

# Stories from the Movement.

*What is your Gospel story?*

*Gospel stories are the voice of the Open Table movement. They teach how congregation members are creating community with people in poverty. And they witness how mutual relationship with our Brothers and Sisters in poverty can heal.*

*The Gospel journey in Open Table is action on the outside and transformation on the inside.*

*We invite you to read these stories and ask yourself if you are called to change yourself and your community.*



Table in Arizona

*Is now a time to find the answer to the question:  
What is your Gospel story?*



# *A Discipleship Model*

*They were fishermen, a tax collector and others called by Jesus to discipleship. In Open Table, we are church members, moms and dads, business people, medical professionals, mechanics, dentists, accountants, college students, pastors, lawyers, community leaders, government workers, retired people, veterans and more.*

*Through the Open Table model – a comprehensive, structured process – we exit the classroom and enter into mutual relationship with our Brothers and Sisters in poverty.*



*A Table in Texas*

*Together we become vulnerable, we love, and we trust. We experience wilderness.*

*We learn to share resources: our intellectual and social capital and personal networks to develop and implement plans.*

*We reach out to God. We follow a new way. We become disciples.*

*“I went to a neighborhood where I would normally lock my car doors and drive through quickly...”*

“I had a meeting with a prospective Brother. I knock on the door and a very large, muscular, tattooed man answers.

“As I walk through a living room full of people, he offers me pizza. We break bread together, and break through. I learn of a struggle, a single parent as caregiver to a profoundly disabled child, a man in poverty giving life to his little one.



“This Brother would demonstrate a gospel truth I would have missed if I had only looked in the window and not walked through the door.

*“The door to my judgment started to close and a journey of healing for me began that day.”*

*Table Member, Arizona*

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*“I always had the idea that everyone started out life on the same footing. I didn’t really understand the concept of kids aging out of foster care...”*

“The brother on our Table was preparing his initial paperwork when we came to the part of the form that required an emergency contact. After giving him several options of people to add to the form, he stared at me blankly.

“*‘Anyone I could think of wouldn’t care if anything happened to me.’* When he began his Table, he whispered upon entering his first meeting, *‘Six people want to know me?’*

“After weeks on the Table, he was filling out a job application and he looked over at the director and said, *‘I put you down as my emergency contact.’*

“This made me realize what we are doing here. We are walking alongside a brother and creating real community.

*“We were an instant group of people that cared what happened to him.”*



*Table Member, Texas*

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*“Abandoned, broken, neglected. That’s how he would describe himself...”*

“At the age of 30, he had been through so much: drug addicted parents, public housing, homelessness, incarceration.

“After the Breaking of the Bread meeting, when everyone on his Table shared why they chose to serve on the Table, he said something profound.



“Initially, everyone on his Table appeared to him as a beautiful flower vase, pristine and priceless.

“After the meeting he realized that if he looked close enough, he would see cracks and breaks, that each of the people on the Table had their own pain and failure too. He said it gave him hope that God could put him together.

*“Embraced, restored, and cared for. That’s how he would describe himself now.”*

*Table Member, Texas*



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*“Our Table was filled with type-A personalities.  
We had a plan. We knew what was right...”*

“We were frustrated when our Brother didn’t see the plan as his plan. We were pushing, even shoving. We were of the mindset that change comes from a very structured plan. We wanted him to write things down. That’s how we did things. It was seven against one.

“Then he brought out his phone. He started using it to jot down notes. We started thinking outside of the box.

“*Our way* did not work for him and we realized that *we* were wrong



“There wasn’t one way to do things.

*“We learned to understand our Brother  
and use tools that worked for him.”*

*Table Member, Maryland*



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*“She had been through more suffering than I could ever imagine. She lost 16 members of her family to a hurricane...”*

“She was brought to this country with the hope of being a nanny and was left jobless and homeless. She didn’t know the language.

“She lived out of a dumpster, prostituted, worked the whole time and saved money. She is now my friend because of our relationship on her Table.

“She calls me to pray and I call her to share things that happen in my life. She tells me, ‘You need to have patience.’ I believe her because she has lived that truth.

“She is amazing and strong and I am blessed to call her ‘friend.’ Only relationship could affect this kind of change in both of us.”

*“She is amazing and strong and I am blessed to call her ‘friend.’ Only relationship could affect this kind of change in both of us.”*

*Table Member, Arizona*



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*“Never assume anything...”*

“I was talking to my Sister about food. It turned out that she was having premade meals delivered to her.

“She had never used her oven; she didn’t know how.

*“We shared life together making meals and sharing something I had taken for granted before.”*



*Table Member, Arizona*

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*“Our Sister seemed like she had it together. She seemed to be completely honest. I was shocked when her drug test showed traces of Meth...”*

“I freaked out. I was on the Table with Christians at my church that didn’t even smoke.

“I was worried what they would think. I felt torn. This is my church, these are my people.

“I didn’t know how to tell them about our sister. I felt convicted that I should let down my guard and get to know her. Could I relate to someone with her history? She was remarkably just like me.”

*Table Member, Texas*

*“I didn’t know how to tell them about our sister. I felt convicted that I should let down my guard and get to know her. Could I relate to someone with her history? She was remarkably just like me.”*



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*“How could he love her? Our young man had lived in group homes; stable but not ideal. Then he got into contact with his mother...*

“His undying love for his mother was shocking to us.

“She was a broken woman, one who struggled with addiction to the point that she became an invalid.

“He refused to take our help without having us help her too. What we saw was a picture of Christ like love.



*“She had wronged him and he loved her fiercely. It was a shocking picture of our own relationship to Christ.”*

*Table Member, Arizona*

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*“She would rage. Whenever she recalled a painful memory...*

“She was in survival mode. We realized that this situation was one that didn’t just warrant material help.

“This Table would be about healing and nurturing. She didn’t trust adult women; those were the people that abused her most.



“We spent time developing female relationships with her around food and activities. Slowly, through lots of support, we began to break through. She would just yell and scream at us, ‘*You don’t know anything. You don’t know me.*’”

“We had gained enough trust that we would just hug and hold her until those feelings passed.

*“Nothing she could say or do would make us stop loving her.”*

*Table Member, Texas*

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*“She didn’t know all of the Bible stories; Church was a place other people went on Sundays...”*

“On our Table, she expressed a desire to know more. Someone gave her a Bible Story Book. She loves it. She says it’s one of the best things anyone has ever given her.

“We see her eyes light up with recognition when we speak about something from Scripture that was once foreign to her.

*“She taught us what a treasure God’s Word should be.”*

*Table Member, Arizona*



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*“She introduced herself to the group of pastors. She was about to share the impact Open Table had on her life...”*

“My name is Blessed and Highly Favored by God. My other name is Alcoholic, Drug Addict, Lousy Person, Bad Mother.

“Both of these names are true and accurate.

“I no longer believe I’m a lousy person. I am working daily to be a better parent. I am in recovery.



“God shows me every day why He brought the Table into my life. I now have a new identity.”

*“What a beautiful story of God’s redeeming power through relationship.”*

*Sister being helped, Arizona*



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*“Walls. She had put up walls to protect herself. Judgment and mistrust from others have made her leery of letting anyone in...”*

“They were frustrated. How could they accomplish anything on the Table if their Sister kept them at arm’s length?”

“One day she got a job; a job 30 minutes away. She had no way of getting there. The members on the Table began to drive her to and from work, almost every day.

“She talked and they listened and then they talked and she listened. They got to know her.

“The walls came down and she stood with confidence. They were driving toward a new potential together. That time allowed real relationships to develop between them.”

*"The walls came down and she stood with confidence. They were driving toward a new potential together. That time allowed real relationships to develop between them."*

*From a Table experience in Maryland*



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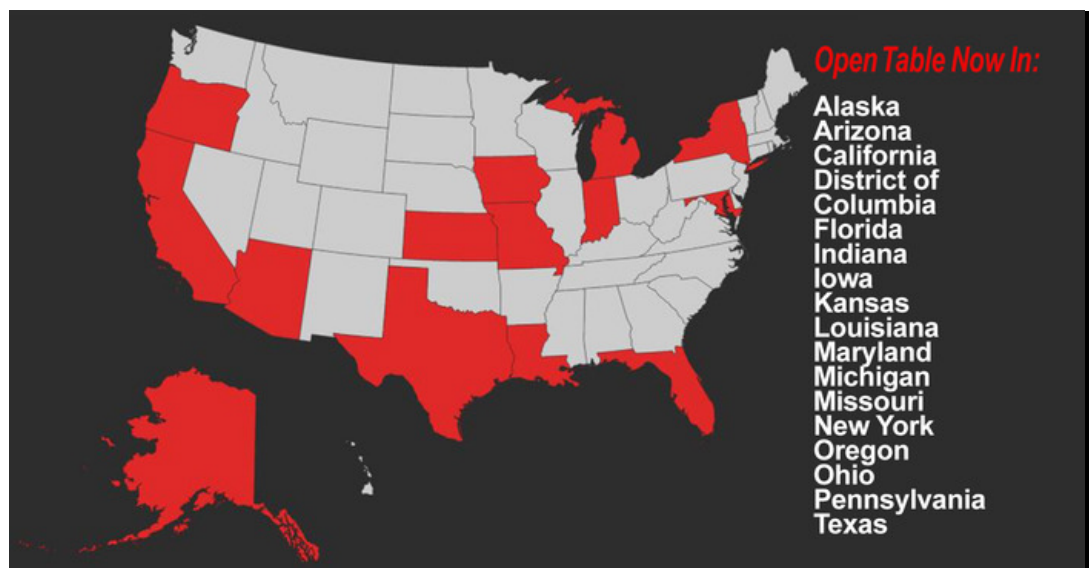
# The Open Table Model

Open Table trains congregation members, through the Open Table Model, to form communities – called Tables – that transform their vocational and life experiences into tools our Brothers and Sisters in poverty can use to develop and implement plans that create change.

Congregations use the Open Table model to create community and transformation with the homeless, working poor, young adults transitioning out of foster care, veterans, probation/re-entry, HIV+ and in poverty and survivors of human trafficking.

Congregations recruit volunteers who are trained to launch “Tables.” A Table is the platform through which our Brothers and Sisters in poverty and congregation members enter into relationship, allowing them to create change in their lives. Candidates for Tables pass through a psychological assessment and backgrounding process. Each Table is composed of a group of volunteers that make a year commitment to act as a team of life specialists, encouragers, and advocates for impoverished Brothers, Sisters and families. The Table members, together with the individual or family being helped establish goals, accountability, develop an overall plan and implement it.

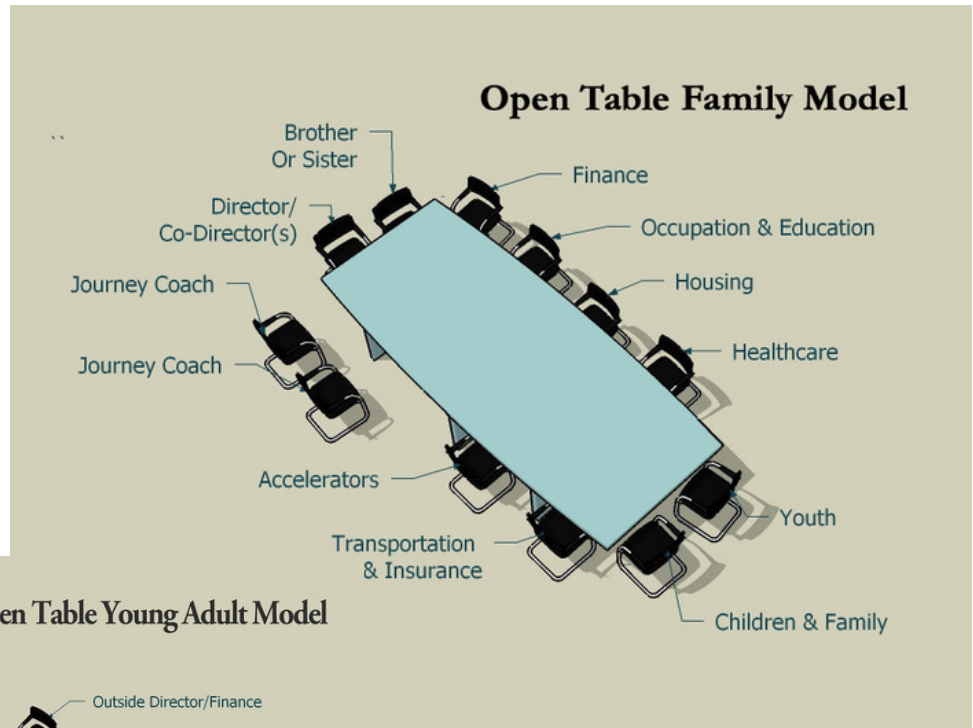
Table members network in their congregations and the community for resources to support the plan. As Tables end, they transition into an After Plan, through which Table members and Brothers and Sisters are able to remain in community together.



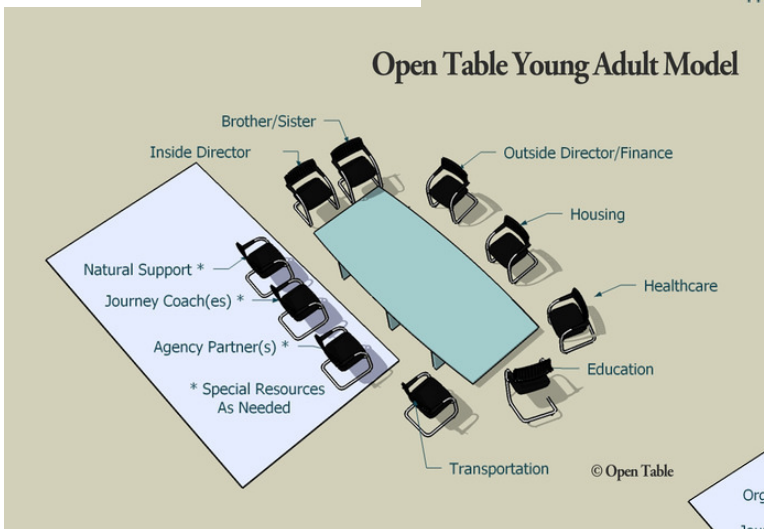
To protect the privacy of Table Members and Brothers & Sisters, we've used stock photos in this booklet (with the exception of pages 1 & 2) to illustrate the stories from the Movement.

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*There is always room for you at the Table...*

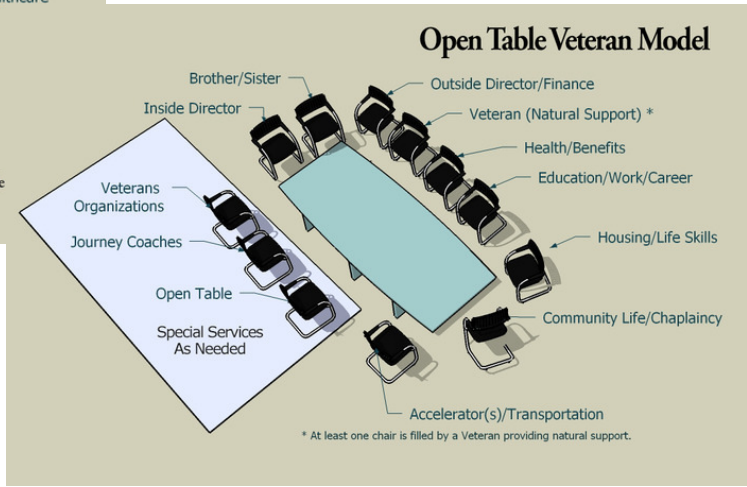


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**Family Model**



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**Young Adult Transitioning Out of Foster Care Model**

**Veteran Model**



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