

We learned in this week's sermon of the need for hospitality. The problem is, all of us could surely point to examples when we received hospitality done well as well as other times when it was done poorly. There are many practical considerations and skills that go into making our efforts toward hospitality communicate what we wish. Some of the skills can be picked up and practiced by watching cooking and hosting shows and reading books such as Rosaria Butterfield's "The Gospel Comes with a House Key," which largely inspired the following devotions. Other skills only come through practice and experience. Don't let this be a barrier to your practice of hospitality, as the most important component is having the right heart.

Day 1

Trust

Psalm 112:6-7 is one of several psalms that speak to the need for trust in God. In fact, it is good to meditate on the whole Psalm in regards to our needs and efforts toward being hospitable. The psalm speaks to the idea that the righteous have great wealth in their house. You might look at this idea and feel immediately that you should be counted among the unrighteous, because when you look at your house you do not see great wealth. But is this true? When the psalmist writes of wealth, what is he talking about? Gold or silver, as well as fine and extravagant food could be what he is referring to, but it could also be something spiritual. In Acts 3:1-6 a man born lame asks Peter and John for some money. Peter's response is instructive. Do you have spiritual riches to share with someone? When we see rich and famous people in Hollywood complaining of feeling empty, and tragically sometimes ending their own lives, do we think that a little more money was what they were missing, or that even some kind of physical healing would have solved all of their problems? What are we all looking for? We desire, every one of us, to live lives of meaning and purpose. We desire to be loved and to feel that we have value. Do we trust that God has given us something of value to share? Do we trust him to provide not only love and meaning, but food and time as well? Take some time today to make a list of the riches that God has provided you, and think about who you might share this bounty with.

Day 2

Kingdom

God has taken us out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We were once far away from God, but now we have been brought near. The veil of separation between God and us has been torn in two (Exodus 26:31-33; Matthew 27:45-54). Is there evidence of a change of kingdoms in your house? In Ephesians 4:22-24 Paul writes of putting off the old self and putting on the new self. How much blessing we have to offer those we invite into our hospitality is largely dependent on the extent to which this transformation has progressed. In the presence of God is all glory and blessing, which was why God needed to remove the veil between him and us. When we put on the new self, we are putting on something which resembles, even radiates, Christ Jesus. Therefore, hospitality is an invitation to the life of God. The bible says that we are ambassadors and that God is making his appeal through us. If our lives are being transformed by him, those we invite into our hospitality get a small and imperfect taste of what life in God's kingdom is like. If we are in God's kingdom, the invitation to our hospitality is like an invitation to an evening in the kingdom. This might scare us from inviting people into our homes as we see our own sin and shortcomings, but do not fear. The standard is not perfection, and time is not the issue. Sometimes new Christians have put on the new self to a degree that older Christians have not. Begin where you are, but be encouraged toward greater transformation of your life knowing that it makes a difference that goes well beyond you to the people that God is calling to himself.

Day 3

Agenda

One of the issues that separates good hospitality from bad hospitality is agendas. What is your agenda as you invite people into your home? Your agenda will not remain secret but will be communicated in many small ways throughout your time with a guest. We all know this is true, as all of us have experienced bad hospitality that was ruined by agendas. What are some of the agendas that can ruin hospitality? There are many, but let's look at a few. First, the desire to be paid back is a destructive agenda that is addressed in Luke 6:35. When we give it should be a way of glorifying God, not a way for us to keep score and make sure we get as much as we give. Second, we should not engage in hospitality to seem "righteous" or "spiritual." Matthew 6:1 warns us not to do good works from false motives. The problem is that while we think our motives are hidden deep in our hearts, they are, in fact, written on everything we do. Third, don't choose the recipients of your hospitality based on who you think would be an asset to God's kingdom or the church, or even your life. Why? Because we are terrible judges of these things. When Israel wanted a king, they wanted a guy like Saul while God chose David, telling the people that he judges the heart. Sometimes we need to be reminded of what God did with twelve of the most unremarkable people in history. Finally, don't make someone your project. Instead, love them.

Day 4

Boundaries

Hospitality to those inside the church as well as outside the church needs to be part of all our lives. 1 Peter 4:7-11 urges us to practice hospitality as we practice our spiritual gifts. It does not say to practice hospitality only if we have the gift, but to practice it and to do it without grumbling. We must recognize that all the commands of God are predicated on his gifting. When Peter got out of the boat to walk on the water (Matthew 14:22-33) he did so because Jesus commanded him to do it. I often wondered why Peter would ask Jesus to command him, but recently I heard a Pastor point out in a sermon that when God commands you to do something he also equips you to do it. That is the nature of a loving God. So, we can be sure that God has equipped us for hospitality. That does not mean there are no limits. It may not be wise to invite your entire city over to your house for dinner every night this week. We are called to be wise and to be good stewards of what God has given us. We are to be like God and equip people for the task we have given them. It is unfair to ask of our families something we have not equipped them for, and we also should understand that God gives us limits for our good. What kind and how much hospitality has God equipped you for? He has surely called you to be hospitable, it is up to you to use wisdom and discernment in finding the limits and boundaries of this calling.

Day 5

Love

The call to hospitality is, among other things, a call to love people more than we love the things of this world. It is a call to love people more than comfort, more than free time and more than money. The inordinate love of any of these things will be a barrier to practicing hospitality. At one point in our ministry our old second-hand furniture had worn out and it was time to purchase new, store-bought furniture for the first time in our marriage. At the time, we were hosting high school and college aged students at our home on a weekly basis and had experienced several "accidents" with food, drink, and damage as a result. When we unwrapped our new furniture in our home, we knew at that moment it was the last time it would look like it did. We had to let go of the desire to keep it pristine. 1 John 2:15-

17 exhorts us to rid ourselves of the love of the world and worldly things because all these things pass away. A couple of weeks ago I noticed a big hole in our couch cushion. Luckily it has a bottom side. But soon our couch will pass away. How foolish it would be to not engage in hospitality over such a short-lived thing like furniture. Is there anything in your life that you love more than people that is keeping you from engaging in hospitality? What can you do to put your priorities right? What will a life of hospitality look like for you? Spend some time praying this week about how you might be more hospitable.