The Jesus Life, Kingdom, and Community: A Year with the Open Table Collective

Cory Hendrickson | August 1, 2026

Introduction:

Recapping the *Turning the Gem* Gatherings from the past year:

- **Bob Cornwall** —Eating with Jesus: Divine Encounters at the Open Eucharistic Table
- **Cory Hendrickson** — 3 Essential Questions for Faith Formation: Identity, Purpose, and Belonging
- **Dr. Craig Mayes** — Working with the Marginalized in NYC
- **Jessie Forster** — Building an Empowered Community to Love our Immigrant Neighbors
- **Daniel Yang** — Lost in Gran Torino: Learning from the Hmong experience for such a time as this
- **Cory Hendrickson** — Quiet & Beautiful: Connecting with God through Wonder
- **Zach Lambert** — Better Ways to Read the Bible
- **Jalen Seawright** — Gratitude for the Struggle
- **Danny Cox** — The Virtue of Responsibility
- **Cory Hendrickson** —Faith that Grows and Changes
- **Tatiana Schmidt** — Creation Care & Consumerism
- **Shalini Bennett** — Navigating Lament
- **Cory Hendrickson** — Promise & Pain: Loving the Church We Cannot Escape
- **Dr. Naomi Walters** — Spiritual Typologies (Part I)
- **Dr. Naomi Walters** — Spiritual Typologies (Part II)
- **LaShaun Phoenix** — The Price of Loving Like Jesus
- **Shenay Shumake** — From Overwhelm to Overflow: Reclaiming Lament as Covenant Speech
- **Jason Miller-Villegas, DMin** — Un-Settling our Faith: Planting Seeds for a Decolonized Discipleship
- **Shannon Schmidt** — Invitation to the Kingdom Life: Discipleship Regarding the Common Good?
- **Field Trip** to St. Peter's Episcopal Church

Table Conversations:

- Did you have a topic, speaker, or conversation that surprised you? Why was that?
- Is there a topic we covered this year that you are still chewing on?
- Which two or three topics felt like they were in conversation with each other?

Highlights:

- Zach Lambert's book resonated most widely
  - "Literal lens" reframing was transformative for several attendees raised in literalist traditions
  - One attendee sent the book to adult children in the Bible Belt before visiting; son read cover to cover
  - Women preaching in scripture: attendees surprised to discover how extensively women preached in the Bible
- Jason Miller Villegas' session on unsettling faith/decolonization also stood out
  - Handled a difficult topic with gentleness while still challenging deeply
  - Connected to colonization's global legacy and mission zeal
- Lashawn Phoenix's testimony on loving like Jesus
  - Centered on her mother's death and an imperfect relationship
  - Praised for honesty, authenticity, and "boots on the ground" approach to unconditional love
- Lament sessions and gratitude seen as connected thread
  - "Grudgingly needed" but deeply valuable

Core Teaching:

Three movements identified through "coding" all sessions:

1. **Jesus Life**: personal formation, individual discipleship, sanctification; becoming Christlike
2. **Jesus Community**: communal transformation, collective discipleship, ekklesia; how we pursue Jesus together
3. **Jesus Kingdom**: societal change, justice, grace, love; "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth"

Three-legged stool: remove any one and the whole structure collapses

- If you solely focus on the Jesus Life: spiritual navel-gazing, personal performance and piety without action (James 2)
- Only focus on the Jesus Community: spiritual country club or doomsday cult: no outward mission, which was a key component of Jesus' mission in the world.
- Only focus on the Jesus Kingdom: social morality unmoored from Christ, individual moral compass without community.