christmas service next week
- Don't just send a digital invite—have a conversation
- Share why it matters to you and why you want them there

3. Examine Your Own Heart

- Reflect on what "excuses" you've been making that keep you from fully experiencing God's feast
- Identify one area where you need to acknowledge your brokenness before God
- Share this with one trusted person in your group for accountability

4. Slow Down

- Choose one Christmas activity to eliminate or simplify this season
- Use that time to reflect on the significance of Jesus' birth
- Journal about what the "feast" of Jesus means to you personally

Group Prayer Time (10 minutes) - Prayer Focus

1. **Thanksgiving** - Thank God for setting the table and inviting us to His feast

2. **For Those We're Inviting** - Pray by name for the people group members plan to invite to church

3. **For Receptive Hearts** - Ask God to prepare hearts to receive the gospel message

4. **For Next Week's Service** - Pray for the Holy Spirit to move powerfully during the Christmas service

5. **Personal Needs** - Share and pray for any personal needs in the group

Looking Ahead

Next Week: "The Guests Have Been Invited" - We'll explore who God invites to His table and what our response should be.

Reminder: Next Sunday's service is in the **evening** (not morning). Make sure your invited guests know the correct time!

Additional Resources

- **For Further Study:** Research other Old Testament prophecies about Jesus' birth (try Isaiah 9:6-7, Jeremiah 23:5-6, Zechariah 9:9)
- **Reflection Question for the Week:** "What would it look like for me to truly feast on Jesus this Christmas rather than just celebrate the holiday?"

"*For I tell you, not one of these individuals who were invited will taste my banquet*." - Luke 14:24

The table is set. Will you come? Will you invite others?