

Practice of Hospitality



Bible Passages

Deut 10:17-19; 24:17-22; Isaiah 58:7

Luke 10:1-11; 38-42

Eph 4:28; 1John 3:16-18

Hebrews 13:1-3; 1 Peter 4:9; Romans 12:13; 1 Tim 3:2

Hospitality starts with God

- Hospitality it is rooted in God's hospitality – “the God who made and sustains us wishes to welcome everyone into his household through Jesus Christ” consequently, hospitality goes far beyond the act of entertaining to become an all-encompassing approach to Christian life in general and to relationships in particular.¹
- Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus eating with people, ignoring social norms, receiving as well as giving hospitality. He told stories of banquets with surprising hospitality and said this is what the Kingdom of God was about. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we celebrate a meal with the Lord as the host, the one who invites us to his table, and to benefit from his life.
- Acceptance is the key to hospitality, as it portrays the welcoming attitude of our God who in so doing never compromised his character.¹

The Nature of Hospitality

“the act or practice of being hospitable; the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers with liberality and good will”

- When we look at the OT from a social perspective, through hospitality God created a net and network of human interdependence designed to secure the basic necessities of those who were at some kind of disadvantage, especially the poor and landless.¹
- Having sent out the 72 to go to villages to talk the Gospel, encouraging them to stay in the homes of the locals, Jesus is invited to Mary and Martha's house. Here Jesus seemed more bothered about Martha spending time with the guest was more important than flawless entertaining!
- ‘Entertainment’ could represent a superficial hospitality; it is possible to entertain without being hospitable.¹
- In Celtic monasteries, hospitality was of the highest importance. In fact, even if the monastery was in the middle of a fast, and a guest turned up. A fantastic meal would be laid out for them, and the Abbot would break fast in order to eat with the guests.
- German word for hospitality is *Gastfreundschaft* which means “friendship for the guest”. Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.²
- Hospitality has two aspects: “receptivity” and “confrontation”. Real honest receptivity means inviting the stranger into our world on his or her terms, not on ours ... The other side, equally important, is confrontation. To be receptive to the stranger in no way implies that we have to become neutral ‘nobodies’. Real receptivity asks for confrontation because space can only be a welcoming space when there are clear boundaries, and boundaries are limits between which we define our own position ... When we want to be really hospitable we not only have to receive strangers but also confront them by an unambiguous presence, not hiding ourselves behind neutrality but showing our ideas, opinions and life style clearly and distinctly. No real dialogue is possible between somebody and nobody.²
- Receptivity without confrontation leads to a bland neutrality that serves nobody. Confrontation without receptivity leads to an oppressive aggression which hurts everybody²

- Someone who is filled with ideas, concepts, opinions and convictions cannot be a good host. There is no inner space to listen, no openness to discover the gift of the other. It is not difficult to see how those ‘who know it all’ can kill a conversation and prevent an interchange of ideas. [also] When our heart is filled with prejudices, worries, jealousies, there is little room for a stranger. In a fearful environment it is not easy to keep our heart open to the wide range of human experiences.²

Hospitality as a Lifestyle

- I will often be able to serve another simply as an act of love and righteousness, without regard to how it may enhance my abilities to follow Christ. There certainly is nothing wrong with that, and it may, incidentally, strengthen me spiritually as well. But I may also serve another to train myself away from arrogance, possessiveness, envy, resentment or covetousness. In that case, my service is undertaken as a discipline for the spiritual life.³
- “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” [1 Peter 4:9]. “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” [Rom 12:13]; “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” [Heb 13:2]
- A Story of Hospitality:⁴

“we intentionally save a few jobs – setting the tables, tossing the salad, getting plates out – until people arrive. These things are more easily done with help, and it’s another way to let people know they are part of the ‘family’ and they have something to contribute ... I look at all these people sharing stories, laughing, passing the salad, serving each other and I see a beautiful act of mutual hospitality ... Something special happens when we eat together, and to me it feels like what Jesus did. hospitality is often synonymous with food, but we work to ensure that our hospitality is not limited to meals. It’s really about involvement in each other’s lives and the act of welcoming the stranger. The real point of this brand of hospitality is the spiritual formation that takes place when we share the rhythm of regular life with one another ... Sitting and eating in someone’s house brings us closer to our true selves and to the place where spiritual formation accelerates ... At the same time hospitality is about welcoming the outsider, the needy, and those from whom we are disconnected. Communal meals force people to eat with those they may not care for... it’s hard to maintain the separated individualistic mentality of isolation when you’re sharing a meal ... To help us enter one another’s lives in deeper ways, we invite members of our community to share their stories [real, honest, variable stuff happening in their lives] on a regular basis – at a meal, through email, on Sunday[s]. This invitation is another way in which spiritual formation happens through hospitality ... When someone enters your home, there is a mandated transparency. When you open your door and offer your chair, you are inviting another person into your life in ways that transcend mere acquaintance and cultural conformability. ...we are seeking the kind of hospitality that says: “you are welcome in my life; there is little I am trying to hide here”. In a way it is homecoming.”

Hospitality as Mission

- Hospitality offers a way to reach out to a society suffering the effects of disintegrated families, loneliness and alienation. Although many, we might even say most, strangers in this world become easily the victim of a fearful hostility, it is possible for men and women and obligatory for Christians to offer an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become our fellow human beings.^{1&2}
- Christian hospitality is also a form of worship – whether as a private act or a corporate effort – when it is a heartfelt response to god, the imitation of his welcoming character, the reflection of a restored *imago Dei*, the mark of kingdom values and priorities...as hospitality points to God, it becomes a way of honouring God.¹

Questions to consider

- What does it mean to be a hospitable church community?
- In what ways do you bring hospitality to the place where you are?
- How do you feel about strangers?
- How can you practice hospitality more effectively?
- Who are you generally hospitable to? In what ways are you hospitable to the “disconnected”?

1 Encyclopaedia of Everyday Christianity; 2 Reaching Out – Henri Nouwen; 3 Spirit of the Disciplines – Dallas Willard; 4 Reimagining Spiritual Formation – Doug Pagitt