

THE BIG IDEA: All are welcome at the table.

The Take-Off

In our Christmas series - "I'll be Home for Christmas" - we've talked about prodigals - we're all prodigals - and the pain that, when properly evaluated, can lead us back home.

This morning, on the Sunday before we celebrate the birth of the One who made that return trip home possible, let's talk about the place to which we're returning.

It's represented by this table, and there's a place at the table for us all.

Today's Big idea, which will echo throughout everything we say and do from this point forward, is simple: **all are welcome at the table.**

There's a place here for you.

Before we get into all of that, though, let's read again the story that represents all of us.

Luke 15:11-32

1. The table is a place

- a. Tables can mean a lot of things to a lot of people, but let's talk about something very obvious.
- b. **The table is a place.**
- c. An actual, physical place where people gather.
- d. Hungry, hurting, happy, hopeful people sit around a table and share life together.
- e. It's a place of fellowship, family, food, forgiveness, communion, doubts, questions, authenticity
- f. A few days after Nehemiah Parah passed, I remember reading something that Casey Covington had posted on Facebook that sums this up perfectly:

Before we ever stepped foot into [The Gathering](#), we first sat at [Renee & Nehemiah's table](#).

[Thomas](#) & I had our first conversation at the Parah table.

We learned who Jesus was, how to pray, how to let go of our pasts all at the Parah table.

We met our best friends, Kyle & [Shannon](#) sitting at the Parah table.

Thomas proposed to me at the Parah table.

We shared when we were expecting our children at the Parah table. Then, when Emmy & Thorne were 12 weeks old, I entrusted them to my friends to learn & grow at the Parah table.

For the past 10 years, this beloved family has sat front row and held our hands through every milestone that we can remember. They have helped shape our marriage, parenting, and our walk with Christ.

If I had known on July 15th that it would be my last conversation with Miah, I would have told him "Thank you." Instead, I shared a song with him..called "Gratitude".

We can only hope to show the hospitality that has been shown to us & create a space comparable to the Parah table.

- g. The table is a place where life - in all of its joys and pains - is shared with family.
- h. This is what the younger son walked away from and what the older son worked away from.
- i. It's the place the father calls us back to.

2. The table is in a place

- a. Don't miss this: we return to the table, because while the table is a place, **the table is in a place.**
- b. The younger son came to his senses and went home. While the father throws parties for prodigals who return, he doesn't bring the party to the pig pen.
- c. The table is in the father's house.
- d. The younger son returns to that place. The older son is invited but refuses.
- e. God isn't trying to make us comfortable in our rebellion. He's waiting to throw out the feast on the big table that is in HIS house.

3. The table has a place

- a. While it's hard to return when we know we've sinned against the father, it's liberating when we pull up to the table and see the name card with OUR name on it!

- b. The Father has been expecting our return, and while we were still a long way from Him in our rebellion or near Him in our religion, He was feeding and nurturing a fatted calf for the party.
- c. John 14:3 tells us that Jesus is preparing a place for us, and while that's about the end of time, it's also still very much about a homecoming.
- d. The Father's table is a place, and it's in a place, and **that table has a place** for you, and for me.
- e. Don't miss the fact that the father was so ready to celebrate that the younger son didn't get to finish his speech.
- f. Don't miss the fact that the father left the party to beg his older son to forgive and return to what he had always had.
- g. We're all prodigals, and we're all invited to our place at the table by a forgiving, faithful father.

The Landing

Which brings us to this table - a table that was inspired by the Parah table and handmade in honor of Nehemiah. A table that will be in our lobby as a reminder of the Father's love that calls all prodigals to a meal that could never be deserved or earned. A meal that Jesus died for so that it could be shared with family. A verse will hang from the end that comes Nehemiah 4:14 and sums up everything about the table, Nehemiah Parah, and the Father he represented.

After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

This morning, as we share communion, Wendy and I would like to serve communion to the entire Parah family around this table, and when we're all finished, we'll wrap the day up with one final worship song.

[\[Communion videos\]](#)