

Streamers

CHAPTER THREE



The Table Matters

Lesson 3A: Remembering Matters

Lesson 3B: The Table Rules

Essential Questions:

1. Why do we observe the Lord's Supper?
2. What led Thomas and Alexander Campbell to want to form a new type of church?
3. Why is the *Declaration & Address* important to the Stone-Campbell Movement?
4. Why do Stone-Campbell churches take communion as they do?

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CHAPTER 3 The Table Matters

My command is this:
Love each other as
I have loved you.

Greater love has no
one than this:
to lay down one's life
for one's friends.

-Jesus, in John 15: 12-13 NKJV

*On the first day of
the week, we
came together to
break bread.*

-Acts 20:7 NIV

All Christians are
members of the
house or family of
God, are called and
constitute a holy
and royal
priesthood, and
may, therefore,
bless God for the
Lord's table, its loaf
and cup, approach
it without fear, and
partake of it with
joy as often as they
please, in
remembrance of
the death of their
Lord and Savior.

-Alexander Campbell,
The Christian System



*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on
to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was
betrayed, took bread, and when he had given
thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body,
which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."*

*In the same way, after supper he took the cup,
saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood;
do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of
me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink
this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he
comes."*

-Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26 NIV

*And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and
gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for
you; do this in remembrance of me."*

*In the same way, after the supper he took the cup,
saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
which is poured out for you."*

-Luke 22: 19-20 NIV

For God so loved
the world that He
gave His only
begotten Son, that
whoever believes in
Him should not
perish but have
everlasting life.

-John 3: 16 NKJV

They devoted
themselves to the
apostles' teaching
and to the
fellowship, to the
breaking of bread
and to prayer.

-Acts 2:42-44 NIV

Each disciple, in handing the symbols to his fellow-
disciple, says, in effect, "You, my brother, once an
alien, are now a citizen of heaven; once a stranger,
are now brought home to the family of God.

You have owned my Lord as your Lord, my people as
your people. Under Jesus the Messiah we are one.

Mutually embraced in the Everlasting arms,
I embrace you in mine: thy sorrows shall be my
sorrows, and thy joys my joys.

Joint debtors to the favor of God and the love of
Jesus, we shall jointly suffer with him,
that we may jointly reign with him.

Let us, then, renew our strength, remember our King,
and hold fast to our boasted hope
unshaken to the end."

-Alexander Campbell, in *The Christian System*, (1852)

Therefore, one who gives
thanks for the loaf should
break it, not as the
representative of the
Lord, but after the Lord's
example.

And after the disciples eat
of this loaf, they should
hand it to one another.

Thus they all have
communion with the Lord
and with one another in
eating the broken loaf.

-modernized from Alexander Campbell, in
The Christian System, (1852)

We also tap into the power of the Holy Spirit when we come together at the Table. As we say Christ's words and take the bread and wine, we re-live the final precious moments Jesus shared with his followers. In doing so, we reach into the spiritual realm and touch the hands around the Table as the elements are passed. We become a part of the scene. We participate in the same meal those first disciples enjoyed. We slip the bonds of space and time and become one with

Christ and with all believers across the ages. In that moment, the Holy Spirit, who lives within us, sparks the connection between God and his people that exists for all eternity. Each of us, then, is lifted into heavenly places to commune with the One who causes all things to be.

-Glenn Carson, in *A Future History*



**LESSON 3A:
Why Do We Observe The Lord's Supper?**

"Do you have your ticket? ...the directions? ...your lunch money? ...your homework?"

"You kids behave while I'm gone." "Call when you get there." "Sure am gonna miss ya." "Look after your momma, now." "Take care of yourself." "Later, man."

Recognize what these phrases share in common? Some might call them *parting words*: words used when saying *good-bye*. Although they will be different with cultures, circumstances, and times, they all translate to one essential reminder: "*Remember that I love you.*"

As the bus was pulling up to take Jarvis back to college, his mother was there beside him, peppering him with typical mother talk: "Got all your books? Your jacket? Don't be stayin' out too late and not studying, now..." Turning and smiling at his mother, Jarvis replied warmly, "I love you, too, Mom," and hugged her with all he had. For a 19-year old, Jarvis was pretty wise, able to see through his mother's words to *what she really was trying to tell him*. But even at that, how could even the wisest young person begin to comprehend the many dimensions of a parent's love for his or her child?

Final good-byes are the toughest, and can leave us at a loss for what to say. How can *any* words capture the depth of human feelings? No matter which words come out of our mouth at these times, they most always translate to essentials—*what matters most*. And no words or acts are more common or more powerful than those translating to: "**Remember that I love you.**"

On the night before his death, it was Jesus' time to teach us about essentials. The scene was an upper room, where Jesus and disciples had shared the traditional Jewish Passover meal. If Jesus was able to eat at all, he must have done so with the heaviest of hearts.

For soon that night, Jesus' earthly ministry would come plummeting to an end. Judas, sitting there among them, would betray him to the authorities. Then things would get really ugly. Over the next hours, Jesus would be hauled into court, tried unfairly, ridiculed, beaten, and nailed to die in unimaginable pain upon a cross. His disciples, *wanting* to help but not knowing how, would scatter and hide in fear and defeat. As they intently watched him now in these closing few minutes, what essential reminders would he give?

Jesus had tried to prepare his disciples. But how could they comprehend that this moment in time *had always been his destiny*? God had sent Jesus to be *the Christ*, the promised *Messiah (Savior)*. In love, Christ would give his life for those who were *not blameless*. Christ's death was part of God's **new covenant**—agreement—for people in time to come.

The **old covenant** had been made in the days of Moses, between God and the people of Israel (the "Jewish")—who in obedience brought to the temple their unblemished cattle, sheep, and goats, in sacrifices of thanksgiving and for breaking God's laws.

By this **new covenant** with God, Christ would be the once-and-for-all sacrifice for all those to come. And the new covenant was expanded to include the Gentiles (non-Jewish people), too. Not having to live under a cloud of doom of the punishment of a lifetime of sins, followers would be freed to live in grace and love. They could follow Jesus' teachings and example, and go to God with the cares and burdens of their world. So, just what were people asked to do as *their part* of the covenant? Simply *to believe, to accept* Christ as God's Son and our Savior. That is why it is called grace: *amazing grace*.

An added promise to people was the presence of the *Holy Spirit*, a part of God that would equip and empower them in their everyday lives. Life's end on earth was to be just a beginning; God promised *eternal life to those who believed*. How could Jesus' disciples have known? What they would soon see happening was more of a *beginning* that it was an *end!*

At the Last Supper with his disciples, what Jesus did next would help frame history. In the days, years, and centuries to come, would Jesus' followers **remember** what he had tried so hard to teach them?... *remember* how much they were loved by God? ...*remember* Jesus' sacrifice? *How would Jesus help them do this?* Then, with hands reaching for the bread and cup, in the next moments Jesus offered a sacred way of understanding and remembering that is followed even to this day:



...the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." -1 Corinthians 11: 23-26 NIV

Christians share the bread and cup today in *obedience* to Christ's instructions. We call this act an **ordinance**: something ordered by the Lord to do. We also call this act a **sacrament**: a *sacred, representative act, repeated* so we *don't forget*. In Greek, the language of the early church, this sacrament came to be called "**the Eucharist**," meaning **good gift** or **thanksgiving**.

Jesus' order has been carried to us through the years by faithful followers, as generations and races become one through Christ, drawn together in *never forgetting* the essentials of God's love. Each Lord's Day, brothers and sisters in Christ lay aside differences to obediently meet around **the Lord's Table**, sharing in physical and spiritual *communion* the love of Christ, for now—and for the generations to come.



Questions For Thought and Reflection:

1. Consider Jarvis, with *awareness* of his mother's love for him, yet at his age still unable to comprehend the vastness of a parent's love. At his best, Jarvis would only know a small fraction of the things his mother had done for him over the years. How is it similar for us in trying to comprehend God's love for us?
2. As we take communion, how many of our senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, movement) are involved? Teachers will try to build *hands-on experiences* (connecting to the senses), *repetition*, and *peer tutoring* into their lessons to make things easier to grasp and remember. Which of these tools does *The Lord's Supper* use?
3. Many people wear or carry a small cross or other reminder of their connection to God and/or to Christ. In what ways are such reminders helpful? Do you see any 'down side' to such reminders?

4. Here is a quick test for you. **(1) What is $4 \times 2 =$ ___?** **(2) How many legs does an ostrich have ___?**

Lets check your answers. Did you answer "8" and "2"? If so, an A+ for you! Pat yourself on the back. Did you know that these questions checked different types of your remembering? The first checked memory of simple facts—called *rote* memory. The second was different. As you answered it, did an image of an ostrich pop into your mind? *Image memory* goes beyond rote memory, connecting facts to what we've seen in pictures or real-life. Images hold more meaning and power than words alone. But memory is far more complicated than even this.

The utmost way of remembering is **constant memory**—one that never leaves us. We have a fancy name for it, coming from Greek: **anamnesis** (an-am-KNEE-sus), meaning **not forgetting**. So, how is this different? Well, this morning when you woke up, were times-tables and ostriches the first thing on your mind? Probably not. On the other hand, do you know someone who lives in constant physical pain from injury or illness? Or grief from a terrible loss? Or someone who is so in love with someone else, that is all they can think of? All these are examples of a remembering that doesn't easily let up or go away. Such a feeling is often the first thing on the mind in waking up and last thing on the mind when falling asleep. They *can't* forget. And even though other thoughts and memories are there too, this feeling is interwoven into everything they think or do. It seems that God wants this same constancy in our lives, not of romance or pain—but of **God's love, presence, and peace with us**.

- a. What would it feel like to live in constant *anamnesis* of God's love, with constant awareness of God's love, presence, and peace?
 - b. Do you think a person living in constant pain or grief could also have *anamnesis* of God's love? How might the two interact?
 - c. How does *the Lord's Supper* give us the chance to develop *anamnesis* of God's love?
 - d. Can you think of other gifts God has provided to help us develop such *anamnesis*?
5. *At the Lord's Table, boundaries disappear. Individuals can be in communion with God, Jesus Christ, and each other, all at the same moment. Suddenly boundaries of time, place, station in life, and language disappear, giving an indescribable sense of connectedness to God and God's people in times past, present, and to come.*

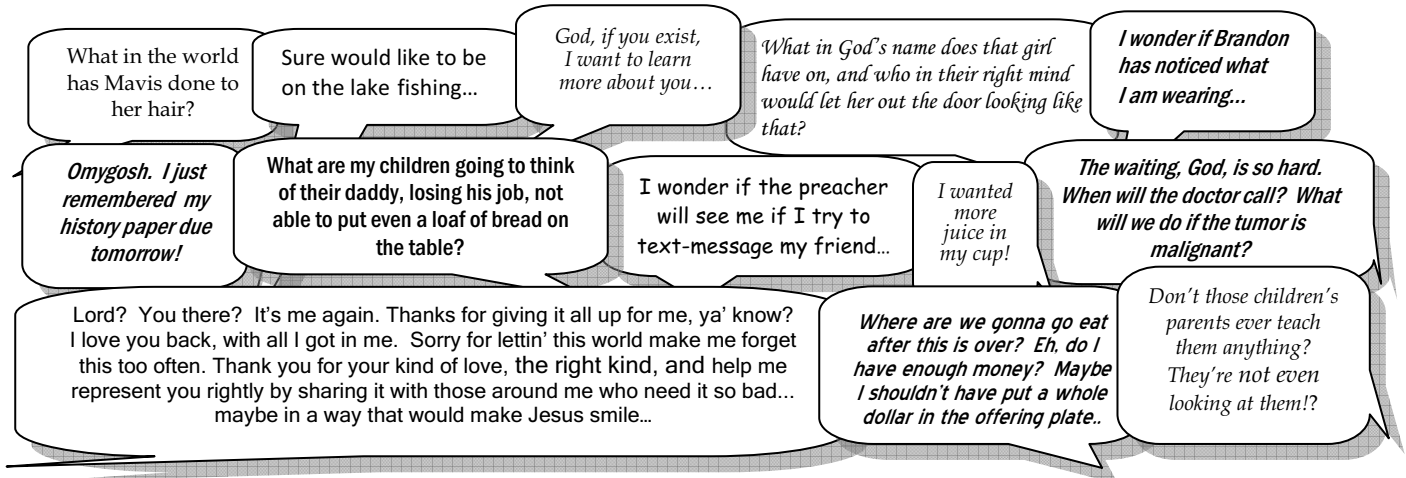
Do you agree or disagree with the above statement? Have you ever felt such a sense? How could this compare to the "table" in God's kingdom, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6: 9-13), "*Thy kingdom come...*"?



Questions For Thought and Reflection: (continued)

6. Most churches allow time during Communion for people to be silent and reflect or meditate. How do you think most people use that time? Look at the “Thoughts at the Table” below. Are any of these similar to your own?

‘Thoughts at the Table’



7. The question above and this one are *not about* judging other people, or to make ourselves feel rotten about ourselves. Instead, the idea is to *find ways to help ourselves learn and grow*. Look again at the examples. Can you quickly put them into any general categories?
8. a) Which examples from *Thoughts at the Table* show people *connecting* with God?
- b) Consider the host of the Lord's Table. Which, if any, of the examples do you see *showing to the host*:
- respect ?
 - disrespect ?
 - reverence ?
 - gratitude ?
 - indifference ?
 - love ?
 - humility ?
- c) Which show willingness to share Christ's burden for others?
9. Look at the different elements of the prayer of “Lord? You there?...” How many of these would you like to include in your own communion practice?
10. What can you do to help keep yourself from forgetting *what really matters* when you come to the Table? What personal commitments can you make for yourself at the Lord's Table?



When You Do This, Remember Me



You, my friend, a stranger once
Do now belong to heav'n
Once far away you are brought home
Into God's family.
When you do this, remember me.

Now my heart is also yours
My people are your own
Embraced together in God's arms
I enfold you now in mine.
When you do this, remember me.

All your sorrows shall be mine
Your joy shall be my joy
Indebted to God's love in Christ
We die and reign with him.
When you do this, remember me.

So let us renew our faith
Remembering our Lord
To our strong hope we will hold fast
Unshaken to the end.
When you do this, remember me.

*-words and music by David Edwards, adapted from Alexander Campbell (1852).
Used by permission.*



3B: The Table Rules

- “Hey, man, that’s not cool. Not while we’re eatin’.”
- “We do NOT make pig faces at our brother while we are eating!”

Every meal table has its own rules. The table may be exquisitely dressed in crystal, lace and a detailed list of do’s and don’ts. Or the table could be an apartment’s front steps where youth gather to share pizza and ponder the finer points of life. Regardless of tradition, sharing a meal has a remarkable way of creating a bond among those gathered ‘at the table.’ Here are one family’s table rules. Which are like or unlike your own?

🎯 RULES FOR THE TABLE 🎯

1. No one starts eatin’ until we’ve said Grace. We hold hands while thankin’ him—the Good Lord put us here together, so must expect us to hold together in this life.
2. Absolutely no cussin’, spittin’, fightin’, or dishonesty at the table. Any and all weapons must be left outside.
3. No ill will allowed here, including spitefulness, talkin’ bad of, and puttin’ people down (includin’ yourself).
4. Good humor and talk that builds others up is appreciated. If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.
5. No distractions while we’re eating, includin’ silliness, game playin’, and wastin’ food.
6. Be respectful to all at the table. Start by remembering your *pleases* and *thank yous*. Eat civilized, not callin’ attention to yourself or spoilin’ others’ appetites with your habits.
7. Always be grateful for the work of the cook and tell ‘em so, even when things don’t turn out exactly as desired.
8. Be mindful of the food to be had and the mouths needin’ to be fed here. Don’t take more than your share. Gladly pass each dish on to the next, not hoardin’ the good for yourself.
9. No matter how much or little we’ve got, we’re always grateful for it, and will share with any soul at our table.
10. If you learn that someone along your way will be goin’ hungry tonight, invite ‘em to dinner. We can always add a little more water to the soup.

Rules for The Lord’s Table

Most Christian denominations observe *The Lord’s Supper*. Yet just *how* they go about this can be quite different—in a small way, like families’ different table rules. *Communion practices* are often the most noticeable differences one sees when visiting different churches. And different ideas of how to observe the Lord’s Supper have caused colossal church quarrels.

Such a difference sparked the Campbell’s part of the *Restoration movement*; Thomas and Alexander had each come up against communion rules they believed were not in line with Christ’s directions for the church.

As part of the goal to restore the church, founders of the *Restoration movement* were convinced that they should look to the practices of the early *New Testament Christians*—many who had learned *what to do* directly from disciples who’d been with Jesus. The founders searched and studied the Bible, both in English and in its original languages. As a result, the communion practices chosen by the founders were not new; some other churches throughout history had adopted them, too. But the practices *were* new to the founders. Each practice was chosen in faithfulness to what the founders saw as the Lord’s directions for the Lord’s Table.

1. Who can take communion?

The founders believed that Christ gave the invitation to *all who would believe*—not to just the best and the brightest. With this thinking, the Lord offers the invitation as host of the table, so it is no human’s place to turn another away or to add more parts to the test. This belief is called the “**Open Table.**”

In Stone-Campbell church streams, meaning of “*the open table*” ranges from “open to *all believers baptized by immersion*” or “open to *all believers*,” to “open to *all worshippers*.” The details are prayerfully considered and decided by local congregations. Remember the saying, “*In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty...?*” *Observing the Lord’s supper* is considered an *essential* of weekly worship, but for many of the smaller details, *liberty* is more often the guideline.

2. How often is communion observed?

Thomas and Alexander Campbell found references (such as in Acts 20:7) to early disciples meeting together “*on the first day of the week*” and “*breaking bread*.” Because of this, they came to believe that *weekly observance* of the Lord’s Supper was most in keeping with New Testament church practices. Any of Barton Stone’s *Christian churches* not already doing so made this change after the movements joined in 1832.

3. Who serves communion?

Recall the belief in *priesthood of believers* (Lesson 1A)?

As you come to him ...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

–1 Peter 2:4-5 NIV

This belief guided the founders to see that with Christ as host, each of the others at the table are *priests*, themselves intended to *serve each other*. Today, Stone-Campbell congregations typically use *elders*, *ministers*, or other *leaders* to preside at the table, leading in breaking the bread and saying the “*words of institution*” used by Jesus at the Last Supper. The bread and cup are either held for others to come forward and take, or passed along from believer to believer—each served, then in turn serving another.



The Table Rules: Questions for Thought and Reflection

1. Those who have grown up with weekly communion have no doubt seen their share of mistakes at the table:
 - Some are sorrowful, such the elder who lets slip a tray of communion juice, which flips over and crashes to the floor, splashing its dark liquid all over nearby people and objects. As the tray rolls down the aisle, seemingly on its own, the mortified elder rushes out of the sanctuary.
 - Some mistakes have a lighter side. One congregation watched with increasing interest as a guest minister doggedly but unsuccessfully worked to ‘break’ a hardened, varnished ‘prop’ loaf of bread—before someone whispered to him the problem.
 - Another congregation stifled applause when, hearing a commotion, looked up just in time to see the loaf tumbling from the tray as the elder raised it in prayer. As the loaf bounced off the table and arched toward the floor, an alert young deacon made a spectacular diving catch to “save” the loaf just before it would have hit the floor.

Do you have any similar stories? Even with our best effort, people are still only human. Do you have any ideas how Christ might see such mistakes? What do you think is the proper way to respond to such situations when they happen?

2. If you want to raise a ruckus among a broad range of religious thinkers, ask them the meaning of Jesus’ words, “*This is my body given for you...this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (Luke 22: 19-20)*.” Christians have various ideas of how to best interpret it. Here are two contrasting ways that different Christians, including Protestants and Roman Catholics, might interpret this passage:
 - Jesus was saying that the communion *elements* (bread and wine) *are transformed* at the Table into Christ’s *literal body and blood*. Because of this, only those specially set aside—ordained as priests—can touch the elements before handing them to *the communicants* (those taking communion). After communion, any unused “host” must be treated as extremely sacred; priests would never just set it aside.
 - Jesus was saying that the elements are *symbols*, to serve as memory aids—*reminders*—of his broken body and spilled blood. Although the elements are seen as *sacred representatives*, they are not Christ’s *literal* body and blood. The role of the “priests” may vary, but is typically a leader such as *elder* or *minister*, who either offers the bread and cup for others to take, or passes them on to others, so that in the way of the priesthood of believers, one person serves another. Some churches are strictly “one-cuppers,” always using one common cup for the wine or juice, while others use a tray of individual, single-cup servings. Some use either method, depending on their focus. About the time of *Prohibition* in the United States, most Stone-Campbell churches made the move to using ‘unfermented wine’ (grape juice) instead of actual wine.

Individuals, congregations, and denominations may hold beliefs close to one of those above, or in between them both. Which belief is most similar to your own?

3. Imagine yourself as host of the dinner table as your ‘guests’ are arriving. Suppose one of your guests says to you:
 - Mom, I told Joey that he couldn’t eat supper with us anymore. Or lunch or breakfast. We got report cards today, and he is failing everything in second grade! He can barely even read his name. I just don’t think Joey is smart enough to eat with us.
 - Daisy, we heard that you invited the Smiths to your dinner party. Our family doesn’t think much of the Smiths. Actually, we can’t stand them. So we called the Smiths and told them that they couldn’t come to the party. We were sure you’d agree.
 - a) Do these examples sound preposterous? If so, why?
 - b) How do the examples resemble some of the communion practices that Alexander and Thomas Campbell objected to?
 - c) Do you think any of the founders would have a different opinion about any of our communion practices today?
4. In a church that practices weekly Lord’s Supper, a regular church go-er will have participated in communion *at least* 520 times over 10 years. People from denominations that practice communion less often, maybe only once or twice a year, may see this as *weakening* communion’s meaningfulness.
 - a. How would you answer a friend from one of those traditions who asks you, “Doesn’t taking communion so much cheapen it for you?”
 - b. If you were unable to celebrate the Lord’s Supper for some reason, such as happens with many people who are hospital or home-bound, what would you miss the most?
 - c. Does your church have any program to take communion to individuals similar to those described above?



5. When individuals come to the table, what are their responsibilities before God? What are their responsibilities to each other? What can individuals do to keep from cheapening the act of communion?

6. In many Stone-Campbell churches, deacons and other church members help to serve communion. Advice given to them typically includes, “*Don’t act or dress so that you will distract others from their focus on God,*” and “*Don’t think of what you are doing as a chore, but as a sacred honor to be an extension of Christ’s arms, reaching out to others.*” What do you see as some essentials for those who help prepare, serve, and lead the Lord’s Supper?

7. Although not sacred in exactly the same way as the Lord’s Table, family dinner tables around the world hold their own essential place. In some ways, thinking of the family table can help us understand *The Lord’s Table*. Look again at *Rules for the Table*. How do you think the ***Rules for the Lord’s Table*** should be similar or different?

RULES FOR THE TABLE

1. No one starts eatin’ until we’ve said Grace. We hold hands while thankin’ him—the Good Lord put us here together, so must expect us to hold together in this life.
2. Absolutely no cussin’, spittin’, fightin’, or dishonesty at the table. Any and all weapons must be left outside.
3. No ill will allowed here, including spitefulness, talkin’ bad of, and puttin’ people down (includin’ yourself).
4. Good humor and talk that builds others up is appreciated. If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.
5. No distractions while we’re eating, includin’ silliness, game playin’, and wastin’ food.
6. Be respectful to all at the table. Start by remembering your *pleases* and *thank yous*. Eat civilized, not callin’ attention to yourself or spoilin’ others’ appetites with your habits.
7. Always be grateful for the work of the cook and tell ‘em so, even when things don’t turn out exactly as desired.
8. Be mindful of the food to be had and the mouths needin’ to be fed here. Don’t take more than your share. Gladly pass each dish on to the next, not hoardin’ the good for yourself.
9. No matter how much or little we’ve got, we’re always grateful for it, and will share with any soul at our table.
10. If you learn that someone along your way will be goin’ hungry tonight, invite ‘em to dinner. We can always add a little more water to the soup.

**Up Next:
CHAPTER 4:
The Body Matters**



INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION SHEET

Lesson 3A: The Table Matters

Date:

3-Connections—Campbells, Communion, Conscience

Date:

Lesson 3B: The Table Rules

Date:



CHAPTER 3 NOTES: The Table Matters