

Hospitality - discipline eight in our spiritual formation series

PART 1: CHANGED BY THE HOSPITALITY OF JESUS



MISSIONAL COMMUNITY OR DNA GROUP DISCUSSION

Read this Overview Together

Imagine the person least likely to be sitting at your table. Who is the “other” in your world? It may be someone from a different culture or socioeconomic background. Maybe it’s someone on the opposite end of the political spectrum. Maybe someone who speaks a different language, is from a different generation, or simply has a personality that feels hard for you. Maybe they’re too conservative, too progressive, too religious, or too libertine.

If we’re honest, we can all think of names and faces we would feel uncomfortable breaking bread with. It’s also humbling to realize others may have us in mind when asked this same question.

In Luke 19, Jesus encountered this person in an unexpected way. Many of us know the story of Zacchaeus, the “wee little man” who wasn’t tall enough to see Jesus through the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree to get a better view. While this makes for a good song, it’s not really what makes this story so shocking. You see, Zacchaeus was a tax collector. And not just any tax collector...he was the chief tax collector and had become very rich through his work. To a Jewish man or woman who was seeking to be faithful to God’s law, the tax collector was the enemy. They were Jews who willingly supported the oppressive and exorbitant Roman tax policy and exacted even more tax in order to line their own pockets. In other words, they were traitors working with the Roman oppressors using their corrupt tax system to make themselves rich.

So, when Jesus sees Zacchaeus, he should have at least ignored him. And no one would have blamed Jesus if he had cursed or condemned him. It was shocking to everyone when Jesus spoke to him as a friend and invited himself over to Zacchaeus’ home for a meal. For a notable teacher like Jesus to come to your home for a meal was a great sign of honor. And Jesus gives this honor to Zacchaeus, the man who everyone hates.

Biblical hospitality is not just about welcoming friends to our table, but welcoming the stranger...the “other.” The greek word for hospitality, “*filoxenia*,” literally means “friend of the stranger.” Rosaria Butterfield, in her wonderful book, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey*, defines biblical hospitality this way: “Radically ordinary hospitality is this: using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God.”¹

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In light of this, hospitality is no small thing, but reflects the heart of God and the work of God ever since our sin made us into strangers. Indeed, the story of the Gospel is essentially a story of God's hospitality, making His enemies into His family. As Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements write, "The Bible begins with God making a home for humanity to dwell with Him in a garden and the Bible ends with God making a home for believers to dwell with Him in a city."¹ When we engage in "radically ordinary hospitality," we are participating in the redemptive mission of God. Indeed, this kind of hospitality is crucial to evangelism in our post-Christian world, as we'll see in part 3.

Yet, practicing hospitality doesn't just change our neighbors. It also changes us. As we'll see in part 2, both giving and receiving hospitality challenges our idols and shapes us more and more into the image of our hospitable Savior. In fact, we will not be able to truly practice hospitality until we have first received the hospitality of God. Receiving the hospitality of Jesus changes us.

After Jesus extends radical hospitality to Zacchaeus with a visit to his home to share a meal, Luke says Zacchaeus "received him joyfully" (vs. 6). He did not deserve this honor, but Jesus loves him and gives him this incredible grace anyway. And this completely changes him from the inside out. He has barely climbed down from the tree before he has already made a radical decision. Full of joy, he tells Jesus: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." (vs. 8)

After receiving the unmerited hospitality of Jesus, Zacchaeus' whole perspective changes. He responds not just by committing to be generous to others in the future, but by committing to restore the money he has stolen from others beyond what he originally took. It is a radical commitment to generosity. And it all starts with Jesus' radically simple act of hospitality.

When we read the gospels, there are a few times when Jesus clarifies the purpose for which he came. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). His purpose in coming was clear: to rescue the lost. But Luke also records "how" Jesus came. We know why he came. But Luke tells us how: "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking." (Luke 7:34) Jesus' hospitality, choosing to share intimate moments around the table and bread, embodies his saving work and reveals his heart for sinners.

And here's the amazing reality: just like Zacchaeus, we too have been invited to a meal with Jesus. We have been invited to one day share a feast at the table of the victorious King. This invitation is only possible because of another meal...a meal we remember

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1 Dustin Willis & Brandon Clements, *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, pg. 40.

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every week in our liturgy. As Jesus ate one last supper with his disciples, he told them that the bread they ate was his body being broken for them. The wine they drank was his blood being poured out so that their sin would be forgiven. And because of his sacrifice, they would one day drink wine again with him in his kingdom...at the victory feast of the lamb.

We were the "other"...the stranger. Even more, we were the enemy. And Jesus didn't ignore us, condemn us, or exclude us. Instead, Jesus, in his incredible mercy, chose to move towards us. He made seats for us at his table. So, like Zacchaeus, have you received the hospitality of Jesus with joy?

Questions for Discussion

1. What are your most memorable moments of hospitality (giving or receiving it)? Why do you think those moments stand out to you? What was special about them?
2. What are some similarities and differences between biblical hospitality and the way our world thinks about hospitality?
3. How does hospitality connect to the Gospel?
4. What are some barriers in your life to extending hospitality to others? (You don't need to problem-solve these at this moment...just listen to each other.)
5. Do you see Jesus' hospitality to you? Have you received it with joy?
6. Where do you struggle to see or believe that Jesus has extended this kind of hospitality to you? How do you think that plays out in your life?
7. Take a little time to review the individual practice and commit to it together.

Individual Practice on next page...

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INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE: WHO IS YOUR NEIGHBOR?

The tangible practice we are moving towards through this guide is to share an intentional meal with a non-Christian. That may mean inviting a coworker to lunch, bringing a meal to a neighbor in need, or inviting a family from your kids' school over for s'mores around the fire. This guide is meant to help you prayerfully identify who you will move towards (part 1 practice), take the tangible next steps so that it moves beyond a good idea in your head (part 2 practice), prepare for this time with prayer (part 3 practice), and actually enjoy a meal with them (part 4 practice).

So, first, we need to identify who God is inviting you to move towards. As you do this exercise, it will be tempting to start thinking of reasons it won't work: "That neighbor won't want to come over because they don't seem friendly." Or, "That coworker is super busy, so they probably won't be able to make time." Or, "I haven't talked to that person in a long-time and can't remember their name. It will be awkward to restart the relationship."

Instead, just invite the Spirit to draw your heart and mind towards people.

For this practice, find 10-15 minutes where you have a quiet space and time to think and pray. Put away distractions (like your phone!) and get out a piece of paper and a pen to help you consider the following:

Your Workplace

Prayerfully consider your workplace: who are the 2 or 3 people God brings to mind?

Your Neighbors

Who are the neighbors around you? If you live in a home, try to list names of the neighbors across the street, on either side of you, or even behind you. If you're in an apartment or condo, who lives in the apartments around you?

Third Spaces

What about other spaces in your life (kids' school, gym, club, etc)? List these people.

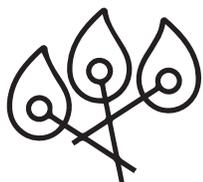
By now, you probably have a list of 8-10 people. Take 5 minutes to pray over this list. **Ask God to help you know who you should move towards.**

You might have clarity at this moment. That's great! But it's okay if you don't. Ask God to direct you towards people as you go throughout your week. God may provide opportunities you don't expect. Go through your week awake to who God might put in your path. Maybe God opens a conversation with a neighbor at the mailbox. Maybe a coworker drops by your office to ask about your weekend. Pay attention to these moments.

Don't overcomplicate this. Even if you don't feel any clear draw, it's okay just to pick someone. By the end of this week, our goal is to have one person (or family) in mind.

Reflection Questions on Next Page...

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DNA GROUP OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

After you have tried the individual practice, find time to meet with your DNA group and reflect together on your experience. Let the conversation go wherever God leads; here are some questions that might be helpful.

1. Did you do the individual practice? How did that go?
2. Who are the people God brought to mind? Who are you going to move towards with hospitality?
3. Who is the "other" or the "stranger" in your world that you would be less likely to invite to your table?
4. What are your practical challenges or barriers? Are there ways you can help each other in this?
5. As you think about practicing hospitality, what are your fears or hesitations? What do you think is underneath these fears?
6. Take time to pray that God will open opportunities for relationships through your hospitality. Ask God to help you not just talk about giving hospitality, but to actually take action.