

MINISTRY INNOVATIONS WITH YOUNG ADULTS
YOUNGER GENERATION CHURCH:

OpenTable

A Ministry Adaptation from Blackhawk Church

OpenTable Experience Guide

OpenTable is a gathering of eight to twelve people, meeting 3 times over a meal and having focused conversations in order to build genuine connections and practice Biblical hospitality as a way to connect.

This guide offers some structure on how to start and end each evening, what to focus conversation on, ground rules for every gathering, and some logistical information.

Hospitality – Why Is It Important?

Biblical Hospitality is defined as extending all the privileges of the insider to the outsider. This hospitality is found throughout the Bible, and Jesus embodies this through his entire ministry, but it feels so radical and outrageous when you consider who this includes and what it means in your own life. It means treating everyone like family. Extending yourself, being willing to reach, giving your time, space, prayers to others and inviting them to be known, welcomed, and loved just as they are in the most authentic way.



As followers of Jesus we recognize the need for hospitality in our world. Where human brokenness and our culture breed enmity and division, practicing Biblical hospitality cuts against that grain. We hope that OpenTable is one way among many to show the love of God and the message of the Gospel to young adults looking for connection and belonging in the world and in the Church.

Focusing Your Conversations

Since an OpenTable meets over three dinners, we've outlined an "intent" for each of those gatherings so that your group can naturally progress over the weeks. Start each night with the intent in mind, but let your table's conversation go where it may. Encourage everyone at the table to ask questions of the group and pop around. Just keep the conversation moving and intentional.

The conversation shouldn't feel programmed. We know conversations ebb, flow, and sometimes stop, but we don't want you to feel caught up creek without a paddle! Along with each night's intent, there are some optional questions you can lean into as conversation starters or carriers. You don't need to use these questions if you have some of your own in mind, or if your group conversation goes in a different direction. Our hope is that each OpenTable would look and sound a little different, but they should all have the same intent and basic structure.

We want the conversation to feel natural, so just relax, fully engage in conversations, be yourself, and go with the flow of the night. This isn't a Q & A. You don't need to have all (or any!) of the answers except your own story to share!

If you have questions, come up with some great conversation starters you think should be added to our list, or want to share some feedback, don't be a stranger! We are here to support you and are eager to learn from you!



We are using Hospitality as a vehicle to open space for Young Adults to talk about topics that often feel off-limits at church and beyond. These topics often get closely tied to our identity, and the message young people hear when these topics are shut down is that they aren't welcome to bring their whole identity into a space. We want to fight this mentality with a hospitality and openness that says to that thought, "you are welcome wholly and no topic is off limits. We

want to hear you and your whole story matters." In this way we image Jesus, who offers this to us all.

First Dinner

Intent: Get to know each other! Hopefully by the end of the night, the group is more comfortable with each other and everyone knows each others' names.

- Give us 3-5 words or phrases to describe who you are and where you are in life.
- What's something you really love doing?
- What did you want to be when you grew up? How has that changed?
- If you could have any job for a day, what would you try?
- Something you're looking forward to this week/month/year?

Second Dinner

Intent: Keep building relationships. Start talking about vocation and identity more directly and invite everyone to share their story a little more.

- What is the best and/or worst job you've had?
- What assumptions do others make about you because of your job? What is wrong or right about those?
- Do you see your current role as a stepping stone to something else, or do you feel rooted in your role?
- Do you feel you are a different person at work/school/home/with friends/at church?

Last Dinner

Intent: Challenge and encourage each other. We want to leave each other with the feeling we can find identity and purpose in and outside of vocation. You could lean into the practicality of how or why.

- How is your job attached to your idea of purpose? Are they connected or separate?
- If you could describe your life in 10 years, what do you see yourself doing? What will it take to get there and what challenges do you think you'll need to overcome?
- If you had a mission statement for your life, what would it be?

Starting the Evening

1. The facilitator or the host can say a blessing over the meal if they wish.
2. Once everyone has food and is seated, people can start eating. Let conversation happen naturally for a bit and let people settle in before the next step.
3. Welcome everyone and thank them for coming. Tell everyone the intent for the night.
4. Read the ground rules out loud (provided on the next page). You don't need to read through every paragraph, just make sure to communicate the purpose of each rule. Especially on the second and third gathering, you only need to remind everyone what the ground rules are.
5. Tell everyone what time the evening will wrap up, to be respectful of the host's space and everyone's time. Our suggestion is one and a half to two hours.
6. Begin! It might help if you start by going around the circle and have everyone introduce themselves and tell everyone a little about themselves. Feel free to use an icebreaker question. On the second and third nights you can still do this, to refresh everyone on names and to break the ice.

Ending the Evening

1. Give the group a warning five to ten minutes before your agreed upon closing time.
2. When it's time to end, wrap up the evening by thanking everyone for being a part of the group and that you look forward to seeing them next time.
3. Ask the group to reflect on the discussion and stories that people shared that night, and to think about any new perspectives they encountered.
4. If this is your first or second gathering:
 - a. Remind everyone about your next gathering, if this is just your first or second dinner.
 - b. End with a short prayer. Feel free to come up with one or use this prayer: "God, we thank you for this group, for bringing us together that we may meet and learn from one another, and for the conversations and stories we shared tonight. We give you thanks for our hosts for giving us a space to gather, and for the food that they provided. We ask that you guide us as we grow independently and as a group, and teach us what it means to extend hospitality to each other. Amen."
5. If this is your final gathering:
 - a. Encourage people to reflect on the hospitality they've encountered in the group. Hopefully you've already discussed how we can practice this sort of hospitality in our own lives. Ask that people look for opportunities to be welcoming to others.
 - b. Let everyone know that they'll be receiving surveys so that they can provide feedback about OpenTable.
 - c. End with a short prayer. Feel free to come up with one or use this prayer: "God, we thank you for this group and the relationships that formed through our dinners together. We're grateful for our hosts and the food, and the hospitality that we've experienced as a group. We thank you for inviting us to be called your children. Help us take what we've learned and bring that love and invitation to those around us, especially to the outsider that is looking for a place to belong. Amen."

Ground Rules

These Ground Rules are a resource for our Facilitators. If you are sensing that your Open Table is in need of some guard rails for discussion, feel free to read them aloud.

The purpose of these ground rules is not to police and shut people down, but to set the stage for how the evening should go. It sets the boundaries for what's okay and not okay, so people can feel free to express themselves within those boundaries and know they will be accepted.



1. Be Open

Our name OpenTable starts from this idea. Come to the table and leave fears and prejudices behind. Expect that you will meet people of different backgrounds and perspectives. In order to get the most out of your time here, bring a posture of openness and welcome each other into your lives. Allow people to be different. Accept that there can be disagreements. This is practicing hospitality.

2. Listen

This is more important than speaking or having all the right answers - listen to each other and practice empathy. Come alongside each other and acknowledge the stories that people share and the lessons they've learned.

3. Share

We all desire to be known and loved. This is a space to create opportunities for that. It's meaningless for you to be part of this group and then hide yourself. As you listen to others and learn from them, share your own story so people can learn from you.

4. Focus

Avoid getting stuck on discussions and debates of abstract ideas, theories, and politics. Keep your focus to the personal questions and stories that everyone brings to the table. Hone in on the common threads that we all have.

5. Build

Genuine relationships start from genuine conversations. Follow the above rules to build relationships. Whether you say goodbye to the people here or they become lifelong friends, build relationships with the attitude that they are eternal.

Reimbursement for Meal Expenses (for hosts)

We are able to offer some reimbursement for your meal hosting expenses for OpenTable.

We can offer a stipend for the two meals that you, the host, provide. Here is the process for reimbursement:

1. Plan your OpenTable meal and buy the supplies. Please keep your receipts.
2. After your third OpenTable meal is finished, complete the Arlington SDA Church “Check Request Form” and submit along with your receipts [laid out and taped to letter-sized paper] to Pastor Allan for review and submission. You can drop that off at his church office.
3. A check will be mailed to you.

Setting the Stage for the Potluck

Participants will know when they register that the third dinner is a potluck. During the second dinner, make sure you have everyone commit to bring something to the final dinner. We recommend making a physical sign up and sending an email reminder to your group so they know what to bring and remind everyone of any allergies they may need to be aware of. You can feel free to have everyone contribute to the dinner with a theme in mind (tacos, italian, BYO Pizza, etc.) or you can make it completely hodge-podge or everyone’s favorites. Just be sure to have a main dish, sides, dessert, and beverages!

Gathering Feedback

We want to make sure we gather feedback from all of the participants at our OpenTables. Here is how we hope to do that:

1. Please make sure we have the email address of all who have attended your OpenTables. Thanks for giving everyone a heads up that they will be receiving this.
2. After your three OpenTable times have finished, we will send a feedback survey to each participant. We will do the same for our facilitators and hosts.

Also, at any point along the way that you want to give us feedback or have questions, don’t hesitate to send an email.

This feedback will be invaluable for us as we look to the future and refining the OpenTable ministry opportunity for young adults at YG.

Frequently Asked Questions: OpenTable FAQ

1. Are YG LIFEgroups going away?

No! OpenTable will NOT replace young adult life groups. We will continue to encourage young adults to jump into longer-term community, including LIFEgroups of all kinds at YG.

2. Will there be other opportunities for other young adults?

Yes. Stay tuned. We will garner feedback and see about the future. Interested in getting involved or have questions, talk to Valeria, Anthony, Kenneth, or Pastor Allan.

3. Who is a “Young Adult”?

We generally define young adulthood as the post-highschool/pre-kids season of life.

4. How many people will participate in each OpenTable?

There will be 8-12 people at each OpenTable: 1-2 hosts, 1-2 young adult facilitators and 4-8 young adult participants. There needs to be 5-12 people at each OpenTable to run.

5. What is my time commitment as a host?

We are asking hosts to commit to at least ONE OpenTable (which includes three dinners over a 4-6 week period) during the season.

6. Can I still be a host if I don't have the space?

Yes. Volunteer hosts are welcome to use Fellowship Hall or Green Room as their gathering space. We are also happy to help hosts get creative with the space they have! (Cozy is great!)

7. If I'm a host, do I have to provide the meals?

Yes and No. You do NOT have to cook the meals nor do you have to cover all of the costs. However, part of your role is to put food on the table. We are more than happy to help with low-maintenance recipe ideas and will provide stipends to help cover the cost of food (whether you cook at home or get take-out). The third dinner will be a potluck where each attendee commits to bringing an item for everyone to share.

8. What is my time commitment as a young adult facilitator?

We are asking facilitators to commit to at least ONE OpenTable (which includes three dinners over a 4-6 week period during the season).

9. As a facilitator, will I be expected to have all the answers?

No. Your role is to listen and guide the conversation rather than to answer questions. We hope that anyone who participates in an OpenTable would feel free to share their story, ask their questions, and talk honestly without fear of judgment. Listening and making someone feel heard is an integral part of displaying hospitality.

If you have further questions contact Pastor Allan.

How do you feed all these people?!

Below you'll find some tips on how to keep meals cheap, easy, and adaptable for those with special diets. If you have any specific questions or need more ideas, feel free to contact Christian. We will do our best to point you in the right direction. Remember, you don't need to accommodate every kind of diet you may encounter, but it makes people feel super loved and cared for when we are able to anticipate their needs and provide for them in the way that best suits them. If you ask and there are no dietary restrictions in your group, feel free to make whatever you want! Remember, these are tips, not rules!

Some General Tips:

- Avoid nuts in general-- particularly peanuts
- Keep things like cheese, croutons, crackers, or bread on the side
- Make dinners build-your-own
- Offer a side salad, fruit or veggie
- Save packages on prepared foods so people can see ingredient lists if needed
- Offer a vegetarian option or keep meat on the side
- Make sure each item you're serving has its' own utensils and they aren't mixed

Some Menu Ideas:

- Taco Bar (everyone builds their own! Add rice or beans for bulk!)
- Build your own sandwich (have big pieces of lettuce available for lettuce wraps!)
- Spaghetti or other pasta (have 1 box of gluten free pasta/veggie noodles with meat on the side)
- Nachos or walking tacos
- Baked potato bar
- Throw something in the crockpot! (There are so many ideas on Pinterest! Like [this](#))
- Brats or burgers (Have a package of veggie burgers or dogs on hand too)
- Fajitas
- Sheet pan dinners (cut up veggies and meat and roast it in the oven)
- Grain Bowls (Quinoa, rice, or other grain, veggies, and protein-- beans work too!)
- Soup, salad, bread (Get creative here! Try Whole 30 soups and you'll avoid most allergens)
- Breakfast for dinner (eggs, bacon or sausage, fruit, pancakes-- gluten free mix tastes the same!)
- Stir Fry (Rice, veggies, and a protein on the side. Use Tamari instead of soy or find a GF sauce)
- Order milios (get a couple of lettuce wraps)
- Order pizza (get one gluten free option without cheese-- Glass Nickel has a good one)
- Order Thai (100% of the sauces at Curry in the Box are vegan and gluten free)

Discussion Questions for Open Table

First Dinner

Intent: Get to know each other! Hopefully by the end of the night, the group is more comfortable with each other and everyone knows each others' names.

- Where were/did/have you (born, grow up, go to school, get engaged/married, travel to)
- What brought you to Texas/DFW?
- Is there a food, song, or sight that reminds you of "home"?
- What's your favorite way to spend your free time?
- Something you're looking forward to this year?

Second Dinner

Intent: Keep building relationships. Start talking about Hospitality. See what thoughts and ideas people come in with about and maybe try to present another view.

- What place/people/things make you feel most at home?
- Do you have a story of a time you felt like you were an outsider?
- Have you ever experienced radical hospitality/gratitude/grace?
- Who are "your people"?
- How would you define hospitality? Who do you think of?

Last Dinner

Intent: Challenge and encourage each other. We want to leave each other with the feeling we can and should display radical hospitality in our lives. You could lean into the practicality of how or why.

- Where have you experienced someone's or a group's failure to extend hospitality to you?
- What makes hospitality so hard? Emotionally? Practically? What barriers do you think may stand in your way?
- Who do you intend to display radical hospitality to in your life?
- What excites you about radical hospitality? What hopes do you have?
- Why is it so important?
- Are there different circles of people in your life you would like to see come together?