

# True Community, Part 3

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Date: 08 September 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at [TrinityGraceAthens.com](http://TrinityGraceAthens.com).

Turn with me, if you will, to Luke 14. Luke 14. We are going to dive into the scriptures this morning.

Such a privilege to be together, to meet together. If you do not have a copy of the scriptures, we'd love to give you one. We have a number of copies of the English Standard Version in the back.

That's the version we use. So even if you have a copy of the scriptures, you just want a copy of those scriptures, that's totally cool.

We're all in on that. And you can look with me to Luke 14. I'm going to begin reading in verse 15.

[ 1 : 16 ] Luke 14, verse 15. When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, said to Jesus, Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.

But Jesus said to him, A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, Come, for everyone, everything now is ready.

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them.

Please have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So the servant came and reported these things to his master.

Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, and crippled, and blind, and lame.

[ 2 : 42 ] And the servant said to him. And the servant said, Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room. The master said to his servant, Okay, go out to the highways and the hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.

For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste the banquet. That is the word of God, the only authoritative word from him.

You know, in her recent book, Rosario Butterfield, begins by telling us about her neighbor, Hank. She says, Our house and Hank's house share a dead end that stops where two acres of woods open up.

When Hank's van, moving van, first backed down his driveway in 2014, he was a self-described recluse. He played loud music.

He occasionally received cell phone calls that got him seething mad and shouting obscenities. He owned a hundred-pound pit bull named Tank who ran the streets without collar or tags.

[ 4 : 02 ] She continues, Each neighbor can recall how we all saw our life flash before our eyes when we first met Tank, bounding towards us at full throttle. Hank didn't cut his grass for three months, and by the time the city fined him for creating a meadow, no regular mower could tackle the cleanup.

Now, us in Athens could have handled that pretty swiftly. Truth be told, she continues, Hank was not the neighbor we had prayerfully asked for when Eddie moved away.

But we trusted that Hank was the neighbor God had planned for us. So when Hank moved in, we shared with him our contact information, introduced him to our dogs and kids, and waited for him to reciprocate.

Instead, he dismantled his front doorbell. We prayed for Hank. Then one day, Tank ran away and did not come home.

One night turned to two, two nights into a week. In the crisis of a lost dog, our bond was forged. We offered our help, and Hank received our open hand.

[ 5 : 09 ] We posted Tank's information and listed our neighbors to come to Hank's age. My 10-year-old daughter cried herself to sleep each night as she prayed for Tank's return and told Mr. Hank about her prayers and God's faithfulness.

When Tank was finally safe and sound, we became friends. We started to walk our dogs together. Soon, we were eating meals together, spending holidays together, and sharing life.

Hank, she goes on to tell, became like family. Though in so many ways, Hank was not the neighbor they prayed for. Hank was the neighbor God had planned.

Indeed, as she concludes powerfully later on, God gets no address wrong. I wonder if we live our daily lives with the same conviction.

That our neighbors are our neighbors because God brought them to us. I mean, what do you see when you look over to the other house? Or when you look across the apartment complex or across the hallway?

[ 6 : 23 ] Do you just see what they're up to? Do you try to watch out and be a good neighbor? Or do you look further to see their aches and pains? Do you know their names?

Do you know their families? Their kids, their grandkids? What about the folks on your team at work? Or the Food City Barista? Or the auto mechanic?

Or the people at the department store? Or the other parents of the soccer team? What do you know about them? Do you ever wonder why we live, work, eat, and shop around the same people every day?

Do we live with a sense that all these everyday interactions aren't accidental, but powerfully and purposefully planned?

This morning, we're going to continue our True Community series with one more week by considering how community moves outward. When Jesus talks about the kingdom of God and the people of God, as we just read this morning, Jesus doesn't talk about a ministry or an organization or a political party or a business.

[ 7 : 35 ] He talks about a family that parties. He talks about a family that eats together, celebrates together, a family known for its party.

He's essentially saying, be known for your parties and be known for how you invite others in. We're going to take a look at this parable and see what we can learn for who we are and how we're called to live hospitably.

Now, if you were here for our parable series several months ago, you probably noticed that we did study this parable already. I'm okay. We're going to take another pass at it. I'll move a little more quickly on some details because we did that, but it's the word of God.

I feel sure it can equip us today. But let me recap this story. You know, the story begins talking about a master. You know, the story centers around this master who has a great banquet.

We don't often use the word banquet. My mom might use that word, but it's just a party, right? We don't want to put that into our Bibles. The banquet, the party was quite nice.

[ 8 : 37 ] It was great. I think that means it was lavish. It was a kill the fattened calf type of party, but it was great, not merely because of the lavish preparations, but because the master invites so many people, you know, and we see that kind of unfold in this story because he has this party and then he begins to invite people and it's quite common in that day, as we see in this story, to have a double invitation.

To invite the guests ahead of time, to alert them, hey, hey, a party's coming and when all the preparations are made, which take longer without our crock pots and whatever that super speedy pot is, I can't remember the name of it, a super duper pot or something like that, you know, we don't have those super duper pots and so we have to, we have to invite our guests ahead of time and then invite them when everything's ready and that's what's going on with this party.

In many ways, it's not unlike a wedding celebration that we may attend. Invitations are sent out, RSVPs are collected, guest lists are finalized, courses are then prepared and tables arranged and when the day comes, everyone doesn't just run in and eat the wedding cake, right?

They wait, they arrive, they wait and then the master, whoever's throwing this party, invites everybody to feast and that's what's going on in this parable but all the guests, when the second invitation comes, refuse it.

Everything's prepared, the master sends out his servant and says, go tell everybody, come for everything now is ready and they all make excuses. You know, you saw the first guy down there in verse 18, he says, I bought a field and I must go out and see it.

[ 10 : 24 ] I mean, that looks pretty legitimate at first, right? It looks fine, you bought something, go take care of it but the idea is what we're supposed to see in that, in this culture, a desert-like culture like that, no one buys a field quickly.

You can just stumble into Wednesday and buy a field. You would study it for a water source and for suitable soil. So, he bought it knowing this party was coming.

Whether or not this excuse is true, it's unacceptable. The second says, I bought five yoke of oxen, 19, and I go now to examine them.

Please have me excuse. You know, that please, I guess, was a massage away any of the offense there but what we're supposed to see there is this guy's a wealthy man. Five yoke of oxen, he doesn't own one or two yoke of oxen, he's five and the idea is he could go anytime to see this yoke of oxen.

He could send a servant. Why now? The third simply says, I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come.

[ 11 : 48 ] You know, we might tend to think this is the legitimate one. Deuteronomy says, take a year off but this excuse is most obviously unacceptable because it verges on indecency.

He's saying, I'm staying home. I'm bailing to stay home and so the master is insulted and angry. Now, we can kind of read this kind of like a fairy tale and not sense the insult it is when you throw a party like this and people don't come and so the master gets to work though and begins inviting everyone else.

You know, he makes a sudden change of plans. He invites more guests but the surprise of the parable is not that the master invites more guests but who he invites. Look down there.

He says, go out quickly, verse 21, to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.

The servant must have thought, what? What are you talking about? What are I going to waste this party on them?

[ 13 : 06 ] Don't you realize how they look, how they smell? The servant goes. I just love that servant. He goes and goes far and these folks are hard to find.

You know, he says, go to the highways, right? Streets and lanes. The idea is they're not in the corner house, not in the corner office. They're on the streets.

They're outcast. They don't have money. They don't have a home. The servant finds them and they come and then he reports back. I just love this servant.

He reports back and says, sir, what you've commanded has been done and still there's room. Come on, let's fill the house and the master says, go to the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be filled and the servant, he must go further out, outside the city, out into the lanes, out into the rural areas.

He goes to the highways and hedges. I immediately think of those girls and oh brother, where art thou? Singing that hymn, in the highways and the hedges, I'll be working for my Lord.

[ 14 : 11 ] And this servant was working. You know, he must compel them to come, not because they don't want to come and they got to be twisted with the arm or something like that. He must compel them to come because they can hardly believe that they've been invited to his house.

He must compel them to dispel away any sense that this party's not for them.

And the party, I mean, the thing just ends great. Now, some of this we don't even know, but the assumption is everyone just gathers into the house and just full. You know, it's a party where you're shoulder to shoulder with everybody and it's time to party.

It's time to feast. feast. And we got to think, why is this in our Bible?

What's the point? Right? If you look back at verse 1 of chapter 14, there with me if you would, one Sabbath when Jesus went to dine at the house of a ruler.

[ 15 : 27 ] The Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. You'll notice that Jesus tells this parable while he's at the house. He's receiving hospitality at someone's house.

He tells this parable, you know, and he's at a certain type of party that was quite common. That's what we know from the rest of this chapter that it's quite common in that day for the religious and social elite to have their special parties.

All the important people were invited. Given all important places around the table, what Jesus says to the lowliest place or lowest place, so that all the unimportant people might know who they aren't.

I think parties like this are common in our day. I don't know if you ever flip through a magazine and you find the snapshots of celebrities at an exclusive red carpet party and maybe you don't want to go to those parties.

I certainly do not want to go to those parties, but we flip through that magazine so it's loud and clear. We don't have to worry about that. We'll never be invited. Or better yet, have you ever scrolled through Facebook finding happy images of friends at a party that you weren't invited to and one you didn't even know about?

[ 16 : 42 ] That's the way the Pharisees' parties were. There were some that were invited, but everyone else was. They were exclusive.

They were for the important, the elite, the who's who. And Jesus tells this story to tell you that the party he's throwing is not like that.

The party Jesus is throwing is one in which all belong. It's not for the religious who do all the right things. It's not for the socially well connected who know all the right people.

It's for you. It's for you. It's for the outcast. It's for the poor and crippled and blind and lame.

You know, none of these people entered the temple. The poor couldn't have afforded the sacrifice required and the crippled, blind, and lame were outlawed. They were not allowed.

[ 17 : 45 ] And that's why we see when Jesus is walking around doing his ministry, we see so many crippled people outside the temple or along the sides of the roads because they weren't able to enjoy the worship that everyone else enjoyed.

But these are precisely the people that Jesus comes to invite. Jesus is throwing a party for those who don't cut it, who aren't religious enough, spiritual enough, who haven't walked straight, who aren't well connected, who don't have a good family, who have a past, who are rough around the edges.

Jesus is throwing people who are bull and China shop type people, people like you and me. Jesus is throwing a party for people who need him.

I love the way our friends, another use of our friends today, but at Emmanuel Church in Nashville capture this in their mantra.

I love this mantra. I'm a complete idiot. My future is incredibly bright. This is a confession about me too, but I think you could make it as well. I'm a complete idiot.

[ 18 : 59 ] My future is incredibly bright. Anyone can get in on this. Anyone can get in on this. I think they've recited this in their meeting, which I think is just totally great, but I think that captured it so well.

Anyone can get in. That's what Jesus is saying. The only people who cannot get in is the people that don't need, don't think they need to get in, but for everyone else, come on in.

And the parable concludes powerfully. If you look down there in 24, he says, for I tell you, none of those men who are involved shall taste my banquet.

And if you know the context, Jesus is definitely warning the Pharisees and scribes who think they got it figured out. He's calling them to turn now, but the warning extends to us. We ought not delay this invitation.

We ought not postpone it. We ought not dally with the decision for Christ. Jesus calls all who will come to come now for life.

[ 19 : 58 ] I don't know what might cause you to delay from fully giving your life to Christ.

Christ. I know when I was converted, the year before, I heard the preaching of the gospel. And I said, Lord, I want another lap of living in sin.

I want another lap of mushrooms, pot, marijuana, whatever. I literally said that to the Lord.

It's a miracle. He didn't strike me down right then. So kind of him to give another offer to me. But none of us are promised that offer. That's what he's saying. And this invitation is real.

This invitation is for life. And this invitation might not come again. Maybe it's shame that I'm not fully giving everything over. Because I'm so ashamed of the things that I've done or the things that happened to me when I was young.

[ 21 : 18 ] Or maybe it is just the past. You know, a past can be like that sack that just keeps filling up with rocks that weigh us down. And it takes so much to fully give it away to Jesus.

Maybe it's just a thought that you could never measure up. And you just think, well, this gospel offer just can't be for me. Or maybe it's your age. You just think, I'm too young to respond to the gospel. Or maybe it's just that your love for this world, you know.

I didn't want to come to Christ lest my deeds be exposed, what John 3 says. And maybe it's like that. It's just love for the world. But for whatever it is, do not delay, is what the Lord says.

Come to Christ. 1 Peter 3 says, for the righteous die for the unrighteous, that he, Jesus Christ, might bring us to God.

Come now for life. life. That said, I think this parable is also, or it also powerfully underlines the way salvation advances through a hospitable community.

[ 22 : 34 ] I think it's powerful. I want us to be a community that's like this. That parties like this. With room for everyone.

That's always moving outward. That's the type of community this is. That moves to the fringes. To those who don't seem fit. I want us to be a community that practices hospitality.

In a word, the way I would define it, it's hospitality is using your home strategically to make strangers, friends, and friends, family. Hospitality is using your home strategically to make strangers, friends, and friends, family.

That's what's going on in this parable. Just a couple points of application on this. First point is greet others. Greet others.

The Bible talks a lot about hospitality. When the Bible talks about hospitality, it always talks about hospitality or this relationship we have towards strangers, people who are not like us.

[ 23 : 38 ] Hospitality is not primarily about hanging out with your friends. That's what the Pharisees were doing. Right? And often we can stumble in that where we, you know, we have parties with our friends and then they have parties and they invite us and then the other guy has parties and they invite us.

That's kind of, it was a reciprocal type culture that was there, but that's not hospitality. Hospitality is greeting and welcoming those outside. The circle. Hospitality is trying to make strangers, friends, and friends, family.

And in the New Testament again and again exhorts us to it. Romans 12, 13. Contribute to the needs of the saints. And seek to show hospitality. First Peter 4, 9.

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. I think that makes it clear. No one grumbles when their friends come over, right? But they can grumble when that stranger comes over.

You have new people over. I read a quote the other day that says, you know, like, all ministry begins with awkward conversations. And I totally agree. I feel like we have people over for the first time.

[ 24 : 45 ] It is, it's just a giant foot in the mouth fest. And I just say stupid things, say things I didn't want to say. You know, whatever. It's just, I'm a verbal person and it just happens. And so, hospitality is those moments you're like, you're foot in the mouth a little bit because you're trying to figure out how to relate to someone new.

Hebrews 13, 2 puts it very clearly. Don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers. So why is God so serious about hospitality?

Why does God want us to be so serious about hospitality? Well, simply put, He is. Because He is. God is serious about hospitality. All His decisions towards us are deeply hospitable.

He is God and we're not. We are strangers who strayed from Him. We've even strayed so far that we've become enemies of Him. Romans 5 said, at enmity, at war with Him.

Yet He searches the streets and the alleys, the highways and hedges to bring us home. And God wants us to imitate Him. To be like Him.

[ 25 : 58 ] Not only that, this story Jesus tells reveals God's desires for the ones least wanted. Everyone in our culture wants to be around the rich, religious, powerful, and popular. But that's not who Jesus wants.

He's assembling His crew and that ain't them. He wants the poor and the lame. The idea is, He's trying to turn the world's value system on its head.

You know, if He just invited, He just threw a party for the rich, powerful, popular, religious, whatever, no one would be surprised. That's what everybody does.

Jesus wants the poor and lame to say loud and clear, I don't care about money or religion or power or popularity. I'm looking for broken people who need me.

God wants us to be serious about hospitality. You know, the first step towards hospitality is greeting others. I talked about this several weeks ago, but it's just so fascinating how the New Testament just places a priority on greeting and welcoming others.

[ 27 : 03 ] Again and again, like literally through these letters, we see this. I feel like I'm at my most awkward when greeting people.

You know, you should have high five, shake hands, side hug, full-on hug, if it's mom, you know, or something like that. But when you see people in the community, just greet them.

A few tips. Smile. Talk less. Smile more. Let's be like Elf. Smiling is my favorite. You know, let's lead with a smile, right?

You know, we can, you know, your mom always said it takes more muscles to frown than it does to smile, you know, whatever, but let's lead with a smile. Charles Spurgeon, you say, I like to see a minister smile before I hear his voice.

I would love that to be said of us. I saw his smile. He looked a little goofy, but there's something that stood out to me about him.

[ 28 : 03 ] Instead of just smiling and waving, when you see folks, walk towards them. Slow down. Somebody told me this years ago. When you see your neighbor walking across the earth, don't just wave.

Walk over there to them. It's incredible what that does. That little principle, you just kind of lodge that in the head somewhere. Walk towards them when you see them walking out.

Hey, how's Jim? Yeah. You never know what might happen. You know, go to common areas where you see others and greet people. Play in the front yard.

Play at the apartment pool. Play at the local park. Walk around the neighborhood. Go to the grocery store with extra time. Not a huge fan of the click list, but I will not get on a diatribe.

But go to the grocery store. I mean, you go to Athens to the grocery store, you see everybody you know, right? Same people you saw everywhere else. And so, go there. Talk. Second, befriend others. You know, I feel like we get into the conversation.

[ 29 : 05 ] We say, you know, what's your name? Where are you from? What do you do? What's your name? Where are you from? Where do you do? What's your name? Where are you from? What do you do? And then we kind of get paralyzed. It's like intractable, you know, because we think we don't have anything common with them after those three questions, which don't get very far.

You may not be into Fortnite or football or homeschool or Teletobies or Star Wars or Harry Potter or whatever else they're into, but there's at least two things you share with them. One is, you're created in the image of God.

C.S. Lewis says it so well. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.

It's a wonderful word. Next to the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. Now, that's pretty intense language, but the idea, he's more dignified, more wonderful, more amazing than your dog or than anything else in the created world because he's created like God.

How would it change our daily interactions if we saw that? Every person is created in God's image and thoroughly, unordinary, given unique gifts.

[ 30 : 29 ] So you know, you both know you're created in the image of God and you both know pain. Everyone under the sun, which is everyone, knows disappointment, betrayal, loss, guilt, shame, pain, and trouble.

Ask questions. Find out who they are. What makes them unique? I mean, what did you want to be when you grew up? What are your parents like?

What do you like to read or watch or play or do? What do you dream about? How many kids do you have? What are their ages? What are they doing? You know, ask questions about getting to know them. Ask, do you play an instrument?

I don't know. You know, just ask, how are they uniquely gifted and uniquely made? But ask questions also about their pain. Find out what hurts. I mean, sometimes we can think, I can never go there.

But you'd be surprised what we wear on our sleeve. I read a story last night about a guy who, a woman knocked on his door to deliver a pizza and he said, how's the night going?

[ 31 : 45 ] And she said, life is hard right now. I left my husband. I think it was the biggest mistake of my life. That's incredible. I said, where's the receipt?

Let me sign up the receipt. I mean, just ask, how's your life? I mean, how's the night going? I think people like, people definitely like to talk about themselves and people like to talk about what hurts.

One of the questions I like to ask at a restaurant is can we pray for you in any way as we pray for our meal? A lot of times I get some funny questions, you know, or something like that but occasionally it opens up something and we pray for this lady, this man for the next couple days but it, but it, it tries to push beneath the surface because everybody's carrying pain.

Point three, eat with others. Have you ever noticed that a large part of Jesus' ministry is simply eating? that's a ministry I can do. You know, Jesus doesn't start programs or organizations or ministries but he does eat with people a lot in their homes, at their tables, their food, their drink.

You know, it's one of the things, it's one of the biggest things that really chapped the Pharisees and scribes. They said, he eats with tax collectors and sinners. He eats too much, you know, I mean, John came fasting but Jesus came eating and drinking as if that's like the ultimate gut punch, you know.

[ 33 : 27 ] Have you ever been in someone's house you're afraid of people seeing you walk out? That might be the moment you're most like Christ. Why, why did Jesus do this so much? Because eating with others communicates we truly care.

You know, if we serve someone a meal, it's clear we're up here and they're down there. But if we eat with them, we're saying, I want to be friends with you.

The table is level. The table is level. Perhaps what we need more than anything else is missional eating. I'm always on a mission to eat but not usually with Jesus.

People often complain about not having time to minister, you know, or not having time for missions but we do have time to eat. We make time. Now in America we do fast food and everything and I think that's not helping us but we can make time and eat with people.

So invite others to eat. Invite them to a restaurant or coffee or ice cream. It's what you're doing already. I know some of you got that dairy barn rhythm going on so just invite somebody to come with you when you go get that whatever they serve, you know, ice cream.

- [ 34 : 45 ] And I'm trying to think of the blast thing but I always mess up the name. Invite them into your home. You know, I feel like one of the most underutilized resources the church has are our homes.

I read a stat the other day that said that most people don't have others into their home except for one time, one to two times a year. I pray that's not said of us.

Not because we're the best cooks or most hospitable people but because we see this opportunity to communicate something.

Watch out for your excuses, you know. They'll start coming. It's too scary. Often it's not other people that are too scary but it's we that care too much about what they think.

Will my house be clean enough? The food be good enough? Will they like me? You know, will I bumble around and stick my foot in my mouth? I promise you that so don't let that one get in your way. Or it's too costly.

- [ 35 : 47 ] Hospitality costs money but you don't have to serve surf and turf, you know. You can serve lentils. You can serve anything.

You can serve a modest meal. Many times like that's not what people are coming for. I mean we used to have this like bring your own lunch thing which no, my wife wasn't a big fan of bring your own lunch thing but people just loved it and talked about it forever and the house would be just packed full and all we did was bring our lunch.

It's too busy. You know, I'm too busy for hospitality and in order to show hospitality there are certain things you, you know, change the way you live. You may not be able to keep your routine perfectly.

you may miss more family devotions. You may miss more extracurricular activities because of a commitment. Thirdly, just throw a party. We should be known for throwing the best parties.

I think that's kind of read right out of the parable. We know how to use God's gifts in the ways that the world does not. They abuse them and so we can throw a party and just enjoy.

- [ 36 : 55 ] You know, there's so many reasons to throw a party and it's very easy to find an excuse to do it. Parties, birthdays, anniversaries, housewarming, sporting events, but wait till basketball season, please.

Seasonal occasions, July 4th, Thanksgiving, Christmas. Other occasions, may the 4th be with you. Get together and watch that work. Cinco de Mayo that we've thoroughly adopted as a culture and party.

Fourthly, share Christ. In many ways, I put this forth. I'm leaving the least amount of attention to it. I think we think it's the hardest point, but I don't think it is. I think if you build relationships like this, sharing Christ, most natural thing to do in the world when this lady says, I feel like I just made the biggest mistake of my life.

Let's get back to Hank. May 12th, 2016, 515 AM. A text message from a neighbor came in.

What's going on at Hank's house? Why are police surrounding the house? Are you okay? My phone was turned off in any other room so I didn't get the message.

- [ 38 : 13 ] Peaceful sounds echoed from my husband and my two youngest children. Even the dogs were sleeping. My Bible was open and I began to pray.

As neighbors were texting my turned off phone about the danger at Hank's house, I was sitting at my desk praying for Hank. I was praying for his salvation and then I noticed it.

Burly men ducking around the back of his house wearing orange shirts marked DEA, Drug Enforcement Agencies. Yellow tape appeared everywhere, crime scene. I left my Bible open and ran to wake Kent, my husband, and the children.

I grabbed my phone and turned it on and the text message bounced to light. What's going on at Hank's house? I hear there's a meth lab across the street.

She continues as the day went on, watching the DEA drag Hank and Amy from the scandal and secret of their addiction was painful. Hank was ashamed, head low, not able to look at us.

[ 39 : 22 ] Amy was flying high as a kite, her pink hair wild like her eyes. She made eye contact with me and waves. She blew kisses to my children like a homecoming queen or a princess.

Before long, we were fingered as friends. Not just informed neighbors, but friends of the evil one. That was true and it cast us in a different light.

The whole neighborhood accused us of loving this sinner. More than one neighbor asked, did you know about the meth lab? More than one neighbor declared, you must have known.

Others said, did you call the police? How could you have not known? By day's end, which we thought would never come to pass, with kids and dogs tucked into one room for company and support, Kent and I had our first moment of the day to look each other in the eye and try to piece things together.

How could we have missed a meth lab across the street? Was Hank that gentle, scared, depressed, sweet Hank a dangerous man?

[ 40 : 38 ] After we prayed together, Kent turned to me and said, would you have done any of this differently? I knew what he meant. Our neighbors were fuming mad at Hank and their anger was spilling over to us.

Had we missed the important clue, for the past two years our neighbors had been warning us about Hank. They had this bad feeling about him. They would say, were they right and we wrong? It must seem so. Would you have done anything differently?

I said, not a thing. Jesus dined with sinners. So do we. Let's be a community that lives with others in such a way that causes the world to scratch their head and even point their finger.

Let's be a community that shows hospitality, that makes strangers like Hank, like you, like me, friends.

It makes friends, family. Father in heaven, we thank you most of all that once we were strangers, once we were not a people, once we were not wanted by anyone, and yet you told the world that you wanted us.

[ 42 : 06 ] And you sought us and found us. God, we had strayed so far into alleys and highways and hedges running from you, ducking and hiding, and you came.

You didn't send us, you didn't send just any servant. Father, you sent your son so that he could come, become like us in every way, become one with us so that he might be the true friend, the friend of sinners, put his arm around us, not just to pat us on the back, but to carry everything on our back to Calvary.

And there, Lord, you made him who knew no sin to be our sin, to be punished in our place, to be pointed at, to be judged, to be mocked, to be ridiculed.

That we might be loved and accepted, delighted over forever, so that we might know you.

You became our friend, Lord Jesus, and what a friend you are. We give you, Lord, let us live like you. We want to go outside the gate. We want to bear the reproach you bore.

[ 43 : 33 ] We want to join you in your mission to seek and save the lost. God, help us. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at [TrinityGraceAthens.com](https://TrinityGraceAthens.com).