

The **Reconciliation Table**.



**12 year anniversary service
"The Reconciliation Table"
Courage Church, Detroit, MI
October 9, 2016**

At the beginning of the year, it was the first sermon that I gave this whole year, I talked about fear.

and one thing that I committed to you guys was that when it came to moving forward this year... this year we are going to jump. If God tells me to do something, I am going to trust him enough to do it.

This year we are going to take the risks that are required if we are ever going to go to another level for Jesus in this city.

because we know that God has something he wants to do in this city. And it is actually pretty easy to gage what it is, just by talking to anyone who has Detroit on their heart... so many people are coming here, others have lived here their whole lives... and they all share this common thread between them, that there are things that ought not be, that must be changed... that there is a great city here, that needs to be rebuilt by God's people and on God's principles... there are neighborhoods that need to be brought back to life, houses that need to be rebuilt, community centers that need to go in, kids who need to be mentored. Art that needs to be taught... the list goes on and on and on.

but the difference between the ones that God uses, and the ones who just have an idea that never actually does anything, is all determined by whether or not that person is willing to do it. To jump. To step out.

To move.

To take whatever risk it takes...

because the truth is... if God puts a vision on your heart... it is worth the risk to see it happen. And I would rather fall on my face pursuing the call of

God, then rest easy in the comfort of what is familiar and what makes sense...

One thing that Pastor Chilly told me at Four Days, after all the crazy things that have been happening to our family in the last year... is that "where we are is the safest place we could be, because we are in the will of God." and so God has just been working the fear out of me over the time that we have been here.

And I said that one thing that I determined is that I will not let fear have a seat at the table in our conversations, nor let it be a wall for our dreams to hit up against. And so this year we launched our Discipleship School... a simple first step. We raised over 30 thousand dollars towards a house to house them in, and now we are working on a deal to get a house, that the students and workers of the discipleship school can live in one unit, and we can build bunk beds and host short term mission teams on the second floor.

Please be praying for us, for favor as we continue to walk through that process. We have a house that we really like a lot, but it still needs to pass an inspection and we still need to raise a little more money to do it the way that we are supposed to do it. We have raised over 30, I think realistically we will need about 45 total to really bring the project to completion debt free.

We are really excited about that, and about everything that God has been doing.

So on our anniversary service, I wanted to begin with that.

There is motion. Things are moving forward.

We have a lot to celebrate, and even more to anticipate.

and after service we are going to have a meal together.

and sometimes we cook all the food together, but today we ordered food from a few of our neighbors... which I love... I love that the meals came from several different places right here in Southwest.

We have tamales from Evies, we have Quesadillas from the taco truck across the street and we have Mexican rice from E&L.

and today's message is going to be centered around a meal.

It is a concept that I have mentioned several times, because it is so dear to my heart... but today I want to teach about it.

and the title of today's message is: The Reconciliation Table.

You see, for a while, the number one question that people would ask Dawn and I after we became pastors, was this:

What is your vision?

and I think that we get it asked it less now, because people are so frustrated with the broad, simple, an one worded answers that they get. Now of course, we did a whole series really laying out a lot of it, back in January called "Cultivate the Romance" and if you missed that series you can always go back and watch that anytime on our website or on our app...

But to simplify things.. when we say it in a word, the word is reconciliation.

And the way that looks here... the tangible... we are learning as we go. Because God makes all things new... he is doing a new thing.

and as our church grows and expands, and takes on bigger projects and ministers to more people, we are going to find, that what it takes to reconcile one person may be a lot different than what it takes to reconcile another...

what it takes to reach one neighborhood may look totally and completely different than what it takes to reach another neighborhood.

But it all falls under the same overall goal, of reconciling people to God.

Because in the New Testament, the only ministry that we are given is the ministry of reconciliation.

There is no mention of a “childrens ministry” or a “youth ministry” or a “homeless ministry” in the bible... and where those things are not bad, they are, to a degree, made up.

The ministry we have been given is the ministry of reconciliation. So if someone is doing “youth ministry,” it should look like “reconciling the youth back to God.”

Because ultimately, if we have all of these ministries, and we learn together and we feed people, and we create social environments... but ultimately nobody meets Jesus, and at the end of each day they still go home feeling powerless over their circumstances, powerless over their desires and their urges... powerless over the substances that control them and the routines that they feel stuck in, and they can't find a hope for getting out...

if that is how people are leaving this place,

then we are not doing our jobs.

any of us.

Our job is not to create moments where people think that they are meeting God. It is not about emotional highs, and warm fuzzies.

Our job is to introduce people to what it means to know God.

and the first image of God that the world out there is going to get is going to be us.

So before we can realistically reconcile people to God, we need to reconcile them to ourselves. We need to make sure that we are building bridges for people to cross and welcoming them into relationships with us... opening our homes and our wallets and our dinner tables to people.

and living the love of Jesus Christ through the tangible and simple things like meals, and conversations, in the ways that we meet practical, tangible needs.

So with that, lets open up our bibles to 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, which of course, is one of our staple passages at Courage Church.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

lets pray.

The entire gospel, and everything that I believe that a church should be, is wrapped up into this passage.

Our job is to reconcile people to God, by not counting their trespasses against them. Our job is to be ambassadors for Christ in his Kingdom, which means that our job... the way that we reconcile people... is we represent Christ to people.

That is the job of an ambassador, to represent its king.

So if we are going to reconcile people back to God, we first need to represent God to people, and be in relationships with people.

In the Arabic language, the word reconciliation, and the word "table" come from the same word.

The word is “sulha” - which is Arabic but it comes from the Hebrew word “shulhan” which is the Hebrew word for table.

So literally... even now, in middle Eastern Culture...

Reconciliation goes hand in hand with tables.

With tables that people gather around and drink coffee together, and share meals together at.

To this day, It is how rivalries between families are settled.

It is how wrongs are made right.

And where the bible does not specifically address a “reconciliation meal” there are all sorts of examples throughout the old and new testament, of things being made right, in that setting.

David, in Psalm 23 says a verse that we all love to quote: “the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul... though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil because the Lord is with me.”

but then in verse 5 David says this:

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Now, in our culture, and knowing the way that we relate to each other and to our enemies... I wouldn't consider God preparing a table for me in the presence of my enemies as a blessing.

I would think... that is one dinner that I am not going to!

To me, that would not be leading me beside still waters... that would be destructive, not restoring.

But David here says “my cup overflows.”

Why?

What David is referring to is something called “the reconciliation table” or “the meal covenant”

and it is how truces were made. and again, in Middle Eastern culture, It is still how they are made to this day. A “sulha”

So, if there was some sort of a rivalry between families, maybe someone was killed, maybe someone felt cheated... and everyone was one upping each other and it was turning into a war and was getting way out of hand, what would happen was they would initiate a “sulha”

and it was a giant meal that would sometimes go for days... because it went until there was resolve.

So they would share this meal. And one family would apologize. And over this meal, they would come to terms that they both agreed upon, that would make it right. and they didn't always agree right away but both parties were committed from the beginning,

“We are not going to leave here, until we come to an agreement.”

and forgiveness had to be a part of that agreement.

So King David is thanking God, because the truth is, King David screwed a LOT of things up. He made a lot of enemies... he hurt a lot of people.

and yet God prepared a way for him to reconcile.

I read a story recently of an Israeli man, who in a freak accident hit an Arabic 13 year deaf child with his car... it was late, very dark... the child had wandered out, the street was not very lit, and the man only had a split second that he saw the child stepping out. He slammed on his breaks, and he slammed on his horn...

but the child didn't hear the horn, because he was deaf, and he hit the boy, and the boy died.

Now, in that culture, had that boy's family witnessed the accident, there is a very good possibility that they would have killed that driver, on the spot. Instant retaliation. That is just kind of how things work there.

But they weren't there.

The Israeli man was haunted by what had happened, and so, with the help of a pastor, they initiated a "sulha" - which the family was very surprised by because the man was not from their village, he was not Arabic... so to try and make reconciliation was pretty out of the ordinary.

But they agreed... and they went through the process of this reconciliation meal, and when the man finally left their home... the family said to him, "We know you have your family... but now you have ours. You are welcome anytime."

So a man who they literally probably would have killed for what he did had they been there, they had now forgiven and invited him into their family, after this meal.

That is reconciliation.

and that was in the last few years... Throughout the bible, you read lots of stories like that.

In Genesis (31), we read about Jacob and Laban.

Laban was Jacob's Father in law.

And Jacob felt cheated by Laban, he felt like Laban was not looking on him favorably anymore, so one day, when Laban went out to shear sheep, Jacob took his wives and children and they took a bunch of livestock and Rachel even went in and stole what the bible describes as one of Laban's "household gods" (verse 19) - they were little idols...

and they fled. They ran.

And of course, Laban was furious. and for seven days he hunted down Jacob and eventually found him. and they went back and forth and talked and talked and came to terms together, that they would not hurt each other, and they shared a covenant meal together.

Then Laban kissed his daughters and grand children and he went on his way. and when they parted ways it had been established that there were lines that neither Jacob nor Laban were allowed to cross again, and there was to be peace.

Then of course we have the story of the prodigal son. Who decides that he doesn't want to wait for his father to die to get his inheritance..

So he asks for it early. Basically, what he was saying was that he wished his father were already dead, and that the money was more important than the father and the relationship that he no longer wanted to have with him.

But the father grants the request, and of course, the son squanders all of the money. All of it. He finds himself hitting rock bottom, And eventually realizes that even his fathers servants have better living conditions than he is living in at the moment, so he goes home to plead with his father to accept him as a servant...

but what is so amazing about this story is the Father... when he sees the son far off in the distance... He drops what he is doing, and runs to his son and embraces him, and he looks to his servants and says this: (Luke 15:22-24) -

Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate."

The moment the Father caught even a glimpse of his son... a blip from a distance... a "could it be that he is finally returning?" type of moment...

the moment that son was in sight, the Father said “prepare the table. We are going to have a feast. My son has come home!”

That Father did not think in that moment “look at what my son has taken from me.” He didn’t focus on the pain and betrayal that his son had brought upon him.

All he wanted to do, was whatever it takes to make his son be ok.

maybe its time we set the table for our community and build a bridge for them to meet God.

Maybe it is time we have a “sulha”

maybe it is time we go out of our way to make people know that no matter what they did... maybe they stole their inheritance. Maybe they drank it away last night. Maybe they blew it big time...

can we still make them know that they are so valuable to us, that we will kill the fatty calf and hold a banquet the moment they do come home?

maybe its time we work out the terms what it will take to get them back to church. and back to God.

and that may sound extreme... like, “should we really negotiate what the terms are going to be?”

but is it?

It is the churches job to reconcile people back to God. That is our job.

and what does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 5?

NOT HOLDING THEIR TRESPASSES AGAINST THEM.

The number one reason that people don't come to church is because either the church DOES hold their trespasses against them... or they FEEL LIKE the church holds their trespasses against them.

That is why the reconciliation table is such a powerful thing. Because the meal goes as long as it takes... to bring us to a place, where:

whatever you did to me, I can't hold against you anymore.

Think about that passage that we talked about a couple of weeks ago... after Jesus redeems Peter's moment by the charcoal fire, what does he tell him to do?

Feed my sheep! Give them something to eat.

What did Jesus do BEFORE he said any of those things to Peter?

When Peter realized that Jesus was ashore, he jumped out of his boat and he swam to Jesus, and he finds Jesus doing what? Cooking Peter breakfast by a charcoal fire.

Creating a space to make room for reconciliation.

and I really believe that so much of what God would have us to do in our community, is that. Make space for reconciliation.

As you guys know, I have really felt strongly about buying a house for our church this year. We raised over 30 thousand dollars for the project so far, so I know that a lot of you are with us... and we are working on a plan to raise a little bit more and we have a ball in motion for a potential property. It is not a done deal yet, so we are going to be limited on what specifics we are saying about it for right now...

but when I started considering the amount of money that we raised, which is more than we have ever raised so it is amazing...but what that amount gets in our neighborhood compared to other neighborhoods, I began to think, "maybe we could buy a house somewhere else (like, a different Detroit neighborhood) and then commute to Southwest." - because the

houses here are a lot more than some of the other neighborhoods... and don't get me wrong... in the future, as things grow, I hope to have houses all over the city making amazing impacts on various communities throughout Detroit... but this is the reason that I really want to first house, the one that we are trying to get now, to be here in Southwest. Let me explain why:

Something is happening here. Something new. New for our church.

and I think new for our community.

I live in *the* neighborhood, about seven blocks from here. And I have 3 kids and we have the Williams staying with us right now, so there are 8 more kids there... next door there are always anywhere between 2-4 kids, across the street there are 5, a couple doors down there are more...

and our house has kind of become a hub for these kids. On any given day there are a minimum of 15 and sometimes as many as 25 or more kids just hanging out... I am not talking about a birthday party, the number goes up for those types of things... this is a normal day. Lots of them are from kids club, they just meet there. And they play their hearts out.

A few weeks ago, Austin was driving me home from the office, and just on the way, he saw a group of kids, probably 8-10 of them, and he pulled over right away because half of them are from kids club. So we got out, and we talked to the kids, asked how they are doing... reminded them about church... Told the ones we knew to invite the kids we didn't know who were there. Invite your cousins, invite your friends... and they get so excited!

then we talked to their mom. made sure she didn't need anything. Just checked in.

These things are becoming normal.

I am at E&L and I see Ben. I go to the Pharmacy and I see Robert. I wear a courage shirt and someone always recognizes it.

Almost every day that I walk to church in the morning or walk home in the evening, I see someone from the church, or someone we helped at 4 days, or Joy to the D, or someone who brought their kids to kids club.

I see Ron riding his bike.

our church is located in one of the very few “walkable” communities really in the entire state. I mean, they did the “open streets” thing the last couple of weeks and there is a reason Vernor was on that... because its totally walkable.

and when we can be *that* visible and that active in our community, it just makes all of the difference in the world.

and if that is my experience on a daily basis, how much more community would we build if we had 3, 4, 5 others doing that every day... just out, around... walking between home and church, inviting people into their homes and to our church.

This church will always consist of people from all places who believe in Detroit and what God is trying to do here. Some of you come in and you tutor the kids at Neinas and give those teachers a break... those things make all the difference in the world.

We can't do what we do, without the people who believe in our church and what is happening here, and what God will do through Courage Church to impact Southwest Detroit and eventually our whole city, and I know God positions different people where he does for a reason. And we are all one body.

but he has placed us in this location for a reason... and for the first time, at least for me... it doesn't feel like we are this hidden tucked away place in a corner somewhere. We are engaging our community and are a part of it.

and this is the reason that I love doing meals on days like this.

Because we can go out and knock on the doors of people that we actually know now, and invite them to dinner.

The table is such a central theme of reconciliation.

and of redemption.

That is why we take Communion every week.

Because as often as we come together, we want to remember that Christ died to reconcile us back to him. So we take our bread and we dip it into the cup and we thank Jesus because he doesn't count our trespasses against us.

But how do we carry that same reconciliation into our communities? Into the streets and the homes of the people who aren't willing to come through the church doors yet?

I had this idea this weekend sitting in my office thinking about today's message... and I know there are lots of ideas like this, and lots of people who do things similar to this, and there is nothing new under the sun, and all that that... but this is the thought.

we have these new students...

and I love our new discipleship students... these guys are hardcore. They were talking about how they want to open their home to people... how they want to be a place of refuge for people. And we were talking about entertaining strangers and bringing in the people into our lives, and my heart leaped when I heard them speak because they most of the time, you start a program like that, and it takes several months to get to that point... it takes a long time before you actually understand that the words of Jesus Christ are incredibly radical, and in order to live them, you have to be too.

and I had this thought... and you guys need to pray for us... pray that we get that house down the street, or if not that one, then one that is even better. One reason I like this house, is it has a giant side lot next door that we could try and buy down the road, and that would be a great place for something like this.

But I had this image in my mind of building two giant tables... I mean, I am almost seeing something as big as Slow's to go... maybe smaller for sake of space, but if we had that side lot, it could be huge.

but maybe at first, one smaller one indoor, and one huge one outdoors. something that could sit a whole bunch of people.

and the verse that came to my mind was the parable that Jesus gave in Luke 14, "The Parable of the Great Banquet"

Jesus essentially says "when you throw a party, don't invite all the people who can throw you a party in return... don't invite the people who can repay you, and who as soon as you give them the meal, they will right away think... *now I need to do something for them.*"

Don't we do that? It makes sense. It is balanced.

Someone invites Dawn and I over for dinner... we go over there, they prepare an amazing burger or they slow cook a brisket for 30 hours before we get there and we bite into it and it melts in our mouths and we leave so full, and satisfied, and hoping to get invited again.

But we know, "its our turn!"

So we invite them to our house, and we make our famous salmon with a side of bacon pasta.

and maybe eventually, they will invite us over for that brisket again.

And that is just the way that friendships go... they are mutual. They are balanced. People both give. Both sides contribute.

But Jesus says:

next time you host a dinner, try doing it like this. Go into the streets and find people who haven't eaten a real meal in days, and invite them over. Fill your table with the ones who have no where to go. With the ones who may

not leave when you begin to hint that the night is over... and you put “happy trails to you” or “closing time” on your speakers.

Invite those people. The ones that can offer you nothing, and may even take more than you are offering.

and you will be repaid at the resurrection!

and I had this thought... and I keep saying it. But I really want a house for our church, in this community.

I think down the road, we will have them in several communities. But right now, we need *one* here.

But what if, when we get that house and we move in... we just built two giant tables like the ones they have at Slows... one outside, and one inside for winter. And once a week or once every couple of weeks, we hosted a meal like that.

We cooked amazing food... we all contribute... Austin mans the grill... we all bring some of our favorite meals...

and we go out for a couple hours and we literally start gathering people and we bring them back to our house and we have an amazing meal together.

I am not talking about a soup kitchen... I am not talking about people waiting in line to get a free meal that they then go sit in a corner somewhere by themselves and eat it.

I am NOT talking about somewhere where the focus is:

I am handing YOU something.

I AM talking about somewhere where the focus is:

We are sharing something, together.

and I know I am just dreaming right now... because we don't even own a house yet... but I am telling you that clear as day I can see it. And I can see the difference that something so simple will make in peoples lives. and truthfully, I really don't want someone to go hungry, because I don't feed them.

I am at this point right now, where, if Courage Church becomes known for anything, I want it to be that we are known as the church that takes the words of Jesus as literally as possible.

and we are going to do it.

Offering communion with people. Offering reconciliation to people.

Offering restoration to people.

There is something that takes place when you sit down at a table, and you break bread with someone. There is something about that, that is healing. There is something about it, that to me just encapsulates the gospel.

In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

Reconciliation to Jesus looks like Him knocking on our door...

us answering the door when Jesus knocks... inviting him in, and sharing a meal together.

and symbolically... if I were to answer the vision question... I would say something like that.

Its all of us at a table. Eating together. With Jesus.

In a place where it doesn't matter where you come from. It doesn't matter what you've done.

It doesn't matter if your old, it doesn't matter if your young.

It doesn't matter if your broke or if you drove here in a brand new Mercedes. Its one meal. At one table. Where Jesus is central and everything else is secondary.

and that is what we are working towards.

Reconciliation.

Thats why we want buildings, and houses. Its why we want land. Its why we want to plant gardens, and open community centers, and coffee shops.

It is why we want to plant churches. and its why we open our homes.

Its why we have kids club. And why we knock on doors and ask people if there is anything that they need?

So today we celebrate... because we had the most amazing summer we have ever had. We saw more people come to Jesus... we saw more people come to church. We had more people in and out of this building and we had more people out there loving on our community.

We celebrate, as our kids club is thriving and is filled with kids from our neighborhood.

We celebrate, because we launched our discipleship school, and have raised most of the money that we need to step into our first property.

And today we anticipate.

Because we don't even know all of the ways that God is working to reconcile our city back to him yet...

but we know that he's working.

We know that he has provided for us, and he has made room for us in our community and it has allowed us the opportunity to provide for others. To be Jesus' hands and Jesus' feet in this broken city.

I truly believe that our best days are ahead of us.