

What Does It Mean to Show Hospitality to One Another?

Hospitality is one of those words that gets used a lot, but its biblical meaning runs far deeper than most of us realize. First Peter 4:9 gives a clear and direct command: "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." This post unpacks what that means, why it matters, and how you can begin living it out this week.

What Is Biblical Hospitality?

Biblical hospitality and Southern hospitality are not the same thing. Southern hospitality is a real and beautiful cultural tradition, but biblical hospitality carries a different set of intentions and a different desired outcome.

Biblical hospitality is defined as the active love and welcoming of others. This love is extended to all people, including family, friends, believers, unbelievers, strangers, neighbors, outsiders, and vulnerable people, without expecting anything in return.

The biggest difference between Southern hospitality and biblical hospitality is one word: the gospel. At the heart of biblical hospitality is the good news of what Jesus has done for us. When we practice hospitality, we put the gospel in motion. Jesus is at the centerpiece of our table.

How Does the Bible Define Hospitality in Action?

One of the clearest pictures of biblical hospitality in the New Testament is the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. A man is beaten, robbed, and left half dead on the road. A priest and a Levite pass by on the other side. But a Samaritan stops, cares for the man, bandages his wounds, puts him on his donkey, takes him to an inn, and pays for his stay. That is biblical hospitality. It is caring for the needs of others, loving your neighbor as yourself.

As the authors Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements write in their book *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, changing the world through biblical hospitality starts as simply as opening your front door and welcoming others around an ordinary table. You can practice it whether you live in a house, an apartment, a dorm, or a high rise.

Was Jesus Himself an Example of Hospitality?

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus practiced hospitality over and over again. He invited the outcast, the sinners, the tax collectors, and the prostitutes to share a meal with Him. He used table fellowship as a way of connecting with people and sharing the good news with them.

In fact, the Pharisees accused Jesus of being a glutton and a drunkard because He welcomed unbelievers and outcasts to His table. That accusation reveals just how radical His hospitality was.

As disciples who imitate the life of Christ, we may never be more like Jesus than when we are practicing hospitality, welcoming our friends, family, neighbors, and strangers for the glory of God.

What Gets in the Way of Practicing Hospitality?

There are three common hindrances that tend to keep people from practicing hospitality.

- I am too busy. The calendar is full, the schedule is packed, and any free moment feels like it needs to be spent resting.
- It is too much work. The house needs cleaning, the yard needs tending, there is cooking and shopping and dishes involved. It sounds exhausting.
- It is too expensive. The cost of groceries has skyrocketed, and it is hard enough to feed your own family, let alone others.

These are real feelings. But it is worth pausing and asking yourself honestly: what is keeping me from practicing hospitality? Is it one of these three? Is it all three? What else would you add to the list?

Why Should Christians Practice Hospitality?

The straightforward answer is that it is commanded in Scripture. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Our love for Jesus compels us to be obedient to what Scripture commands.

Romans 12:13 says, "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality." - Romans 12:13 English Standard Version (ESV)

But beyond obedience, when we practice hospitality, we become a tangible expression of the grace, love, and mercy of God. We extend everyday evangelism. We share our story over a meal without expecting anything in return. We let the Spirit lead conversations and season them with salt.

Peter also tells us how we should practice hospitality. Look at the end of the command in First Peter 4:9: "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." - 1 Peter 4:9 English Standard Version (ESV)

Peter knew human nature. He knew we would be tempted to grumble about the inconvenience of it all. But what he is after is the disposition of the heart. We should step into hospitality with joyful willingness, because it glorifies God.

Is There a Warning in Scripture About Failing to Practice Hospitality?

Yes. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and the goats. Upon His return, He separates them and says to those on His left: "For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, I was naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." - Matthew 25:42-43 English Standard Version (ESV)

The sobering truth is this: those who do not practice hospitality toward others have failed to show it to Jesus Himself. And those who do not express the kind of love offered through hospitality will not experience the blessedness of Christ's eternal hospitality.

Hospitality is a test of the heart. It reveals whether our discipleship is genuine and sincere.

What Is the Heart of Biblical Hospitality?

At its core, biblical hospitality is about reflecting the heart of God. The entirety of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, reveals the hospitable heart of God.

In Genesis, God creates a garden and makes a home for humankind. His desire is to dwell with Adam and Eve as their gracious host. By the end of Scripture, in Revelation, the whole Bible closes at the wedding feast of the Lamb, where Jesus is the gracious host of that great celebration.

Even the cross can be viewed through the lens of hospitality. You and I were once alienated from God, separated because of our sin, deserving judgment and condemnation. But God, in His grace and mercy and kindness, sent His one and only Son to die for those who place their faith and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. God moved into the neighborhood. Jesus left His throne in heaven and gave up His life for us. Because of what He did, you and I have been adopted into His family as sons and daughters, as heirs.

The conclusion, the call, the command is to practice hospitality. We do it because it is who God is. It reflects His heart.

What Does Practicing Hospitality Look Like in Real Life?

Hospitality does not always mean hosting a dinner party. It can look like opening your home to a foster child. It can look like stopping to care for someone in need, just as the Good Samaritan did. It can look like inviting a co-worker who does not know Christ over for a meal, sharing your story, and letting the Spirit lead.

The world is desperate for community. The world is desperate for connection. And God is calling His people to be among those who welcome others and practice hospitality.

A practical question worth sitting with: what would it look like for you to have someone in your home in the next 30 days? Who would you invite?

Life Application

This week, take one concrete step toward practicing biblical hospitality. Identify one person, one family, one neighbor, or one co-worker that God is prompting you to invite into your home or to serve in a tangible way. It does not have to be elaborate. A simple meal, a cup of coffee, or a genuine act of care can open the door to gospel conversations and reflect the heart of God to someone who needs it.

Ask yourself these questions as you prepare to take that step:

- What is honestly keeping me from practicing hospitality, and am I willing to surrender that barrier to God?
- Who is one specific person God is prompting me to welcome or serve in the next 30 days?
- How does my practice of hospitality, or my lack of it, reflect what I truly believe about the gospel?
- Am I practicing hospitality with a joyful heart, or am I grumbling about the inconvenience of it?

Biblical hospitality is not a program or an event. It is a way of life. It is one of the most powerful and practical ways to love one another, to love your neighbor as yourself, and to put the gospel on display for a world that is hungry for exactly what followers of Jesus have to offer.