

COMMISSIONED

THE ART OF LIVING OUT THE
WORDS, WAYS, & MISSION OF JESUS

6.3 Practicing Hospitality

Way of Action

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Mr. Rogers used to carry a little piece of paper in his wallet that said, “Frankly, there isn't anyone you couldn't learn to love once you've heard their story.” And in my experience, hospitality gives us the permission we need to hear them.

My name is Jodi Otto. When I first moved to DC I lived at the Southeast White House. Every Wednesday, a Reconciliation lunch was hosted and everyone was invited. Whether you were young or old, male or female, black or white, Senator or homeless, Republican or Democrat — you were welcomed and seated at the table with dignity and honor because this, after all, *was a house on the hill for all people*. The table was set with the finest of linens and the best dishes we had in the house and conversations were cultivated through intentional questions and active listening.

This lunch was formed out of the simple belief that the best policies would be written, lives would be changed, and our communities would be transformed if we could just sit, shoulder-to-shoulder, and find common ground — and eating good food together is a great place to start. I witnessed unique friendships form and genuine connections made. And this all began at the table.

And that's what we see throughout Scripture time and time again. Jesus ate with the most unlikely people. He ate with Matthew and Zacheus, both of whom were tax collectors. He ate with a leper, an immoral woman, hypocritical Pharisees and a coward who denied his friendship on the night He needed it the most. It's where Christ revealed himself after His resurrection and where people encountered the Kingdom of God for the first time. Today, He still invites us back to the table for Communion to partake in the sacraments so we remember the sacrifice He made for us. The table is where we are reminded of our salvation, our freedom, and our identity.

But hospitality doesn't just mean sharing a meal with someone, instead, it might mean inviting someone to do life together. It's about living a generous life with our time, our space, and our perspectives so God can use us in unexpected and abundant ways.

At NCC we have 3 core values on our First Impressions team so we can all practically grow in the art of hospitality:

1. **We See the One:** Dr. Foth talks about there being two types of people. When most of us walk into a room, our posture and body language declares "here I am." But there are a handful of people who walk into a room and declare with every fiber of their presence, "There you are." Let's be "there you are" people.

Danny Meyer is a wildly successful restaurant owner who built his platform by focusing primarily on hospitality. He teaches his team to use the ABCD Technique, which stands for "Always Be Collecting Dots." Dots are information. The more information you collect, the more frequently you can make meaningful connections that make other people feel good. We add more value by listening, using our imagination, and executing on those connections.

Some of the most hospitable people I know are both genuinely curious and great listeners. To begin, ask someone's name and then learn what matters to them, where they're from, their gifts, their passions, their interests, etc.

2. **We go the extra mile:** We want to be tour guides, not travel agents. Travel agents give information. Tour guides come alongside and usher people into experiences. Invite people to sit with you, to join you and your family in a meal or a project you're working on, or introduce them to someone else. Don't just tell them what to do, make the extra effort for their benefit. Look for opportunities to engage in the awkward on behalf of someone else to pursue connection.
3. **We pursue excellence, creativity, and beauty.** I like to think of hospitality as what the Celtics refer to as thin spaces, spaces where heaven invades earth. As hospitable people, we're simply creating environments for people to feel seen and known. It's where your creativity and generosity in life creates opportunities and breaks down barriers for others to encounter Jesus. It's about cultivating environments through the design, intentionality, conversation, unity, and celebration of one another that points our eyes to see the Kingdom of God at work. It's here that our faith feels tangible, real, beautiful, and invitational.

Romans 12 encourages us to practice hospitality. *Practice* being the key word. We actually have to show up and try in order to grow in this.

I've probably prayed more for my kitchen table than most. But you might be surprised by that because so few of you have sat around it.

It's not because I was raised that way. In fact, when I was in middle school, my parents decided to take a bulldozer to the back of our house to rebuild our kitchen and dining room so we could host more people. To this day, my parents host people in their home on a regular basis. My mom serves meals weekly to the growing homeless population in our community and will do their laundry for them as they eat a hot meal. Several people have lived at their house until they got back on their feet and our house was always and continues to be the gathering place for friends, families, and neighbors.

So no, I don't always host because I don't have an example for what that looks like — **I don't always host because hospitality requires vulnerability, authenticity, and courage. It requires margin and sacrifice.**

My space isn't perfect and the meal I serve probably won't be either. You might be like me and find yourself paralyzed to extend hospitality because we've boiled hospitality down to how beautiful or perfect our home is or how elaborate our meals need to be. I have found myself saying, "I'll host when I have time, when I have a different house, or when I am magically able to make this 5-course meal...".

A while back, I felt like I heard the Lord say to me, "If you're not going to steward what I've already given to you, why would I ever give you more?" The people in my life who are the best at hospitality are the ones who just showed up and consistently created space for others. They're generous with their time and resources. It's an act of intention, not just intuition.

Jesus told us to practice hospitality as a directive because this is what the kingdom of God is all about. N.T. Wright said: "When Jesus himself wanted to explain to his disciples what his forthcoming death was all about, he didn't give them a theory, he gave them a meal."

So my question is, who will I invite into my life? Who are you going to invite to yours?

Let's create a beloved community one act of hospitality at a time.