
Pursue Hospitality

Romans 12:13

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Romans 12:11-13; 1 Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:1-2 ESV)

Introduction One of the marks of New Covenant believers was a love for God and love for neighbor that opened hearts and homes to others. In the absence of church buildings, homes were where the church gathered. Worship and fellowship, serving and sharing were intermingled around hearth and home. Savoring God meant sharing and serving with others. Going to church usually meant going to someone's home. Church meant God's people coming into my home. Thus, what is now a subsidiary and optional place of ministry was then the essence and focus of ministry.

Further, homes were where traveling Christians stayed. In Roman days, hotels and inns were often dangerous to one's wallet and one's purity. They were the locales of drunkenness, prostitution and all sorts of licentiousness. Christians didn't go there if it could be avoided. So, Christians were taught to delight in opening their hearts and homes to believers who were traveling on business or ministry. These would not have ordinarily been friends or even people they knew. They were just Christians passing through my town who needed the loving hospitality of the community of Christ.

So hospitality was both the embracing of openness to those who were near to me in my church and the extension of welcome to those who were strangers to me from other places. The author of Hebrews entices and dazzles us with the possibility that our love of strangers and hospitality might open the door to visitors from the Homeland of our heavenly citizenship.

Sadly, our buildings for worship and the relative safety, security and privacy of western inns have moved hospitality from being a central to a peripheral practice in our Christian communities. Hospitality is generally associated with entertaining – it is the privilege of those whose money and possessions allow them to offer a stimulating setting for others to come in to. I want to shape us and stimulate us Biblically for God-pleasing, grace-enabled, love-expressing, home-opening and friendship-developing hospitality.

The Imperative of Hospitality

The Bible elevates hospitality as both a command for all and a characteristic of leadership in the church.

Hospitality is first A PRECEPT. We must show hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9). Peter leaves no room for equivocation. This is what Christians must do. They are to have open hearts and homes to people – not just to the ones they know and are friends with, but also with those who are strangers. The word hospitality literally means, “a lover of strangers”. Since it is an imperative, a command, then is it not reasonable to conclude that not being hospitable is sin?

Hospitality is also A PURSUIT. It is something that we must seek (Romans 12:13) and that we must not neglect (Hebrews 13:1). As a pursuit it must be something we think much about, plan significantly for and passionately seek to do. And it is to be a happy pursuit (1 Peter 4:9) – that is, it is to be done without grumbling. One of our aims as a church is to demonstrate our love for God in practical deeds of love for one another. It is my observation that small love for God tends to lead to closed hearts for others. Grumbling emerges when we prefer ourselves over preferring others. Since it is a pursuit, then we have to give attention to it and not neglect it (Hebrews 13:1). All through Hebrews, neglect of spiritual responsibilities is an evidence of doubt and disobedience arising from hardness of heart and dullness of spirit. So, does your practice of hospitality look like the un-kept, shabby, neglected home down the street?

Hospitality is A PATTERN. An elder must be someone who is characterized by being hospitable. Shepherds must have open hearts and homes to people. The concept of the detached, unapproachable, preacher who is not engaged with people and comes down from his lofty mountain to preach is not Biblical. Biblical shepherd/elders are to be men saturated with the Word, passionate about the glory of God, and smell like sheep. Further, hospitality was a required qualification of widows who were to be supported by the church. It is assumed that widows supported by the church will be the centers of Titus 2 ministry in training the younger and their homes will be hospitality centers for ministry.

So, brothers and sisters, let us pursue hospitality in obedience as a grand privilege and mark out well those among us with open hearts and homes.

The Heart of Hospitality

Hospitality is an outward expression of love for God and love for others. Having been welcomed by God, we now welcome others. Our hearts are open to people. We move towards people in our affections in such a way that we open our homes to people. So, what does a heart of hospitality look like?

- A heart that believes that my home is a part of pursuing the Kingdom of God first. It believes that God’s kingdom is pursued best in the openness of my home where God’s people are invited in and welcomed to. This belief then relieves me of the anxiety of dirty carpets and messy kids and broken dishes and all the cares over my home that closes my door to others.

- A heart that understands that real face to face ministry of love and grace happens in the warmth of homes. Hospitality grows out of soil plowed by Biblical texts pointing to the utter necessity of face-to-face friendship to give grace for growth and holiness.
- A heart that believes that words of love must become acts of love. Hospitality moves from the poise of affections to the performance of actions. It recognizes that I must not only say my love for God and others, but that I must do that love as well.
- A heart that desires to show the love of God through tangible acts of sacrificial love for others. The openness of hospitality involves risk. It requires a certain amount of exposure and a willingness to be misunderstood, used and maybe even rejected. It will cost us. Until it does cost us, it is not sacrifice.
- A heart that wants to really get to know people through initiatives of friendship. I am convinced that the formal meetings of the church do not foster (and in our ministry context, are not designed to foster) friendships. Friendships with other Christians in your church will be fostered around your dining room table, your family room, in your yard. It will be accompanied by the sound of clinking forks, laughing children, games and serious discussions over God, truth and living.
- A heart primarily oriented towards giving, not getting. Hospitality keeps no record of those whom I have invited expecting an invitation in return. It is open to others with no expectation of reciprocation. The greatest hospitality is to open to those in our church who have little opportunity to invite you in return either because they have little money and a small home or other providential obstacles.

So a heart that thrums with hospitality is one that is selfless and sacrificial.

The Barriers to Hospitality

What are the heart barriers to a God-pleasing, house-opening, people-inviting hospitality?

- A heart ruled by the fear of man. Hospitality withers and dies when we believe that we are under the heated stare of others scrutiny. When everything has to be “just right”, then are we not ruled by needing the approval of others?
- A heart ruled by a desire for ease and comfort. We find that the mess of our homes that is the fruit of our laziness or busyness causes us to shrink in dread instead of leaping with anticipation when the doorbell rings. Taking the initiative to invite, prepare and actually engage people in our homes sounds like *work* – and work we just do not want to do and will not do.
- A heart that believes a home of small, humble means cannot be a place of Christ-like ministry. Here is pride functioning like pity and excusing ones self from the joy of giving. If I have a small place, then what about asking singles or seniors over?
- A heart that believes that my home is what I own primarily for my pleasure and not primarily as a stewardship under God. In our culture, this is what I find to be the largest obstacle. Our homes become our castles – carefully walled, deeply moated and quickly retreated into with the drawbridge up and the guards posted. Watch for words in your heart that sound like, “intrusion, place of quiet, retreat” and so on.

- A heart that believes hospitality is only a function of giftedness. In other words, I do not have the gift of hospitality so I do not need to have an open home. Here is what I find in the Scripture – spiritual gifts enable extraordinary exercise of duties required of all. Thus all must give, and there is a gift of giving. All must organize their lives, and there is a gift of administration. All must be hospitable, and there is a gift of hospitality.

So, a heart that struggles with hospitality is one that is self-focused and ungenerous.

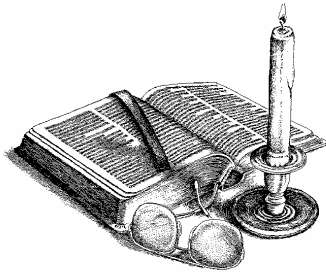
The Practice of Hospitality

Out of our own pondering and planning and purposing for hospitality, let me share some of our own strategies for hospitality.

- Examine your own beliefs and thinking about hospitality. Even as you have read this article, what thoughts have run around in your heart? Write them down. Evaluate them. And if necessary, repent of them, replacing them with truth from the word. Be sure that you can echo this declaration, “Believing that God has welcomed me, I will have an open heart and open home to my brothers and sisters, no matter the risk, no matter the cost, without expectation or demand from them.”
- Examine your own desires, wants and cravings. Are you ruled by ease, comfort, desire for peace, quiet and being away from people? Do you desire authentic friendship, fellowship and accountability? Do you want people in your home? Do you delight in having guests and speakers and missionaries in your home? What about singles and seniors? What about people with 5 kids?
- When you are making choices about your house, choose a home in which you can have room for people to come in. If the treasures of your house or the treasures in your house hinder you from hospitality, then change it. Certainly, anytime you are considering buying or remodeling your home, ask, “How does this house or change help or hinder hospitality?”
- Set aside time each month or possibly, each week, as an “invite others over” night. Don’t let other things interfere with this. Set aside money in your budget to provide a simple dessert, meal or whatever you can to facilitate fellowship.
- Seek out those who seem to be alone to invite them into your home. Have teens, singles and seniors over. Look to those who are struggling financially. Look to the newcomers to the Chapel. Have eyes that see others as opportunities for friendship and fellowship. Take the initiative with people you don’t know. The test of hospitality is not primarily what you do with the people you know, but the people you don’t know.
- Teach your children to prize having others over and to be good hosts. Teach them how to behave when they are guests on other’s homes. And as a parent, do not allow the focus on your children to so dominate the horizon of your life that ministry for others and hospitality to other is eclipsed.

- Be eager and ready to open your home to those who need a place to stay – people in transition, guests, missionaries and speakers. Know how to both provide company to them and how to give them quiet for reflection, rest or preparation for ministry.
- Just as a practical word – keep your house in a certain amount of order so that preparation for hospitality does not become a daunting and massively time consuming task.
- Think about this a lot!

Brothers and sisters, it is possible in the loving work of hospitality, you may entertain strangers from Heaven's home. But most importantly, you will show the love of God and encourage and enable the good of others.



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Requests for tapes or questions about this message may be directed to the church office at (937) 885-2143 or e-mail. Russ Kennedy uses the *English Standard Version* in his preaching and teaching.

The Imperative of Hospitality

The Heart of Hospitality

The Barriers to Hospitality

The Practice of Hospitality

Personal Reflection and Application

- How does my understanding of this text affect my worship and my walk?