

THE SACRED TABLE CO.



Setting the Table

A Sacred Table Guide to Hosting a Small Group



Everything you need to gather women around a table — no matter which study you choose.

A Place at the Table for Every Woman

A posture, not a place

A Sacred Table isn't a place, it's a posture. You do not need a beautiful home, a gift for teaching, or a life that looks finished. You need a willingness to open a door and keep it warm. That is the whole job, and you are already qualified for it.

Every woman you will ever invite is quietly wondering the same thing: *Is there a place for me?* Hosting is simply the practice of answering yes — with a chair, a cup, and your attention. This guide will walk you through the before, the during, and the after, so you can host with confidence and grace. Use it with any Sacred Table study, or any time you gather women to seek God together.

And keep this hope in view from the very first night: the goal is not only to finish a study, but to cultivate true friendship. Studies end; the friendships forged around a table can last for years. Everything in this guide — the warm invitation, the safety of the covenant, the care between weeks — exists to help real friendships take root, the kind of women who show up for each other long after the last chapter is done.

One promise to hold onto: the health of your group will never depend on your polish. It will depend on your presence. Show up warm and honest, and you have already done the most important thing.

BEFORE THE GATHERING

Preparing the room and your heart

Prepare your own heart first

Before you plan a single detail, pray for the women who will come — even the ones whose names you don't know yet. You are not gathering a group to impress them; you are making room for God to meet them. Ask him to make you unhurried, attentive, and unafraid of other people's pain. A host who has spent five quiet minutes with God carries a different atmosphere into the room.

The invitation: a warm, specific ask

Most women don't say no to community — they say no to vagueness. “We should do something sometime” gathers no one. Invite the way you'd want to be invited: personal, specific, and low-pressure.

- ◆ **Make it personal.** A text or a face-to-face ask beats a mass post. “I thought of you specifically” opens a door that a flyer never will.
- ◆ **Be concrete.** Name the what, when, where, and how long: “Six Tuesday evenings, 7–8:30, at my place, starting the 12th.” Certainty lowers the fear.
- ◆ **Lower the bar to enter.** “No prep required for the first night — just come.” Promise that no one will be put on the spot or asked to pray aloud.
- ◆ **Invite the one on the edge.** The new neighbor, the grieving friend, the woman who always sits alone. Your table exists for her.

Size, place, and rhythm

- ◆ **Size.** Six to ten women is the sweet spot — small enough that every voice fits in ninety minutes, large enough to survive a few absences.

- ◆ **Place.** A living room, a kitchen table, a quiet corner of a coffee shop. Warm and consistent matters more than large or impressive.
- ◆ **Rhythm.** Same day, same time, same place. Predictability is a gift to busy women; it removes a dozen small decisions.
- ◆ **Length.** Start and end when you said you would. Honoring the clock is how you honor everyone's yes.

The table itself: ordinary made sacred

You are not hosting a dinner party; you are setting a table. Something warm to drink and something simple to eat is plenty — grilled cheese and tomato soup will do more for belonging than anything elaborate. The goal is not to impress anyone but to signal one thing: *you were expected, and there's a place for you here*. Keep it simple enough that you can repeat it without dread, week after week.

DURING THE GATHERING

Hosting the room, not performing

Your real job

You are not the expert at the table; you are the host of it. Your job is not to have every answer — it's to make it safe for others to be honest, to keep the conversation moving, and to make sure no one leaves unseen. When you release yourself from having to perform, the whole room can exhale.

The first gathering sets everything

The first night is not about covering material; it's about establishing safety. Spend it letting women arrive, learn names, and hear how this table will work. Say the ground rules out loud, warmly, and agree to them together.

A simple table covenant (read aloud together on night one)

- ◆ What's shared at this table stays at this table.
- ◆ We share, we don't fix. No advice unless it's asked for.
- ◆ Anyone can pass on any question, any time. Silence is welcome here.
- ◆ We make room for every voice — and we don't let one voice fill the room.
- ◆ We come as we are. No performance, no pretending, no perfect answers required.

A simple first-night flow

Your first 60–75 minutes

Welcome (10 min). Pour something warm. As women arrive, greet each one by name.

Open the circle (15 min). A light question so everyone speaks early: “Where are you from, and what made you say yes to this?”

Set the table (10 min). Read the covenant together. Explain the weekly rhythm and what to expect.

Begin gently (20 min). A first taste of the study or a single opening question — enough to feel the shape of it.

Close (10 min). Name what’s next. Offer a short prayer, or a moment of quiet for those who’d rather not pray aloud.

Holding the hard moments with grace

- ❖ **When there’s silence**, count slowly to ten before you rescue it. The best answers live on the far side of the pause. Silence is thinking, not failure.
- ❖ **When there are tears**, don’t rush to fix or fill. “Thank you for trusting us with that” and a moment of quiet is enough. Pain doesn’t need a solution; it needs company.
- ❖ **When one voice fills the room**, steward it warmly: “I want to make sure we hear from a few others — let’s come back to that.” Then invite a specific quieter woman in.
- ❖ **When someone stays silent**, make gentle room without spotlighting: “No pressure at all, but I’d love to hear anyone who hasn’t spoken yet.”
- ❖ **When the talk goes off-track**, honor it, then steer: “That’s worth a whole conversation — let’s hold it and come back to the passage.”
- ❖ **When there’s disagreement**, keep the table safe over being right: “We can love each other and see this differently.” You’re building trust, not winning points.
- ❖ **When someone shares something heavy**, resist advice. Listen, thank them, and follow up privately afterward rather than problem-solving in the group.

Tending the table between weeks — and sending them out

Care that happens between the chairs

The most important ministry often happens outside the ninety minutes. A short message midweek — “Still thinking about what you shared; praying for you” — tells a woman she was heard and she is remembered. That is the difference between a meeting she attends and a table she belongs to.

- ❖ **Follow up on what you heard.** If someone named a hard week, check on her before the next gathering.
- ❖ **Reach for the missing.** When someone’s absent, a warm “We missed you — no pressure, hope you’re okay” keeps a gap from becoming a goodbye.
- ❖ **Let the group carry each other.** As trust grows, invite women to pray for and check on one another. You are not the only caregiver at the table.

A shared thread between gatherings

If the group is open to it, a simple group text or a GroupMe can carry the table into the week. It becomes a place to drop a verse that steadied you, a prayer request, a small answered prayer, even a photo of your own set table. Some of the deepest connection happens here, in the ordinary middle of the week — a woman’s request at nine o’clock on a Tuesday doesn’t have to wait for the next gathering to be prayed over. This is often where a study group quietly becomes a circle of true friends. Offer it as an invitation, never a requirement, and let the group decide together.

A few gentle norms for the group thread

- ❖ Opt-in, always. Anyone can join, mute, or step back — no explanation needed.
- ❖ The covenant still holds. What’s shared in confidence stays in confidence, online too.
- ❖ Keep it warm, not overwhelming. Encouragement, prayer, and check-ins — not a firehose.
- ❖ One person keeps a light hand on it — welcoming requests and celebrating answered ones.
- ❖ Silence is welcome. No guilt for the quiet ones; presence matters more than posting.

Closing a group well

Every group has a last night, and how you end matters as much as how you began. Don’t let it fizzle out — mark it. Give women a chance to say what the table has meant, and to name what they’re carrying forward. A shared meal, a spoken blessing over each woman, a small keepsake: these turn an ending into a sending.

The point was never the table

Here is the quiet goal of everything you’ve done: the welcome a woman receives at your table is meant to become a welcome she extends at her own. You are not just hosting a group — you are cultivating true friendships and multiplying tables. When women who arrived as strangers start texting each other midweek, showing up in each other’s hard seasons, and pulling out chairs for someone new, the work has done exactly what it was meant to do. The study was the doorway; the friendship is the home.

The host's quick checklist

- ❖ Prayed for the women coming, and quieted my own heart
- ❖ Invited personally, specifically, and warmly — including someone on the edge
- ❖ Set day, time, place, and length — and committed to honoring them
- ❖ Prepared something simple and warm to eat and drink
- ❖ Read the study ahead and chose the questions that stirred me most
- ❖ Established the covenant and safety on night one
- ❖ Followed up midweek and reached for anyone missing
- ❖ Offered an opt-in group thread for prayer and encouragement between weeks
- ❖ Kept the real goal in view — true friendship, not just finishing the study
- ❖ Planned a real ending — a blessing and a sending

How a study group becomes a lifelong sisterhood

Friendship is not a bonus. It's part of the point. A woman can sit in a full room every week and still go home lonely, because attendance is not the same as belonging. The reason we gather around a table — rather than a lecture hall — is that God so often grows real belonging through ordinary, faithful friendship. When a study ends, the notes get filed away. The friendships can last for years.

Why friendship is sacred work

Scripture never treats friendship as a soft extra. It calls it strength, loyalty, and the very thing Jesus offered his own followers.

What Scripture says about friendship

"Two are better than one... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up." — **Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (NIV)**

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity." — **Proverbs 17:17 (NIV)**

"I no longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends." — **John 15:15 (NIV)**

If the God of the universe calls us friends, then cultivating friendship among women is not beneath the work — it is the work. To help a lonely woman find people who will help her up when she falls is to hand her something Scripture calls a good return.

How friendships take root at the table

- ❖ **Someone goes first.** Friendship follows honesty. When one woman shares something true and un-tidy, she gives everyone else permission. As host, that someone is often you.
- ❖ **Time and repetition.** Closeness is mostly a byproduct of showing up in the same seats, week after week. Trust is built in reps, not in a single deep conversation.
- ❖ **Doing life, not just studying it.** The best friendships form when women move from talking about God together to living life alongside each other — errands, meals, hard seasons, ordinary days.
- ❖ **Laughter and food.** Don't underestimate a shared meal and a good laugh. Grilled cheese and belly-laugh have bonded more women than any perfect discussion ever will.
- ❖ **Prayer that remembers.** When you pray for a woman by name and follow up on what she carried last week, you tell her she is known. Being remembered is the soil friendship grows in.

Tending friendships beyond the study

- ❖ **Keep gathering.** When the last chapter ends, don't let the group evaporate. Plan the next thing before you finish this one — another study, a monthly dinner, a standing coffee.
- ❖ **Go deeper one-on-one.** Encourage women to meet in twos and threes between gatherings. The whole-group table is the doorway; the smaller table is where hearts often open widest.

- ◆ **Show up in the hard seasons.** Funerals, hospital rooms, moving days, new babies. True friends are the ones who come. This is where a group becomes a family.
- ◆ **Celebrate the joys, too.** Rejoice with those who rejoice. Birthdays, answered prayers, good news — friendship is built on the mountaintops as much as in the valleys.
- ◆ **Keep the circle open.** The warmest friend-groups aren't closed clubs. Keep pulling out a chair for the next woman on the edge, the way one was once pulled out for you.



Come as you are. Set a place. Keep it warm.

There's always a place at the table.