

Hospitality - discipline eight in our spiritual formation series

PART 2: HOW HOSPITALITY FORMS US



MISSIONAL COMMUNITY OR DNA GROUP DISCUSSION

Read this Overview Together

The Father's invitation has always been for his people to be a hospitable people...a people who welcome the stranger into their homes and lives. As we saw last week, this reflects the heart of our Father, who has welcomed us to the table when we were his enemies. From the beginning, made in God's image, we were created to give and receive hospitality.

Israel was commanded to do this in the Law: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Lev. 19:33-34)

Jesus says hospitality will be one of the distinguishing characteristics of the righteous when he returns: "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For 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.'" (Matt. 25:34-36)

And the church is also called to this kind of love: The Apostle Paul calls the church at Rome to "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality." (Rom. 12:13) Peter calls Christians to "show hospitality to one another without grumbling." (1 Peter 4:9) And the author of Hebrews reminds us: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Heb. 13:2)

It's clear from these passages that hospitality is core to the way of Jesus. The invitation to practice hospitality is not a suggestion for the more extroverted Christians who really like themed dinner parties or charcuterie boards. All of us are called to participate in hospitality. As Paul says, we get to welcome each other the way that Christ has welcomed us (Rom. 15:7)! In part 4, we'll talk more practically about how this might take shape. Not everyone participates in the same way. But it is clear that if we don't engage in biblical hospitality, we're missing out on an amazing opportunity. An opportunity to experience the welcome of Jesus, to extend the welcome of Jesus to others, and to become more like Jesus in the process.

This gets to the main point we're hoping to see today. As we learned in part 1, hospitality is not just about changing our neighbors; it's about changing us! This is why hospitality is not just a fruit of our spiritual formation, but is a practice that actually spiritually forms

Continued on next page...

Hospitality - discipline eight in our spiritual formation series

Discussion Continued...

us. When we make strangers into neighbors through hospitality, we are actively resisting the deformative power of a world that says “your home is your castle” and “pursue what makes you comfortable.”

Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements, in their book *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, help us see how our culture deforms us when it comes to hospitality: “In many ways, your culture has you set up to fail, because the dominant values and ways of thinking about your home is at odds with how the gospel causes you to view your home. The water you and I swim in is polluted with things that make hospitality difficult.”¹ In American culture, hospitality has become a commodity...something you pay to receive. This has formed us to think of our homes and tables primarily as private retreat centers designed to meet our needs rather than as hospitals designed to meet the needs of others. We do need private space; space to rest, to be quiet, to invest in our families if we have them. And we do need to create some boundaries to protect this space. Yet as we’ve been shaped by HGTV visions of home, we’ve made these boundaries into castle walls. And our neighbors have been left outside in the cold. Maybe we need to move a little bit in the other direction?

When we practice biblical hospitality, it’s an act of beautiful subversion. Willis and Clements continue to write, “In a culture where busyness is prized, where isolation is rampant, and where ‘blinking devices’ replace genuine relationships, hospitality offers a beautiful and countercultural rebellion.”² Welcoming someone to your table helps you actively resist the deformative power of a world pushing you towards isolation and selfishness. It’s hard to stay focused on yourself when you’re actively opening your life and home to your neighbor.

Giving your time, your space, and your presence to your neighbor helps challenge the idols we have made of our own comfort, our privacy, and our space. All of us have different amounts to give depending on our personality and resources. But we’re all called to give something. And when we do, it helps free us from the tyranny of these American idols.

It’s not just giving hospitality that shapes us...receiving it from others also forms us to become more like Jesus. When Jesus sent his disciples out two by two to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom in Israel, he instructed them to bring no provisions or extra clothes with them...essentially to rely on the hospitality of the people they encountered (see Matthew 10:9-14). While this was partially a way to reveal who in Israel was ready to receive the good news, it was also a way of teaching the disciples how to be dependent.

Continued on next page...

1 Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements, *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, pg. 35

2 *Ibid*, pg. 56

Hospitality - discipline eight in our spiritual formation series

Discussion Continued...

And while our context is very different from first century hospitality customs, the principle remains the same. Depending on the hospitality of others helps form you into a person dependent on others to meet your needs. This is the way of Jesus.

Sometimes it's harder to receive hospitality than to give it. It assaults our pride. We lose our self-sufficiency. It can lead us to feel like we now have a debt that needs to be repaid. Because we've been shaped by an "earn everything" world, it's hard to receive a gift without feeling some obligation to reciprocate. Receiving from others...their time, resources, and kindness...will remind you that ultimately everything is a gift. As Paul says, "what do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7) Receiving will remind you of your dependence and of God's lavish grace. And as you learn to receive, you can trace each gift to the Father of lights, from whom every good gift comes. (James 1:17)

Practicing hospitality is a formation practice that will help make you more dependent, more grateful for God's grace, and will free you from the suffocating grip of idols like your need to control things or to be comfortable. As you welcome others into your life and home, you will get to see lives transformed around your table. But you will also see your own life transform in amazing and beautiful ways. What an opportunity! Will you join Jesus in this life-giving way?

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the predominant way our American culture views hospitality? How has that shaped you? Try to be specific.
2. What "idols" do you think practicing hospitality will challenge in your life? Maybe your need to control things (as inviting others into your life can get messy)? Maybe your desire for comfort?
3. What is a biblical vision for how we view our homes? How do you think you currently view your home?
4. We all have different resources and personalities. Some of us are extroverted and have large spaces. Some of us are introverted and share space with roommates. How do we take these factors into account as we pursue biblical hospitality? There's no "right" answer here except that we're all called to practice hospitality in some way. Take time for an open discussion about how this might look different for each of you. Without being harsh or judgmental, be curious about how we might also use these factors to make excuses.
5. Is it hard for you to receive from others without feeling the need to reciprocate? Can you think of times others have met your tangible needs? How did it feel to receive their generosity? Why do you think that is?
6. Take some time to review the practice for part 2 and commit to taking this next step.

Individual Practice on next page...

Hospitality - discipline eight in our spiritual formation series



INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE: PRACTICAL PREPARATION

In our part 1 practice, you chose one non-Christian person or family you want to share a meal with. Now, it's time to start making a practical plan.

Some of you will get really excited about "making a plan" and some would much rather just go with the flow and see what happens. If the former fits you, that's great! Just be careful not to let your planning get ahead of your action and prayer. Sometimes, it's easier to plan than it is to actually do the thing. If you're more of the latter, that's okay too. You don't have to create an elaborate plan. But sometimes not making a plan can also keep you from taking next steps and actually doing something. Be aware of how you feel when we talk about making a plan.

If you're married, or partnering with a friend, consider doing this practice together.

Pray

Find a place with no distractions. Set a timer for 5 minutes. Then, sit quietly with God in prayer.

Ask the Father to help remind you of his hospitality to you. Meditate on how he has welcomed you.

Then, picture the person or family you are going to welcome. Ask God to help you take the next step to pursue them.

Plan

With the person in mind, what do you think would be most "welcoming" to them? Maybe it's inviting them to lunch or coffee. Maybe it's inviting their family over for a backyard BBQ or S'mores around the fire. Maybe it's suggesting you visit a new restaurant you've been wanting to try.

Get out your calendar(s) and look ahead to the next month. Write down or note the days or nights that you have free. It's most helpful when inviting someone to something if you already have 3 or 4 days/nights to suggest that they can respond to.

Ask

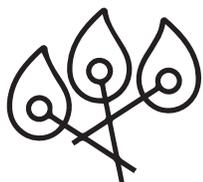
This step is pretty simple, but the most important. Invite them to share a meal with you.

Don't overthink it. Pick up the phone, send a text, stop by their office, or catch them right after school drop-off. Just do it!

Now that you've done the practical preparation, our part 3 practice is all about prayer preparation. Plan to do part 3 before you host your friend.

Reflection Questions on next page...

Hospitality - discipline eight in our spiritual formation series



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. As you took time to plan and take next steps with the friend or neighbor you are going to pursue, what hesitations or barriers showed up in your heart and mind? Don't judge or condemn, but take time to be curious about these with each other.
3. What "idols" are revealed or exposed in your life through giving and receiving hospitality? (An "idol" is anything you look to give you what only God can give you.) You've already discussed this in the previous discussion, but take time to explore in more depth with each other.
4. Take some time to share specifics about your plan with each other. This can be a great time to give feedback and encouragement to one another.
5. Take time to pray for each other, praying specifically by name for each of the people (or families) that you will be pursuing.