The background features a blurred indoor scene with two blue and white floral tea cups on saucers resting on a wooden surface. In the foreground, a tea bag is visible in the left cup. To the left, a vertical strip of blue floral wallpaper is visible. At the top, green leaves and a small yellow flower cluster are shown. The text is centered over the image.

TEA TIME
DISCIPLESHIP



SHARING FAITH ONE CUP AT A TIME

SALLY CLARKSON

T E A T I M E
DISCIPLESHIP



S A L L Y C L A R K S O N



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

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Photography by Lori Sparkman

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Teatime Discipleship

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-8542-0 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8543-7 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022938621

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Printed in China

our forehead,
action reminds
and, like the Blessed
these things in our hearts.

ay blessing. O Lord, on this book, on
er, and on all thy people, that with clean
and diligent understanding, we may indeed
the glory of thy Incarnate Word, full of grace
and truth.

The Divine Wisdom is at hand; let us attend!

After the Gospel, a sermon usually follows. The
from the readings so that we see
ourselves and our world in them, redeemed and made
new.

On Sundays and major feast days, the Nicene
Creed follows the sermon (or Gospel, if there was no
sermon). The creed sums up the Church's faith, and
repeating it, we affirm our continuity with those
who have followed and believed in Jesus, and our
hands this faith on to those who will come

167

after us. During the creed, it is common to make a
reverence at the words announcing the great mystery
of the Incarnation—"he came down from heaven and
was incarnate by the... and was made man." Some
of the head at the name of Mary, as this gesture is
a remembrance of the Incarnation. It is also common
to bow at the name of Jesus, and at the words "who
with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified."
At the end of the creed, make the sign of the cross as
a remembrance of our baptism.

The intercessions follow, and our care for those we
know at the name of Jesus, and at the words "who
with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified."
The intercessions follow, and our care for those we
know at the name of Jesus, and at the words "who
with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified."
The intercessions follow, and our care for those we
know at the name of Jesus, and at the words "who
with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified."



*To Clay, for working over 40 years to dream
of bringing light to our world with me, over
ten thousand cups of tea together.*

*To our four wonderful children, who have been
tea companions over thousands of hours of soul-
shaping, reading, meals, and discussion.*

*To Phyllis, for sharing with me the profound
importance of teatime discipleship by extending
hospitality to me countless times when I
needed personal care and friendship.*

*To Gwennie, for building that rhythm into our
lives in Vienna—even if it was coffee sometimes.*

*To my myriad wonderful friends who have
entered into worlds of love and friendship
over cups together through the years.*

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AN INVITATION

Lighting a candle on a tiny table near my front living room window looking out on the snow-covered ground, I eagerly anticipate the arrival of my dear friend. I've picked the most pleasant view to the outside aspen trees and the tall pines, so our souls will feast on beauty as we talk.

A small crystal bowl is filled with salted, roasted buttered pecans. A matching bowl of fresh blueberries sits next to it. Dark chocolates wrapped in silver paper—her favorites—are waiting in a small pedestal dish I recovered from a secondhand store. My old Austrian teapot is filled to the brim with strong Yorkshire Gold tea, a favorite of my guest...and mine!

I have already pondered the questions I will ask to make our time purposeful because I know it will pass too fast. I will look into her eyes and even notice the wrinkles around them, the demeanor of her countenance, because I want to see into her heart. How has life treated her during these past months? Is there a furrow in her brow? What challenges has she encountered? What books has she been reading? And I will take her hand in mine and tell her how very glad I am to be with her and how much I love her. I will ask, "How can I pray for you today?"

I can't even begin to count how many close friends I have made over a simple meal or a cup of tea (or coffee, if you must!). There is something about stealing time away from the "busy" of life and sipping something wonderful, smooth, and warm while sitting in an environment where secrets can be shared, silly moments discussed, sympathy poured out, comfort given, and dreams become real in the speaking. I think of strong coffees in Vienna with new friends long ago, of daily pauses at three o'clock with friends in Oxford, both of which gave me a love for afternoon teatimes. *Civilizing of the heart and soul*, I have called it. Of Saturday morning omelets and the cheesy egg quesadillas that knit my heart to my sweet children. Of the foundational traditions of teatimes on my front porch or with warm chocolate chip cookies on my back porch.

*From years of
being intentional with
one another, we have a
heritage of heart sharing
that has sustained
both of us.*

All of this is teatime discipleship. When the atmosphere has been created and the table has been laid with intentionality and care, we are drawn together to learn, encourage, and strengthen



one another, welcoming one another into the deep things of God, the multifaceted dimensions of His love expressed.

My teatime discipleship journey began in earnest 45 years ago in communist Poland. In the late 1970s, spiritual gatherings were illegal in countries controlled by the Communist Soviet Union. Yet the women who came to us, mostly university students, were eager to learn, hungry to know that their lives had purpose, that a personal God really existed, saw them, and called them His beloved. They took a risk coming to our home to learn more of the Bible.

Leaders in the Polish underground student movement had invited our ministry into the country to teach the Bible and essential truths about living a flourishing Christian life. I was single and moved there with a friend under the guise of being university students. Many weeks, 35 women from cities all

over Poland crowded into our modest living room. An ocean of interesting faces—all chattering, laughing, delighting in the company of kindred spirits. They sat on the floor, on wobbly and various chairs, squishing together on two worn couches, squeezing into every nook and cranny. With notebooks in hand and open, our friends gathered for a Bible lesson they would take back to share with groups of women in their cities.

Using every possible cup, mug, and glass, we filled our teapots





with steaming hot water and herbate—the Polish word for tea. Herbate was drunk from glass cups with metal handles to keep our hands from burning. We scooped spoonfuls of sugar into this brew, as was their custom—no milk for them! Piles of buttered bread with jam were passed around, occasionally accompanied by thick slices of pungent cheese. This comprised the feast that made our gathering a celebration.

Here I would learn the gift of teatime—speaking together about eternal truths and life-changing messages of God’s love and design, shaping the foundations of thought, sharing in friendship. All of this was made possible simply by opening our doors, serving a simple meal, and establishing an environment of welcome. I drew from these experiences of faith, learned simple hospitality, and forged relationships with seeming strangers in all the years of my ministry. Our experience in reaching out to others and seeing the transforming of their lives set me up for a practice of teatime discipleship for the rest of my life.

One of the reasons I wanted to write this book was to rekindle the understanding that women need women, friends with whom to share life, companions through seasons, and spiritual mentors to keep their faith alive. My heart for my own teaching and messages is to help women feel seen, to help them understand that God is present. He cares for the burdens we carry. Yet, I also hoped to inspire you and others to see that sharing our love, faith, and friendship is not frivolous; it is a necessity if we are to stay alive in Christ. Finding accountability and support is essential to all human beings. We long for love, for a place to belong where we are accepted, limitations and all. We breathe only through the oxygen of love and will die spiritually if we do not have relationships where we can feel kindred with others who understand us, who



will join hands with us amid the demands of life.

Come to this book as if I've just met you at the door to welcome you into my home. Candles are lit; soft music is playing. I invite you to choose a china teacup from the cupboard and sit beside me to share stories. Inside these pages you'll find some of my own stories and some of the wisdom I've gleaned over decades of following the Lord. You'll find prayers, recipes, Scripture, stories, books, traditions—all sorts of blessings close to my heart that I would offer you if you sat beside me. And you'll find questions I'd like to ask you to get to know you better—questions you might like to contemplate during an encouraging conversation with a friend during your own teatimes.

In Part One, we'll explore together what it means to create a space for others. I'll bring you into my home and invite you to likewise welcome people in your community. In Part Two, we'll see what it means to be a true friend, discovering how God can transform our hearts, habits, and hospitality when He lives within us. In Part Three, we'll discuss ways to share the message that has changed us. You don't need to be a Bible scholar to love others well! And finally, we'll look in Part Four at what it means to be home to one another—to invite one another into fellowship and joy. I hope to pass on a little of what I've learned in hopes that you, too, might be able to share with others the beauty of a life and moments redeemed by celebrating life in Christ.

God called me to disciple others at a young age, and I've never gotten over the habit. May you, too, discover the joy of sitting at the Master's feet and gathering others around you to hear and celebrate this love and beauty!



A BLESSING

DEAREST HEAVENLY FATHER,

I love these precious women who are joining me here—and I know You love them more. I pray You will speak compassion, gentleness, and grace through the truth written here. Let Your love, Your compassion, fill their hearts. Give them a feeling of Your deep sympathy, a richness of Your joy, an imagination of the light You want to show through them. From this well of Your goodness, open the doors for them to extend Your generous self and words to those who long to know this beauty of being Your precious child.

Give them eyes to see those around them from the cries of their hearts, not just from their outward selves. Send them into conversations and friendships that bring life and healing. Lord, I know that in heaven we will share together the amazing stories of how You used our lives to bring light and restoration to those You brought our way. Bless and bless and bless these precious ones to flourish and to find Your companionship in their lives a living reality. I come to You in the precious name of Jesus.

A M E N .

PART ONE
WELCOME IN



Our home and table can be a sanctuary for life, a holding place for all our ideals, an atmosphere of love, and an energy that engages dreams and inspiration. The profound work of a woman is to bring civility and order out of chaos, to bring beauty, intelligence, and excellence to her community, and to subdue her kingdom of home into a life-giving haven.



A SPACE TO SHARE

There are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea.

HENRY JAMES, *The Portrait of a Lady*

Our life's greatest work is giving ourselves over to the elegance of God's design, the artistry of His hand, and the loveliness of His presence. And so we can let our lives and homes reflect our will to celebrate each day as He has given it to us.

Treasure seeking is a cherished hobby of mine. To me, it is a sort of art form for bringing fun, beauty, and creative thought to my tables for teatimes.

One Saturday afternoon in Oxford found me strolling along the cobbled streets for an irresistible pastry to grace our tea table the next day. I was headed for a neighborhood shop that specializes in buttery, sugary, melt-in-your-mouth cinnamon buns. Just before I reached the bakery, a secondhand shop across the street called me to peek inside. I glanced around at the artifacts piled near the window and had almost concluded that nothing in the shop would entice me when I spotted a small, intricately woven rattan child's chair in the back corner.

What a find! I could just picture my granddaughter feeling proud of having her own grown-up chair to sit in as we



sipped tea together. I wrestled it into my grasp to walk a half-mile home as a surprise for her. When she first received “Lily’s throne,” her tiny feet dangled above the floor. Yet now, at age four, it is a perfect fit.

When I visit Lily’s home, two hours away in another part of England, I tell her, “Let’s let Mama sleep just a bit more. You and I will be friends and talk and tell stories and have a cup of tea every morning. You in your chair and I in mine.” And so we do. We have chattered together and giggled, and she has broken out in wild ballet dancing around the room as we sipped. Now every time I go to visit, she says, “I can’t wait till we can be friends again and have our tea together.”

As artists in our homes, we paint the canvas of our life stories with the colors we most love, the art and photographs and framed quotations we set in the center to discuss, the way we place furniture to create community, and the ways our tables are decorated to say, “Come here and feast and rest a while. Good food, conversation, and friendship are awaiting you. I have prepared a place for us. You are special and I love spending time with you.” I love to love my people well; it brings me much pleasure to plan for ways to delight them, to bring unique touches into my environment that I know will especially please them, cultivating the ambience that will set the stage.

Almost all the time, I leave my tables set to be ready in case anyone comes at any time, so that they can feel I had prepared for



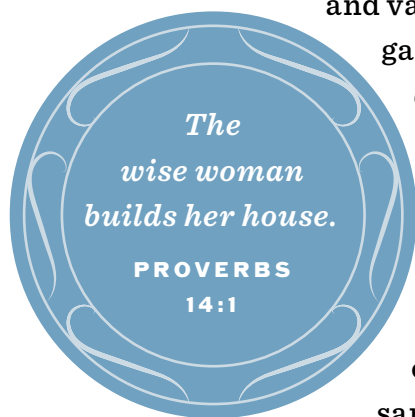
them—that I am so very glad they had come.

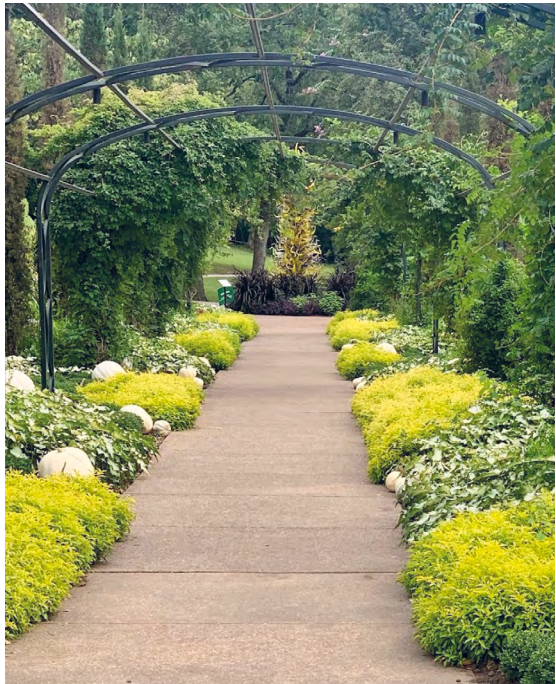
Music is almost always heard humming through the rooms of my home at any time of day someone might arrive. I pick acoustic instrumental music for the backdrop of conversational evenings, upbeat contemporary artists for cooking together and preparing the feast while in the kitchen, Celtic in the winter evenings as the candles are lit and soup and warm homemade bread is piled in baskets with pungent cheese to accompany pots of steaming tea.

As Easter approaches, rabbits have been seen to hop onto my table. In spring and summer, various figurines of birds peek out of many corners of the place settings. Toy knights or superheroes occasionally grace the settings to delight our boy crowd. Around Christmas, a tiny mouse or angel comes to delight. Multicolored

and varied sized vases have been purchased over years at garage sales to hold something natural from the outdoors. Flowers of every sort and color, pine boughs tucked into vases, and wildflowers fresh from the fields surrounding us fill the different corners of our rooms.

Many years ago, I wanted to provide cozy, two-person high teas (more of a meal and pot full of tea). These were accompanied by small finger sandwiches, a fruit soup, salads, chocolates, and tiny cakes made in muffin tins. I scoured the local antique shops and found a real prize of a piece. It was an old, squeaky-wheeled tea trolley with two sides that folded down when not in use. I could set up this movable treasure between two overstuffed chairs in my den and it became an elegant place setting for a quiet, intimate spot. I have rolled this into bedrooms and onto the front porch, and it has drawn together many a twosome. My children





loved it when I celebrated a special 15-minute mama-tea in their rooms with my little candlelit, treat-laden trolley.

As I grew in imagination as an artist in my home, creating *place* became a satisfying work of my life. I owned the fact that I shaped my life according to my personality and preferences. My desire for delight and whimsy was embodied in how I created the moments for intimacy and friendship, and I realized that I was quite free to do it “my way.” There is no one sort of teatime or decor or place where planned mentoring, encouragement sessions must be enacted. All the details are merely the backdrop for the enactment of memories, traditions, love, and legacy. And so, your teatimes will become a unique reflection of *you*—your stories, your delights, and your joys!



CONVERSATION AND CONTEMPLATION

Describe a time when you’ve received extraordinary hospitality. What preparations, words, and actions from your host made you feel welcome?

How can you leave everyone who enters your space with the fragrance, intelligence, and beauty of Christ? What tangible steps can you take to prepare your space for both hospitality and discipleship? How will the presence of Christ be experienced in your home?

