



Breaking Bread & Bearing Burdens

A Four-Week Gathering Series for Women

A Sacred Table Co. Gathering Series

"Breaking bread. Bearing burdens. Building community."

A Sacred Table Co. Study

Standalone Edition

by Vickie Sweeting

Welcome to the Table

Friend, before this is a study, it is an invitation.

For as long as I can remember, the most sacred moments of my life have happened around a table — not a perfect one, just a table with people willing to be honest around it. This little series is my attempt to hand you that same table.

Over four gatherings, we'll do four simple things together. We'll share our burdens. We'll share our stories. We'll share our gifts. And we'll share our hope. That is the whole journey — from "*I'm carrying this alone*" to "*I was never alone at all.*"

You don't need a big house. You don't need matching dishes or a gift for cooking. You need a table, a few chairs, something warm to eat, and the willingness to say to a handful of women, "Come in. You're safe here."

I've been saving you a seat. Now let's save one for them.

— Vickie

How to Use This Guide

Who it's for: any group of women longing for real connection — a church small group, a neighborhood circle, or a handful of friends.

Group size: four to ten is the sweet spot — small enough that every voice is heard.

How long: plan about two hours per gathering — roughly thirty minutes to eat and settle in, and ninety to go deeper.

Cadence: once a week for four weeks, or every other week if life is full. Consistency matters more than speed.

What you'll need each time: a simple themed meal (menus are included), a candle for the center of the table, and whatever small supplies that night's activity calls for (listed under each gathering).

Each gathering follows the same gentle rhythm, so no one ever has to wonder what's coming:

- **Pull Up a Chair** — a short welcome and a reading to set the tone
- **On the Menu** — the meal for the night
- **An Icebreaker** — something light before we go deep
- **Around the Word** — Scripture and a guided conversation
- **At the Table** — a hands-on activity
- **A Prayer to Close**
- **Carry It With You** — a simple practice for the week

A Note for the Host

If you're the one hosting, take a deep breath. Your job is not to have the answers. Your job is to make room.

A few things I've learned about holding space at a table:

- **Create safety, not perfection.** No one opens up in a room that feels like a performance. A slightly messy house and a warm welcome will always beat an immaculate house and a stiff one.
- **Listen more than you talk.** When a woman shares something heavy, resist the urge to fix it. Most people aren't looking to be fixed — they're longing to be heard. A simple "thank you for trusting us with that" is often the holiest thing you can say.
- **Protect confidences fiercely.** What is shared at the table stays at the table. You set that tone.
- **Let silence breathe.** After you ask a question, wait. The most honest answers usually come after the pause most people rush to fill.
- **You go first.** When it's time to be vulnerable, the host's honesty gives everyone else permission. You don't have to share the hardest thing — just a true thing.

One more word. Some of these conversations may surface real pain. That is not a sign something went wrong — it's a sign the table is working. You don't have to carry it or solve it. You simply have to stay, listen, and, when it feels right, pray. If a woman is truly struggling, gently encourage her to reach out to a pastor or counselor. Love her enough to point her toward more help than a table can give.

The Table Covenant

Before the first gathering goes deep, read these words aloud together. It is a small thing that changes everything.

At this table:

- *What is shared here, stays here.*
- *We come to listen, not to fix.*
- *Every voice matters — and no one has to share more than she is ready to.*
- *We leave our masks at the door. No perfect required.*
- *We make room for one another, and for God.*

Then, if you'd like, go around and let each woman simply say, "I'm in." That is the sound of a safe table being built.

Gathering One — Breaking Bread & Bearing Burdens

The First Stop in Our Journey: Share Your Burdens

Theme: "Come to Me"

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

The heart of tonight: to build a table so safe that a woman can finally set down what she has been carrying alone.

Pull Up a Chair

Light a candle in the center of the table — a small sign that this is set-apart time. Welcome everyone warmly. Then read the Table Covenant aloud together and invite each woman to say, "I'm in."

Then read these words slowly, as your opening:

"There is a difference between a broken relationship and a broken woman. One is something that happened to you. The other is a lie you were never meant to believe." — Vickie

On the Menu

An easy, comforting Italian night — the kind of meal that lets everyone relax:

- Lasagna or baked ziti
- Caesar salad
- Garlic bread
- A simple dessert

Icebreaker: Five Things to Know About Me

Before we go deep, we go light. Each woman shares five quick, ordinary things about herself — the sillier, the better. Laughter is the doorway to honesty.

Around the Word

Read Matthew 11:28-30 together — twice, in two different translations if you can.

Then talk about it:

- What burden are you carrying right now?
- What burden have you carried so long that you barely notice it anymore?
- What do you think it would actually look like to hand it to Christ?

At the Table: The Burden Basket

Give each woman three small slips of paper. On them, she writes — privately — one burden, one prayer request, and one hope. Fold them and place them in a basket in the center of the table.

Pass the basket. Each woman draws slips that aren't her own (no names attached). Then take time to pray over the burden, the request, and the hope you are now holding for someone else. She carries yours. You carry hers. That is the whole point.

A Prayer to Close

Father, we are tired, and You said to come. So we're coming — not cleaned up, not put together, just honest. Teach us to lay our burdens down, and to help carry one another's. Amen.

Carry It With You

Each morning this week:

- Read Matthew 11:28-30.
- Ask, "Lord, what am I carrying that You never asked me to carry?"
- Write down one sentence. Just one.

Host Notes

The Burden Basket can bring tears — let it. Don't rush to lighten the mood. When you redistribute the slips, remind the group that they are now holding

something sacred: someone else's real burden. Encourage them to actually pray over it during the week, not only tonight.

Gathering Two — Known & Loved

The Second Stop in Our Journey: Share Your Story

Theme: "Known and Loved"

Scripture: Psalm 139

The heart of tonight: to move from sharing burdens to sharing stories — and to discover we can be fully known and still fully loved.

Pull Up a Chair

Light the candle again. Welcome everyone back, and remind the group of the covenant in a single line: "What is shared here, stays here." Then read your opening:

"Before I was ever a wife, a mother, a leader, a grandmother, or an author — before I produced a single thing — I was already His daughter. Nothing I achieved could add to that. Nothing I lost could take it away." — Vickie

On the Menu

Comfort food night — the meal that tastes like being home:

- Chicken pot pie
- Garden salad
- Warm rolls
- Peach cobbler

Icebreaker: Conversation Cards

Set out a few cards face-down and let each woman draw one to answer:

- Tell us about a season God felt distant.
- Tell us about a prayer God answered in a way you didn't expect.
- What has shaped your faith the most?
- What is something you wish more people understood about you?

Around the Word

Read Psalm 139 together. Sit with the truth that God knows every part of us — and loves us still.

Then talk:

- Where do you tend to hide?
- What parts of your story are the hardest to share?
- What would change if you truly believed you were fully known and fully loved?

At the Table: Where I've Seen Him

Go around the table and invite each woman to share one moment when she felt unexpectedly seen by God — a quiet sign, a whisper, a comfort that came just when she needed it. If someone can't think of one, that's okay. Let the group gently reflect back the ways they already see God at work in her.

A Prayer to Close

Father, You have searched us and known us, and still You call us Yours. Give us the courage to be known — by You, and by one another. Amen.

Carry It With You

- Read Psalm 139 twice this week.
- Text the group one thing you're grateful for.
- Nothing more.

Host Notes

"Share your story" can feel exposing. Model it by going first with something true but not overwhelming. Watch the quiet ones — a warm, direct "We'd love to hear from you, whenever you're ready" can open a door without forcing it.

Gathering Three — Love in Action

The Third Stop in Our Journey: Share Your Gifts

Theme: "Love in Action"

Scripture: James 2:14-17

The heart of tonight: to turn our eyes outward — from being carried to helping carry others.

Pull Up a Chair

Light the candle. Tonight has a different energy — a little lighter, a little more hands-on. Open with:

"You don't have to lead thousands of people to change the world. You only have to faithfully love the people God has already placed right in front of you." — Vickie

On the Menu

An easy, hands-on taco bar — because service nights should be simple:

- Build-your-own taco bar
- Chips and salsa
- Brownies

Around the Word

Read James 2:14-17. Faith isn't only something we feel — it's something we do.

Then talk:

- When has someone carried a burden for you? What did it mean?
- Whose burdens is God asking you to notice right now?
- What is one gift or ability you have that you rarely think of as ministry?

At the Table: Blessing Bags

Together, assemble Blessing Bags for women in crisis — for a local shelter, pregnancy center, or ministry your group chooses. Fill each with:

- Travel toiletries
- Chapstick
- A handwritten encouragement card
- A Scripture card
- A few snacks

Pray over the bags before you send them out — and over the women who will receive them.

A Prayer to Close

Father, You have carried us so faithfully. Now make us carriers. Open our eyes to the burdens around us, and give us the courage to do something about them. Amen.

Carry It With You

- Perform one intentional act of kindness this week — anonymously, if you can.
- Come ready to share the story at the final gathering.

Host Notes

Choose the service recipient before the gathering so the night has focus. Keep the assembly casual and conversational — some of the best sharing happens while hands are busy. This is also a natural night to invite a friend who's new; serving together is an easy on-ramp.

Gathering Four — Hope & Purpose

The Fourth Stop in Our Journey: Share Your Hope

Theme: "Hope and Purpose"

Scripture: Galatians 6:2 and Jeremiah 29:11

The heart of tonight: to celebrate what God has done in these weeks together — and to send one another out with hope.

Pull Up a Chair

Light the candle one last time. This is a celebration. Open with:

"Keep making room. Keep listening. Keep loving. Keep believing that God does some of His most beautiful work in the very places we are tempted to overlook." — Vickie

On the Menu

A celebration grazing table — abundant and beautiful:

- Charcuterie and cheese boards
- Fresh fruit
- Small desserts
- Sparkling mocktails

Around the Word

Read Galatians 6:2 and Jeremiah 29:11.

Then talk:

- What burden feels lighter than it did when we started?
- What has God taught you through this group?
- What is He calling you toward next?

At the Table: Speak Life

Before the gathering, the host prepares a card for each woman. During the evening, pass every card around the circle. On each one, every woman writes:

- One strength she sees in her
- One Scripture
- One prayer

Each woman goes home with a card full of encouragement in her friends' own handwriting — proof that she was seen.

A Prayer to Close

Close by having each woman pray a one-sentence blessing over the woman on her right. Then commit, out loud, to stay connected and to keep carrying one another.

Carry It With You

The table doesn't end tonight. Decide together: when will you gather again?

Host Notes

Prepare the Speak Life cards ahead of time — this is the emotional high point of the whole series, so don't rush it. Leave space for tears and laughter both. End by casting vision for what comes next: another series, a monthly table, or simply staying in one another's lives.

Until You Gather Again

You have done a beautiful thing. You have built a table where women can be honest, carried, and loved.

Don't let it end here.

The women around your table have tasted what it feels like to belong — and that hunger doesn't go away. Keep gathering. Keep the light on. Keep saving a seat.

And if you're wondering where to go next, there is always another Sacred Table gathering series waiting to be gathered. But whatever you choose, remember the truest thing these weeks have had to teach:

You were never meant to carry it alone. And there is always room for one more.

Breaking bread. Bearing burdens. Building community. All for His glory.