

Show loving hospitality

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 February 2024

Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Father, as we come together as your gathered people today, we pray once again that we would be eager to hear your word.

May your word refresh us and nourish us, convict us and challenge us. And may we have continued confidence in you to strengthen us so that we would do what you want us to do and be your agent of blessing in this world.

Amen. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now in this series, we've been talking about how we can glorify God. And so far we've looked at how we should plan, what we should pursue, how we should use our money, how we should relate to the world.

And imagine if you didn't know what we're going to cover next. You probably would think that we might look at something like our prayer life or how we should worship God at work.

Now those are certainly worthy topics to look at. But I wonder if you would have thought of the subject of today's sermon, showing loving hospitality.

[1 : 1 0] It certainly wasn't on my radar initially. It's not exactly at the top of our list when we think about ways in which we can glorify God. And yet it is actually all over scripture.

The New Testament commands it. There is the verse from today's Bible reading, of course, Hebrews 13 verse 2. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

There is Romans 12 verse 13. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

There is 1 Peter 4 verse 9. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

In Acts 28 verse 7, Paul himself is welcomed into the home of Publius, the chief official of the island of Malta, who showed him generous hospitality.

In Colossians 4 verse 10, Paul reminds his readers that if Mark should come to them, show him hospitality. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 both mentioned being hospitable as one of the criteria for a church elder.

[2 : 2 6] And of course, we haven't even looked at the Old Testament yet, where there are many stories of hospitality. Rahab offered protection and lodging for the Israelite spies in Joshua 2.

Abigail provided hospitality for David and his men in 1 Samuel 25, while they were still on the run. And that is just two of several stories.

So there is a high value on hospitality in the scriptures. But let's pause here and consider.

How might that make you feel? How do you feel if called upon to show hospitality? Now, I suspect different ones among us would react differently.

If you are someone who likes cooking and you are pretty good at it. If you are someone who enjoys conversation and you are good at making conversation with a wide variety of people.

[3 : 2 9] If you are someone who currently has a lot of emotional capacity, you might react differently than someone who knows they are not a good cook.

That's me. Someone who knows that they are not the most amazing conversationalist in the world.

That's me too. Someone who is an introvert, which means crowds can be exhausting.

Well, that's me too. And maybe that is some of you. So some of us might feel dread upon hearing this command. You know, God, is it okay if this is just for a few of your disciples and not for all of us?

But God says, this is part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian. But don't run away screaming just yet, especially if you are an introvert.

Because let us get clear on what hospitality actually is, biblically speaking. Now today we tend to think of hospitality as keeping people entertained.

[4 : 39] We have things like the hospitality industry, with its reception desks and room service and five-star ratings open to all with cash and credit cards.

We talk about corporate hospitality when companies entertain their clients in order to promote their business or do some networking. Perhaps at church, we think of those who pour out your coffee with a smile.

And that is all well and good, and I'm sure you wouldn't want the person serving your coffee later on today to be grumpy. But is that what we are actually talking about?

You see, what is hospitality, biblically speaking? Let's turn to the passage we've just heard read, Hebrews 13, to get an idea.

You would know already that the hospitality command is in verse 2. But what does that look like? Just take a look at verse 3.

[5 : 44] Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

At that time, prisons did not have their own canteens or proper lodging facilities. The care and nurture of prisoners were entirely the responsibility of friends and family.

And if you didn't have anyone willing and able to support you while in prison, it often meant you could die from starvation or infection from bad hygiene.

And so the early Christians would bring in meals to these prisoners. Indeed, they not only brought in physical food, but spiritual food, because they would also come to read the Bible and perhaps sometimes even expound them.

One commentator says this on the screen, the Christians were eager to extend to the prison the communal experiences of the house church gathered around the dinner table.

[6 : 54] This suggests that the early church regarded a ministry to Christian brothers in prison as a corollary of the responsibility to practice hospitality. In short, they saw it as a way of life beyond just having a friend over to come and let up.

And so you can see that this is beginning to paint quite a different picture of hospitality. It is really about committing yourself to someone else who has no place and no protection with the intention of refreshing them.

If modern hospitality is a pleasant optional extra, biblical hospitality can literally be a matter of life and death.

And that's why the early Christians practiced hospitality, even if it comes at a cost. There are stories from the second century of certain Christian leaders deciding to sleep in the same cell as the prisoner and share the same living conditions as them to show their solidarity.

That is the spirit of biblical hospitality. And when we begin to see it in this light, it is no longer surprising to see that the word hospitality and the word hospital share a common etymology.

[8 : 30] That is, both come from the same Latin word, hospice, which means guests or hosts. And the word hospital originally meant what we would call a hostel, a place where weary travellers could rest before pressing on with their journey.

It is only later that it evolved in its usage to mean what we mean today, an institution for sick or wounded people. Indeed, the monasteries of the Middle Ages were exactly that.

A hostel for weary pilgrims to have a place to lay their head for the night and a hospital for the sick. And what this tells us is that the end goal of hospitality is really the same as the end goal of the hospital.

Care and healing. But here is the difference. you don't need to spend six years in medical school to do hospitality.

All you need to have is a willingness to open your home and your life and to show others how an ordinary person loves and follows Jesus.

[9 : 55] And hospitality, without a doubt, is shown to other Christians. Verse 1 makes that clear. Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.

The ESV says, let brotherly love continue. Let it persist. Let it endure. That's the idea. Biblical hospitality is not a one-off.

Back then, believers would often open their homes regularly so that the church could meet there. They didn't have nice buildings like this. We see that, for example, in Romans 16, verse 3 to 5, where Priscilla and Aquila open their home precisely for such a purpose.

So, hospitality is for our brothers and sisters. But, it is not just for those we know.

For us today, we tend to be most hospitable to our good friends or maybe family from out of town. But, in the Bible, biblical hospitality is especially for those we don't know.

[11:10] Let me say that again. Biblical hospitality is especially for those we don't know. The word hospitality in Greek is phyloxenia.

It is actually a compound word, meaning it is two words joined together. The first word, phylo, means love. So, that's why the city of Philadelphia in the United States is known as the city of brotherly love.

Because the phylo in Philadelphia is love. And the second word is xenos, which means stranger, which is also where we get the word xenophobia, meaning fear of strangers.

But here we don't have xenophobia, but phyloxenia, love of strangers, love of people who are not your brothers, love of people who are not like you, love of people you don't know.

In the book of Acts, the Christians often provided hospitality to traveling missionaries they did not yet know. And it wasn't just to make them feel at home, but to make sure their gospel ministry could continue.

[12:39] After all, back then, there were no holiday inns, and because people didn't really move all that much, unlike today, that means if you were going somewhere to a different city, you probably had no friends that you knew to stay with.

So you had to depend on the kindness of a stranger. I'm told that you sometimes have to wait at the city gate, or perhaps at a well just outside the city, you know, you can see that in the Old Testament sometimes, and hope that someone would invite you in before a bandit comes and finds you.

And so you definitely hope that phyloxenia is being practiced. So, hospitality is not just for those we know, but those we don't know.

Now, in an age where we do have holiday inns, what does that now look like? Well, we all still have strangers in our lives today, don't we?

We don't know everyone. I'm 100% sure that no one in this hall today knows everyone else in this hall.

[13:55] So, we can still use our homes to get to know people we don't already know. Someone who is still relatively new at church, a colleague whom we only have a passing familiarity with.

And we can especially look out for those who simply do not have a place to belong. Now, on occasion, that's someone who literally cannot find a place.

Refugees, for instance. But it could also be relational. It could be that teenager who struggles to find a friend, that international student who is in a different culture, that widow who is a little lonely.

Now, these are the people to whom we can show hospitality too. It doesn't require us to know how to cook incredible food or plan up lots of activities.

There is no Bible verse saying that. It could simply be, hey, shall we go have a drink? I just want to get to know you. hospitality, biblically defined, is simply about giving a welcome and helping people know they are valued, that there is a place for them.

[15:19] It aims to help people feel cared for so that they might know the care of Jesus. And so, to paraphrase another scholar, when a stranger becomes a guest and in a safe, welcoming space, that guest is subsequently turned into a friend, you have shown hospitality.

Or listen to how Kim Keller puts it, hospitality is essentially treating others as family. It incorporates newcomers into household, common daily activities, such as eating a meal, sharing a cup of coffee, or painting a room.

It treats peers as brothers, sisters, and cousins. It treats older people as fathers, mothers, aunts, and uncles. It treats children as sons, daughters, nieces, and nephews.

In the past, I've been invited into homes where families still went about their daily routines, such as bath time for kids, or the general cleaning of a room.

And I've been invited to share in those routines, such as reading bedtime stories to those very same kids. And it had the effect of not making me feel like an outsider, but as part of the family because I am not being invited into a break from their real lives.

[16:58] Rather, I am being invited into their very real lives. And we try now, Janine and I, to do the same for others, which is why sometimes during home fellowship group, if a person comes early, they're more than welcome to read bedtime stories to my kids and participate in our everyday routines.

And I hope that way, they would, in just a very tiny way, feel a bit more part of our home as well. But what prevents us from being hospitable?

After all, we all know it's nowhere near as easy as it sounds. And I think we can identify four reasons why. Number one, it's messy.

It's messy. Even the early church knew that. We can sometimes romanticize the early church as if everyone got on well together and were always happy with one another.

But the New Testament refuses to shield us from that reality. Sometimes, hospitality or the attempt at it exposed the tensions and inequalities in the church.

[18 : 09] Think of 1 Corinthians 11, verse 17 to 34. We know the part about the Lord's Supper. We just read that part earlier. But do you know the larger context?

Actually, it wasn't pretty. The Corinthian Christians were supposed to be sharing food together. But in practice, the rich were actually eating all the food first or deciding that they would eat separately. What was meant to be a sign of hospitality was anything but. Or take Galatians 2, verse 11 to 14, where Paul gets really angry with Peter because he's found out that Peter has decided to stop eating at the same table as the Gentiles because, well, they're Gentiles.

It was messy. It was risky. And Peter decided it would be safer relationally and even theologically just to eat with Jews just like him.

Hospitality is scary. And we know that. And so, that stops us. We say, hey, what if that person just wants to take advantage of my generosity?

[19 : 31] What if that person disturbs my routines and threatens the way that I like to do things? And we let those what-ifs stop us. Number two, it's costly.

And I'm not just talking about money. It's costly because what is home for a lot of us? It is our castle.

It is a private space that is safe. Once we go home and lock the door, we can breathe easy and feel like we can chill out. We want to relax and recharge.

But to commit to ongoing hospitality seems to put that under threat. And if we probe further, it's not simply because we want rest and relaxation. There is nothing wrong with that in itself.

But what we secretly idolize is actually comfort and convenience. A prioritizing of the self without the need to care about others.

[20 : 34] And the command to be hospitable threatens all that. And then number three, we're busy. That's another factor that often hinders any good intention to be hospitable.

that's because we so often fill our lives with work appointments and school clubs and extracurricular activities and hobbies. And so we build in no margin to be hospitable.

And sometimes even as Christians, we buy into the lie that the more busy we are, the more valuable we must be. Because hey, if I'm busy, I must be productive.

And if I'm productive, that must mean I'm important or I'm useful. So we keep ourselves busy. But the truth is, hospitality requires intentionality.

It requires planning. It requires your time. You probably have to schedule it in, rather than hoping that it will happen on its own.

[21 : 42] And if we just let our lives be dictated by the rhythms of busyness, hospitality will not happen. And finally, number four, we feel our inadequacy.

We don't do hospitality because we feel that everything must be perfect. And if it isn't, we feel vulnerable. We feel like we've just exposed our weaknesses for all to see.

There was once a little girl observing her mother getting stressed trying to prepare her house for guests. And she said, Mommy, why are you trying to make the house look as if children don't live here?

We are worried that if our homes are not perfect, that would make everyone think that we're a failure. We imagine all sorts of scenarios. Or what if I run out of drinks or things to say?

What would the other person think? it feels safer not to be hospitable. And so given all these barriers, why then should we be hospitable?

[22 : 54] In ancient and perhaps even modern times, people sometimes were hospitable because that way you might be able to get something in return from your visitors down the line.

time. But the scriptures give us a deeper basis for hospitality. And today I want to show you two motivations. One comes from Hebrews 13 itself, whereas the other comes from the broad storyline of scripture.

So let me start in reverse from the broad storyline of scripture first. Why can we be hospitable? Firstly, because all biblical and Christian hospitality flows from the divine hospitality of God himself. You see, all throughout the Old Testament, God has always welcomed us. I'm sure we are all familiar with God being described as the Lord God Almighty or the Lord of hosts or even the Ancient of Days.

But did you know that our God is also the divine host who nourishes and refreshes his people? [24 : 16] In Exodus, he provides manna and quail in the wilderness. In Leviticus 25 verse 23, he is the owner of the land who grants it to Israel as his guests.

in Psalm 23, yes, he is the shepherd, but did you know what else he is? Let me read to you the last two verses of Psalm 23 on the screen.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. This is no longer just the language of shepherding.

It is the language of the host who prepares a table for us, who allows us to take lodging in his house permanently.

[25 : 20] And in the Old Testament, when God promises that he will save his people and he will bring in his kingdom in full, how does he envision it to be? He thinks of it as hosting a feast for us.

Here is Isaiah 25 verse 6 to 8 on the screen. On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain, he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations, he will swallow up death forever, the sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces, he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth the Lord has spoken.

My friends, this is our God, one who has always shown divine hospitality and intends to do so for all eternity.

and you might say, so what? But remember also who we are. We were never the perfect guests.

[26 : 35] Rather, we are like those Airbnb tenants from hell who come into someone's home and completely trash it. We are like those hotel guests who stain the bed, take away the mini fridge, leave the bathroom covered in dirty diapers, and then dare to leave a long list of complaints in our Google review.

We were never good guests. Rather, Ephesians 2 reminds us that we are those on the outside, those deservedly blacklisted from being anywhere near God.

But look at what God does. He sends Jesus, who in the Gospels uses the title, the Son of Man, to refer to himself.

And in Luke's Gospel, we are told two things about the Son of Man. Now, here is one of them. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.

You know this already. I read it earlier in the service. That's his mission. That's what Jesus came to do. He came looking for those who grumbled against him.

[27 : 52] But, here is the other thing Luke's Gospel tells us. He didn't just say, the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. Luke also says, the Son of Man came eating and drinking.

Do you see? how is Jesus going to about accomplishing his mission? Well, a big part of it is by sharing meals with strangers, sinners, and outsiders.

He is bringing the welcome of God into the lives of the blacklisted. Think of Luke 5, where he eats with tax collectors. As he eats with them, he creates a space in which at least one of them, Levi, or Matthew, as we know him, experiences the saving presence of God, and is transformed from a stranger to a friend of God.

Think of Luke 14, which we'll go through in a few months' time, whereby Jesus invites all the wrong kind of people to sit at God's table. Think especially of Zacchaeus in Luke 19, where Jesus transforms him from being an outsider, an enemy of the people of God, into someone who belongs to the family of Abraham, that's what Jesus says, but even more amazingly, think about this, he turns him into someone who can host Jesus.

I must stay at your house today, Zacchaeus, Jesus says. Let me be your guest, be my host. and that is why we show hospitality, because every time we do so, we are embodying the gospel story.

[29 : 43] We are saying, Jesus has so impacted my life, he has turned me from a blacklisted outsider into someone who can even host God, and therefore I can now host those whom God has

created and loves.

We are simply doing what God has done for us. As Paul says in Romans 15 verse 7, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

Did you catch that? Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you. When we do that, people are no longer just hearing the gospel, they are experiencing the gospel.

They are getting a taste of the gospel firsthand. Jesus, by mixing around with lepers and prostitutes and tax collectors, the people whom no one else wanted to know, was doing nothing less than showing the very heart of God for those who were far away from him.

and when we invite someone who seems far away from God into our homes and into our lives, we are essentially saying to them, God loves you and he hasn't given up on you.

[31 : 10] Is that costly? Yes. But we can do it because we know our Lord himself counted the cost. Will we feel inadequate?

Yes, probably. I know I will. But if we know this is the will of God, we can be confident that he is in it with us, no matter how clumsy we are or how messy it gets.

And we will say we want to do this no matter how busy we get. So we practice hospitality simply because it is an outflow of the gospel we say we believe.

But there is a second reason and it comes from Hebrews 13 itself. Look again at verse 2 with me. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers.

Why? For by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Now, that is an interesting reason, isn't it?

[32 : 19] It's perhaps not what we expected. What's the writer getting at? The writer is alluding to a famous story in Genesis 18 where Abraham hosted three individuals.

Abraham thought they were human beings, but we know they are angels. In fact, one of them might even have been God himself. And through their visit, he learns of God's promise of a long awaited for son, Isaac.

And so what happens here is that as Abraham and Sarah show hospitality, they actually receive an unexpected blessing. And here is the point.

We don't really know the people whom we are welcoming into our midst. Often we think we do. We have all sorts of preconceived ideas. But God says, don't be surprised if you are surprised.

Because they might surprise you with their stories, which bring unexpected encouragement. They might surprise you with their hidden talents. They might surprise you by forcing you to take a different perspective to what you normally take.

[33 : 40] One missiologist says that we actually need a stranger because they help us see ourselves as others see us, to imagine worlds that we cannot otherwise imagine, to force us to break out of our complacency.

God says, you never know. You might feel like these guests are those whom you could never click with. And yet these people might be the very ones whom God sends to you, whom God has prepared you in a unique way for, who might bring unexpected blessing into your home.

So take a chance. You never know if it's God's messenger you are encountering. God's hospitality.

Now, we don't have that much more time, but let's try to ask and briefly answer one more question.

How then can we be hospitable today? What are some things we can do? Well, here is the key principle for today.

Let's be hospitable the way God is. Let's be hospitable the way God is. Let's think about some of the characteristics of God's hospitality.

[34 : 59] What is he like? Well, God is generous in his hospitality, isn't he? Again, think of that lavish feast he lays out in Isaiah. Now, does that mean it is a must to treat people to expensive meals?

No. What we're aiming for is not so much generosity in our spending, but in our welcome. So, are you planning a trip to the cinema, an outing somewhere?

Perhaps include someone you don't normally think to include. Perhaps even someone you might find a little awkward. Is that costly? Yes, it can be.

It might mean that you're sacrificing some time which you normally spend exclusively with your closest friends. It might mean sacrificing some of the relationship dynamics that you are normally so comfortable with.

But this is the way of the gospel. This is how gospel-centeredness plays out in this area of life. So, let's be generous.

[36 : 08] Another characteristic of God's hospitality is its humility. When Jesus came, he said he came to serve, not to be served.

And he completely reversed the expectation, didn't he? after all, of all people, he deserved to be served. And yet we find him at the dinner table washing his disciples' feet.

And so humility characterizes our hospitality as well. It seeks to serve those whom we host. I once heard it said that pride is the great enemy of hospitality.

That is partly because pride causes us to think that someone doesn't deserve to be served. But it can also work in another way by making us fear what other people think of us.

You know, we worry, oh, what if the person I invite doesn't actually like the experience? Or worse, what if they don't like us? Would other people think I'm strange for hanging out with that person?

[37 : 16] Oh, and my home, it's small. You know, it's not that nice compared to the other Christian down the road. But actually, that can be our pride talking because what we're really worried about is what other people think about us.

But remember, hospitality isn't actually about us. It's us trying to show the care of Jesus to others. And so when we invite others into our homes and our lives, we simply have to be interested in them.

We simply have to give them our attention. There is no pressure to be funny or charming or cool. In fact, the gospel has freed you from having to perform.

You are free simply to love people as you've been loved in Christ. You are free not to impress, but to listen. You are free not to have an amazing story, but to find out their story.

Hospitality, in this sense, becomes the very opposite of entertaining. And it is actually very refreshing. And so that's hospitality from an individual perspective, but what about the church?

[38 : 32] What does it look like? I really like how someone else puts it. She says, in church, every Christian should think of themselves not as consumers, but as co-hosts.

We should think of ourselves not as those coming just to receive, but also to give. And what do co-hosts do? We partner together with God to make sure people receive his welcome.

We intentionally seek out those who look like they are alone, or they need encouragement. We want to help every person feel they are valued. we are no longer just guests looking to be fed, but co-hosts who also want to feed others.

Perhaps as we share something that we learned from the sermon, or in our quiet times this past week, we especially look out for those for whom God is still a stranger in the hope of introducing him to them.

And again, we can look for those we don't know. Some of you who were at the prayer meeting this past Wednesday, I saw your surprise looks, because there was someone in our midst who most of us don't really know.

[39 : 51] You can find him today. He's right here right now, and get to know him. He's been in our church for over a year now. Or look for someone you know you should know the name of, but you don't.

I've been a little slow on this, but I am hoping soon, just to roll out a really simple initiative, maybe in the next month or so after Chinese New Year, to help those of us in church get to know each other a little bit better, especially those who are long timers on the one hand, and newcomers on the other.

So, watch out for that. And of course, I know that our elder Ben, he's hoping to restart our newcomers corner so that we can do this better.

Now, when he does, why not approach him and volunteer? And we try to include one another as best as we are able to. Now, some of us might go for lunch together after service sometimes.

Now, consider perhaps sometimes going to a place that is more accommodating to a variety of budgets. It might mean foregoing your favourite restaurant because it's just too pricey for some people.

[41 : 08] But if as a result someone actually agrees to come along with you and gets a taste of true gospel hospitality, might that not be worth foregoing your favourite ramen sometimes?

So, this morning, let us open our hearts to what God tells us. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

But let's open our hearts and let's seek to open our homes. Now, I know we need help in this area. I need lots of help in this area. So let's ask God for his guidance and help now.

Father, we thank you that from the scriptures you have revealed yourself to us as the divine host, as the generous host, as the one who provides everything and gives us what we need and even more besides.

You provide abundance beyond measure. And so Father, help us to appreciate that and help us to let that kind of love pour out of us into the lives of others.

[42 : 25] Father, we are all different personalities. We all have different capacities. We are all not in the same life situations. We acknowledge that. Some of us struggle just to take control of our busy lives right now.

But regardless, we just ask that you help us to take a step of faith and to show loving hospitality in the way that you ask us to, in even whatever small ways we can, as a step of obedience to you.

And in that way, glorify you. And we pray, Lord, that as we do all that, we might know some unexpected blessings that you pour out into our lives.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.