

Sanctify the Dining Room Table

A few years ago, we hosted a seminar for business owners at our office in Anaheim. There were about 20 people present. We moved some furniture around, brought in some extra chairs and managed to fit everyone in.

I introduced each person since it was a new group, then I talked business for a couple of hours which is why they came. At the end, I asked for feedback as to what landed and the consensus was that this was the most intimate gathering these businessmen had been in for a long time. I was enormously surprised by that response.

I mulled over that for a few days, wondering how that happened, since the seminar was most certainly not about intimacy and I did no cheesy ice breakers to build pseudo intimacy with the group. My introductions were, in fact, rather perfunctory.

Finally I got it.

We had moved the lunch table out of the middle of the big room and held our event there. That table is where I do the fathering in the company. Group lunch time is mandatory. We laugh and cry. I tease and give honor. We play Pente and spoons. We dream endlessly and occasionally mourn the death of dreams.

We do intimacy there, day after day, and even though I am not overtly blessing the land with spoken blessings of intimacy, our lifestyle of intimacy imprinted itself on the land, and a bunch of business men and women who were strangers, got more from the anointing on the land that evening, than from anything I had said!

Broadly speaking though, in most of the homes I visit, the table is the most unsafe place in the whole house. The negative imprint is huge, pervasive and often definable.

I remember one home where the tone of the meal was gossip. Everybody in that family's sphere of influence was up for critical analysis and I knew that the day after I left, dinner would consist of "roast leg of Arthur."

In other homes, even though the kids are grown up and reasonably well-mannered by this time, you can still feel the angry intolerance of the father for the early messy learning curve of eating with a fork, and not spilling the milk.



A very common spiritual imprint at the table is shame. Whoever has messed up that day can be assured that their malfeasance will be explored in excruciating detail and those present will take turns shaming the guilty party with creative, incisive wordsmithing.

In short, whatever the emotional dysfunction of a family is, it tends to become distilled and highlighted during the mealtime. Many of you reading this are pulling up memories of your childhood table time and are remembering the shouting, guilt manipulation, score keeping, passive-aggressive behavior, blatant favoritism and many other aberrant behaviors. The constant repetition of these unwholesome behaviors makes a deep imprint on the land, the furniture and, obviously on the people who participate in this dysfunction, day after day.

If that is the reality, what should be the goal? First of all, food was intended by God to be an onramp for spiritual intimacy. This teaching is developed in The Mercy Season album.

Second, the mealtime is design to be a bonding time for the family, where a massive repository of good memories is built up. Consider the prodigal son. He lost everything except the memories of home, and it was those memories that caused him to reconsider his lifestyle and choices. And the specific memory that moved him to action was his memory of food at home. Unfortunately, the memory of the meal table would cause many of our prodigals to set their faces like flint and go anywhere else but back home.

A Principle: Shame is a profound barrier to intimacy.

We are not going to be able to enter into intimacy with God or man if we are under a cloud of shame. The shame may be from the previous residents of the house, or from your childhood memories of the table time, or from current events at your table, or simply the fear of impending shame because once in a great while, dinner time becomes an explosively shame-based event. Regardless of the source, shame crushes intimacy.

So if your goal is a meal table where it is easy to connect with God and a meal experience where good memories are built, shame must be addressed.

If you are the perpetrator, you need to not only ask God to forgive you, but also ask your family to forgive you and then work hard to change your behavior and your speech at the meal table.

Obviously cleansing prayers for the land, from the beginning of time, would be in order.

Blessings of dignity are going to take a little more work than the blessings of truth we explored for the therapist's office. When you do a search for the word "dignity" in Scripture, there are only four usages, and really only the first one — which is Jacob's blessing of Reuben — can be used easily for a blessing.

So that means you have to use the concept, instead of the word, and the concept



is throughout Scripture. The Hebrew root word means “to elevate” and dignity that comes from the hand of God elevating someone is much more potent a healing tool than dignity that is given by man.

You will need to look at every story in Scripture and get past the physical occurrences to see what God did to elevate them. Then turn that into a blessing for the land.

Let’s start with Vashti. On the natural level she was a divorcee who was pretty savagely cast away by her husband and his social network. She also was someone who held her ground on an issue of values and appeared to lose badly because she did not lower her standards.

However, when you look at God’s hand in the matter, there is the deep issue of Vashti’s place being taken by someone who also held high values and who built on the foundation that Vashti had laid. It is quite excruciating to pour yourself into a position, a company or an office community, only to watch your successor tear down what you built up. By contrast it is heart warming to see the foundation you laid be respected and enhanced by your successor.

So even though in the natural, she lost much, God elevated her and gave her dignity over the ages by His so highly valuing the work she had done, that He protected it from degradation.

So the blessing might go something like this: “Father, tonight our family will gather for another meal at this table. I bless this table and this land with the blessing of Vashti. May this gathering place be the setting where we learn how to become beautiful, even in the eyes of the ungodly. May it be a place where we find profound wisdom as we struggle with the unrelenting demands of our culture that we fit into their agenda and embrace their low standards. May it be a place where there is a huge deposit of holy courage when we have to take a high-risk stand against the powers that be. Finally Father, may this be a place where our courage in the pursuit of holiness is so pleasing to You, that You will invest in building on the spiritual authority we accrue through our choices.”

Or try Habakkuk. He was unhappy with God’s silence in the face of the downward spiral of his culture. He asked God to intervene and God assured him He would. Only when Habakkuk got a preview of what was coming, he panicked since it fried all of his small theology. God pushed back against his theology and demanded that he grow up and allow the God of the universe to work out the long-term plan for good, even though there was going to be some short-term pain that was almost incomprehensible.

His final response to God was, “I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.”



You could go a dozen directions with this one passage. Here is one option. "Father, You have been quite silent on a couple of areas that matter a whole lot to our family. Things are bad and they appear to be getting worse. We certainly can't see the big picture. We know by faith, that You are watching over every detail, but by sight it appears You have checked out and abandoned us. I bless our family and this land with having the courage of Habakkuk to defiantly face the unfolding debacle, while knowing and proclaiming that You, God, always write the final chapter. I bless this land with deep faith, in the face of the silence and inaction of God."

Just to summarize: shame has a thousand faces. Dignity, ten thousand. Against the shame of powerlessness (Vashti dethroned) is the dignity of watching God care for her investment in the kingdom. Against the shame of cowardice (flinching in the face of pain) is the dignity of faith that stands to the end and beyond, and sees the triumph when all others thought the game was over.

Seek pictures of dignity in Scripture and bless your table with those blessings. Over time, it will transform your meal times from a random mine field to a place of great emotional and spiritual safety, from which intimacy can spring.

Copyright November 2010 by Arthur Burk

At home, in Fullerton

