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By Kristin Schell

# The TURQUOISE TABLE

A COUPLE YEARS AGO, I was in a season of holy restlessness. I had a big dream — this vision — of living in a community where neighbors knew and loved each other well. I knew a handful of our neighbors, but for the most part our interaction was limited to friendly waves from the car, brief chats at the grocery store, and our annual Memorial Day block party. The block party is a highlight of the year, but twelve months is a long stretch of time between neighborhood get-togethers.

I felt a tug at my heart to open our doors wide and invite neighbors, friends and even strangers into our lives on a more regular basis. But, as a busy mother with four children and an introverted husband I didn't know how.

When I read these words in the book *A Meal with Jesus* by Tim Chester, I knew God was speaking:

**“Don't start with a big program. Start personally and start in your home. I dare you. I dare you in the name of Jesus Christ. Begin by opening your home for community ... All you have to do is open your home and begin.”**

— FRANCIS SCHAEFFER, theologian and founder of L'Abri Community

At first I hesitated. But, God knew my heart. I longed for more than an annual block party. I wanted real and meaningful relationships with my neighbors. I wanted to know their stories, hear their sorrows and troubles, and celebrate their joys.

So, I took the dare and prayed, “Here I am, God. Give me eyes to see.”

Enter the turquoise table.

In October 2013, prompted by a last-minute party I was hosting, I ordered an unfinished picnic table from Lowe's. I didn't think much of the table when I ordered it online. It was just an ordinary picnic table.

Until I saw it. And, I knew.

The simple wooden picnic table was destined for our front yard. After the party, I painted the table bright turquoise (Sherwin-Williams *Nifty Turquoise*, if you're wondering) and placed it under a magnolia tree, close to the edge of our lively street.

That's when life changed. The very day I put the table out front, someone who need-

ed to get out of the house — a neighbor I'd never met — walked past and stopped to talk. We sat at the table and started a friendship. Next, curious people from across the street stopped by and stayed for a cup of coffee. By week three, both spontaneous and planned gatherings were happening regularly at the turquoise table.

Now a familiar sight, the turquoise table has become a meeting place — like the old village well — for neighbors, friends and even strangers to hang out and do life together. The table spurred a *front yard revival* in our neighborhood.

God had bigger plans. When neighbors from a few blocks over learned about the turquoise table, they wanted one, too. I remember thinking, “This is crazy, God! Am I really supposed to encourage people to put turquoise tables in their front yards?”

God multiplied the hallelujahs of one turquoise table into a movement of front yard people all craving authentic relation-

ships with the people right in front of them. What about you?

**Know your Passions** Who inspires you (this can be someone you know or an historical figure)? What makes you smile? How can you involve your kids? What do you find easy to do? What news stories get you fired up? What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?

**Look for Needs** Who around you is in need? Where do you see a gap? What tugs at your heart when you see it? Who do you see is not being cared for? What can you do in this season of your life? How can you involve your family?

**Make a plan** Write down the next logical step, whatever that first step may be. For example: contact the nursing home or buy a picnic table. Do that step. Write down the next logical step. Do it. When we get overwhelmed, the best thing to do is just stop and think about what is one step I need to make. Then the next step will come. ●

*Kristin Schell is on a mission to love her neighbors. She put a picnic table in her front yard, painted it turquoise, and began inviting neighbors, friends, and even strangers, to hang out and do life together at The Turquoise Table. A gatherer at heart, Kristin brings people together for delicious food and stories at her table and online home kristinschell.com.*