

LIFE with Jesus on Mission

Hospitality

“Practice hospitality,” Romans 12:13

INTRODUCTION

The first time Jesus meets two of his disciples, he invites them to come with him to his lodgings. John the Baptist points Jesus out to them, and they begin to follow him at a little distance.

Jesus turns to them, “What do you want?” he asks them.

“Rabbi, where are you staying?” they ask.

He replies, “Come and see.”

John finishes the story with this explanation: “It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day,” (John 1:38-39).

Can you imagine hanging out with Jesus in his rooms?

Jesus creates space for these men who had been strangers to become friends: he offers them hospitality.¹ This is an intimate expression of his broader mission. He comes from the Father to offer us hospitality by inviting us home—to make a way for us to share his relationship with his Father. We see him offering the same hospitality after his resurrection. Peter had grievously denied him, but Jesus calls Peter over and makes him breakfast without a word of reproach: “Now come and have some breakfast!” he says, (John 21:12).

And he wants his disciples to do the same—we are to have glad and generous hearts—and to make space in our lives for our brothers and sisters in his family, for our neighbors and acquaintances, for strangers he places unexpectedly in our paths, for immigrants, refugees, and other vulnerable people, and for those who can never repay us.

He says he will reward those who see him in the face of a stranger and invite him or her in (Matthew 25:38-40). He also commands us to invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” to our dinner parties (Luke 14:13). His followers understood the message. The writer of Hebrews says, “Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!” (Hebrews 13:2). Peter admonished his church to “show hospitality to one another without grumbling,” (1 Peter 4:8). And Paul says, “Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality...Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position,” (Romans 12:13).

As followers of Jesus, we show the world what he and his kingdom are like through the practice of hospitality.

THE PRACTICE

“Hospitality creates a safe, open space where a friend or stranger can enter and experience the welcoming spirit of Christ in another,” Adele Calhoun.

¹ This comes from Henri Nouwen’s definition of hospitality, found in his book, *Reaching Out*.

This is a list of suggestions to consider as you attempt to stretch yourself in the practice of hospitality. Before you read through them, please take a moment to ask Jesus to show you how he is inviting you to grow in hospitality. Ask him to highlight one or two of these ideas. Don't feel you need to try them all at once. Choose one or two that stand out to you and remain open and prayerful about the others.

- Show up a few minutes early to church or to a public event and look around for someone who might be encouraged by talking with a friendly person.
- Stop by the office of someone at work simply to ask about their life and listen to them.
- Is there someone new or unconnected at your work, church, or school that you could invite over for dinner?
- Consider inviting someone new to lunch after church on a Sunday morning.
- Do you have a group of friends that someone else might like to be invited to join?
- Is there someone new to our country in your neighborhood, school, or community? How could you show them hospitality? (Bring a plate of cookies? Invite them for dinner?)
- Have you ever had a Christmas open house and invited your neighbors?
- Who could you invite to dinner who could never return the favor?
- Try putting a fire pit in your driveway on Halloween and inviting the neighbors to join you for hot chocolate.
- Consider volunteering with R.O.P. or Open Door ministries: <https://greenwoodcc.com/serve/>
- Consider serving with Family Promise as Greenwood shows hospitality to families without homes: <https://greenwoodcc.com/serve/>
- On a holiday, consider inviting someone not in your family who might otherwise be alone that day.
- "Develop the practice of praying for the people you invite to your home. Pray for them as you invite them. Pray for them the day they come. Pray for them as they leave your driveway," Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*.
- Be creative! The possibilities are endless.

For additional reflection, please see this devotion on Luke 9:10-17: [The Hospitality of Jesus](#).

HELPFUL VERSES

"I see Jesus in every human being. I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus, I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene; I must wash him and tend to him. I serve because I love Jesus," Mother Teresa.

"Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines," Henri Nouwen.

"All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me,' (Matthew 25:35)," St. Benedict.

"One would almost think that Luke 14:12-14 was not considered part of God's word, nor has any part of Jesus' teaching been more neglected by his own people. I do not think it is unlawful to entertain our friends; but if these words do not teach us that it is in some respects our duty to give a *preference* to the poor, I am at a loss to understand them," John Newton.

INTERESTING QUOTES

“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous,” Luke 14:12-14.

“Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited,” Romans 12:13-16.

“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!” Hebrews 13:2.

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me...as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me,” Matthew 25:35, 40.

“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling,” 1 Peter 4:9.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before you try this practice:

1. Go around your group, taking turns reading out loud the scriptures and quotes above. Which ones stand out to you the most? Why do you think this is?
2. When have you experienced the hospitality of Jesus through another person? What was the impact upon you? What specifically did the other person do to make you feel welcome?
3. What are your current practices of hospitality? What do you enjoy about them? What do you find difficult about hospitality?
4. How do you typically interact with strangers?
5. How do you sense the Lord inviting you to practice hospitality?
6. Pray together, inviting the Lord to place people in your path who need to experience the hospitality of Jesus.

After you have tried this practice:

1. What was your experience with the devotion? What did you see in Jesus as he practiced hospitality?
2. What was your experience with the practice of hospitality? What did you find life-giving? What did you find challenging?
3. Is there something you could do differently going forward to make showing hospitality less stressful or difficult? (Pray about your shyness? Order food to go? Clean your home less or more? Have items on hand?)
4. Who has the Lord laid on your heart who needs to experience the hospitality of Jesus?