

Transformed

Have You Loved a Stranger Today?

*“Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.
Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”*

- Romans 12:13-14

As we read these verses our minds can be drawn to the great need around us, the time and resource costs of hospitality and the difficulty of being a blessing even (especially) with difficult people. It can be overwhelming to think that we have a role to play not only in our own transformation as followers of Christ, but also in the transformation of the world around us as we desire to see God’s Kingdom come (Matthew 6:10). This can lead to analysis paralysis: considering all the needs and freezing instead of engaging in this transformation process. I pray that as we look at these verses today, you are reinvigorated to action.

This is a very practical section of Scripture. In my Bible, the subheading over Romans 12: 9-21 is “Love in Action”. In these verses we see the transformative effects that mercy (12:1) and grace (12:3) should have on our lives because we believe that faith without works is not (living) faith (James 2:26). Let’s take a closer look at these verses.

Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. As believers, we can be confident that God will meet our daily needs (Matthew 6:11). One way that God meets his people’s needs is through the active participation of other believers. You and I are the hands and feet of Jesus.

It is important to both look for ways to share with those in need and to reach out when you are the one in need. In our culture that values extreme individualism and taking care of yourself, it can be difficult to admit when you are in need. What if, by admitting that need, you were actually giving someone else the opportunity to grow in obedience to Christ, as you grow in your trust of his care and provision for you?

Practice hospitality. This might seem like a reiteration of the previous statement but practicing hospitality in this context becomes more nuanced if we look at this verse in the original Greek. The root word of “practice” is “to pursue” and a literal translation of hospitality would translate as “love of strangers” which we can see if we break it down:

Hospitality = Philoxenia “philos” beloved friend + “xenia” strangers

So, another way to look at this verse would be *pursue a love of strangers*. This now becomes a progression from the previous verse. *First*, look out for the needs of your Brothers and Sisters in Christ, *then* continue to look for opportunities to love others (strangers) around you who are in need.

It is also important to note here that Jesus demonstrated hospitality without a house and without a salary. These are not requirements of hospitality. When we see hospitality as “a love of strangers” we can see that being hospitable does not have a salary (or house size)

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requirement, but a heart requirement. Jesus' heart was attuned to the needs of those around him and, as his followers, our hearts should be as well.

Wouldn't it be convenient if this message ended right here? How much easier it would be if we could focus our care on our friends and even strangers, but Paul's message continues one step further.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Blessing is a significant theme in Scripture and here we see that theme extended not just to those who are easy to bless, but to those who persecute us. This verse challenges us with the ultimate test of our transformed state and it's not an easy one: loving those who seek harm for us. We receive strength for this task when we remember that we were once enemies of God (Romans 5:10) until we were reconciled to him through Jesus.

The reality is this, through these verses we learn that God's people are meant to be a blessing to all people. As we practice hospitality, we are transformed to be more like our Heavenly Father whose love extends to both friend and enemy alike.

- 1) **Hospitality can look different through all the seasons of your life. What do you think is holding you back from practicing biblical hospitality? From being a blessing to those who persecute you?**

- 2) **How can you shake analysis paralysis today and practice love in action?**
 - a. **Do you have a Brother or Sister in Christ around you who needs help meeting their basic needs?**
 - b. **Do you need to make space in your life to "pursue" the love and care of strangers?**
 - c. **Do you have an enemy who needs to be blessed?**

Feeling like you don't have enough to offer? Read Matthew 14:13-21 and remember that God uses what we have to be a blessing to those around us, no matter how small the offering.



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