

The Unwelcome Guest Sitting on Your Table

The turkey is cooked to perfection and trimmed with all the best fixings. Your table setting is so beautiful it could grace the cover of a magazine. Your friends and family have all arrived and the house is filled with the sound of celebration. Everything is perfect—right?

Not quite.

There is an unwelcome guest among us. Its name? Green Bean Casserole. Who brought that green-bean casserole? Its mere presence offends the rest of the Thanksgiving spread. Seriously, who is a fan of this dish? How did it find its way to your table? This messy glop of canned beans, cream of mushroom soup and fried onions needs to be tossed out. The recipe requires no thought. No one comes back to it for seconds, and most of it will end up in the trash bin. Friends! Family! Brothers and sisters! Surely, we can do better.

Yet as offensive as the casserole is, it doesn't compare to that awkward feeling everyone feels in the air. Perhaps it's the fact that your brother showed up with his new wife. It's barely been a year since that bitter divorce. Maybe it's the prodigal daughter sitting across the room, chatting like nothing is wrong. You've seen her Instagram and know she is in need of serious repentance. Yet what do you do?

Let's be honest: Though most of our social media feeds will feature picture-perfect holiday moments, we all know that the "behind the scenes" gathering is not always as pretty as what you post on Facebook. Nobody has a perfect family, and no holiday gathering is without its share of mess. We all have those family relationships that have been strained from past hurts and perhaps resulted in an empty seat at the table or

shallow conversations that do nothing but try to keep the peace.

All this family drama can create such an awkward atmosphere that all you can do is fake your best smile and just get through the holidays. My friend, surely we can do better.

Solomon wrote that “A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle” (Prov. 18:19, ESV). How true! Offense builds an impenetrable wall that only grows stronger over time. I dare say most of the awkward family moments we experience each year around the holidays stem from a past hurt or offense that remains unhealed.

This year, you have a choice to make. You can choose how you will embrace those family members who need a little extra grace. You can choose to rebuke them, but that will only harden the wall of their offense. Most will choose to simply ignore the situation and say nothing, but let the offense fester for another year. Clearly, there has to be another choice.

Although it may feel good to tell your family member “how you really feel” about their decisions or current lifestyle those words will only produce death in the relationship. Solomon also offers this wisdom, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Prov. 18:21, MEV). Instead of continuing to speak words that offer no hope, why not choose to release words of life into their situation?

Just as you create a menu and go to the store to gather the necessary ingredients, set aside some time to make a list with every family members name on it. Go to the prayer closet and lift them up by name every day this week. Listen to the Lord. What is He saying about them? Write down His thoughts next to their names. Begin to speak those words out concerning them

before they even enter your home.

As they arrive, meet them at the door with a genuine embrace. Take a moment to look them in the eyes and tell them you've been looking forward to seeing them and have been praying for them all week.

This year make it your goal to give them the gift of a loving gathering. Let your peace, love and grace rest on them as they enter your home. After all, there is a reason they came through the door. Yes, they may be hurting; they may be broken; they might be offended; yet they still came. Why? Everyone needs their family.

You could even go a step further. Carry some cards with you into the prayer closet. Write an encouraging note to every family member that you can leave beside their place at the table. You don't have to make a big deal about it. Let it be a little extra touch to the holiday setting. I can guarantee that long after the turkey has lulled everyone into a temporary coma, your encouraging words will be penetrating down to the deepest parts of their soul. Who knows, perhaps this could be the year that reconciliation and restoration begin within your family? I pray it is.

So, this holiday season, let me offer this piece of advice: Pass on the green-bean casserole but bring extra helpings of grace to the table. It's likely one will be much more welcome than the other.