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The Table

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This is how Merriam Webster defines **hospitality**:

Hospitality: hospitable treatment, reception, or disposition

A modern-day definition defines hospitality as the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, and strangers.

- Guests are those you know are coming and you prepare for
- Visitors are those who stop by, and you receive them with an understanding they will not linger long
- Strangers are those you meet, and your kindness leaves a lasting impression.

There is really no replacement for genuine hospitality.

Hospitality begins in the heart and, according to the Word, is a defining characteristic of who we are in Christ.

I Peter 4:9 Practice hospitality to one another (those of the household of faith). [Be hospitable, be a lover of strangers, with brotherly affection for the unknown guests, the foreigners, the poor, and all others who come your way who are of Christ's body.] And [in each instance] do it ungrudgingly (cordially and graciously, without complaining but as representing Him). AMPC

God expects us to be hospitable to:

- the Body of Christ, Practice hospitality to one another (those of the household of faith)
- to strangers, Hebrews 13:2, **Do not forget or neglect or refuse to extend hospitality to strangers [in the brotherhood—being friendly, cordial, and gracious, sharing the comforts of your home and doing your part generously], for through it some have entertained angels without knowing it.** AMPC Do not limit your hospitality only to friends or family.

In defining hospitality, we have to understand what hospitality is NOT:

- Hospitality is not entertainment. Hospitality is an **opportunity to create an environment** of God's love for people to experience.
- Hospitality is not done with murmuring and complaining. 1Peter 4:9 specifically tells us not to do that. God loves a cheerful giver.

"Let each one [give] as he has made up his own mind and purposed in his heart, not reluctantly or sorrowfully or under compulsion, for God loves (He takes pleasure in, prizes above other things, and is unwilling to abandon or to do without) a cheerful (joyous, "prompt to do it") giver [whose heart is in his giving]." ~ 2 Corinthians 9: 7 (AMPC)

When you invite a guest over then complain about it, you've proven to God and yourself that you're NOT a cheerful giver. The Bible tells us that God does not abandon a cheerful giver. Which means, if you cheerfully invite others into your home, God will provide what you want you need to host them!

It is important to understand that the above passages were written in Greek. The Greek word for hospitality is “philoxenia”, which translates, “love of strangers.” In the time that the Bible was written, it was much more common to invite a stranger into your home. Traveling on foot took a long time and there were very few places for people to stay.

For example, the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem that Mary and Joseph took right before Jesus was born was 80 miles. So understandably, people in Jesus’ time would have needed a place to stay as they traveled. Housing complete strangers for a night was common. That idea is foreign to us in our modern world of convenient travel accommodations.

Even though the context has changed, the application of loving a stranger still applies to us today. What does it say about our capacity to love if we only show love to our friends, family, and those who are like us?

We must live thoughtfully and generously towards others.

The Bible talks about those who have the gift of hospitality. People with this gift just have a natural way of making others feel included or

welcome. They seem to have this superpower for seeing those who are on the fringe and bringing them into the circle.

But it is a fallacy to think that only those with the “gift of hospitality” are expected to be hospitable. As the Body of Christ, we are all called to show Biblical hospitality.

Biblical hospitality: is our sacred duty to treat strangers and friends alike, welcoming one another into our lives. Scripture instructs us, to be ready, at a moment’s notice, to welcome people into our home or church community.

It is not about treating people equally; it is about treating people with equity. Equal means everyone receives the same thing, equity means each person receives what they need to be successful. It’s the difference is giving everyone a piece of clothing, and giving everyone a piece of clothing that fits. (new believers, parents of prodigals, grief share)

Every person who walks through the doors of our church is in a different stage of their spiritual journey. Everyone has the same opportunity to enhance their spiritual journey, not everyone needs the same path to get there. No one who walks through our doors begins at the same

place. While Sundays and Wednesdays provide an equal opportunity for everyone to enhance their journey, it is the relationship building that happens in Connect Groups, volunteer ministries, and discipleship opportunities that tailor the enhancement of each individual journey.

To understand what hospitable behavior means, we can look to the dictionary's definition of

Hospitable: a: given to generous and cordial reception of guests b: promising or suggesting generous and friendly welcome c: offering a pleasant or sustaining environment 2 readily receptive: **OPEN**, *hospitable* to new ideas

The concept of openness I believe is where many of us struggle. But being hospitable to new ideas adds a valuable layer to our understanding of hospitality. To be open is to be without barriers.

Many times, we can struggle with new ideas or new concepts, especially when those ideas were not our own or if they challenge the historical way something has been done. The enemy can use our own insecurities to keep us closed, behind a wall that prevents us from being open and hospitable. When we are truly hospitable, we are open to the

thoughts and ideas of others and will see them as enhancements to our journey and not challenges.

I believe our church is a crossroads. We are at a place of decision. We have an opportunity right now to embrace biblical hospitality and impact the Kingdom in a powerful way.

1. Biblical Hospitality reflects the Gospel

a. As Christians, we relinquish all in pursuit of Christ.

Mark 10:28-30, ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹ Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ESV

b. There is access for all.

i. Luke 8:40-55, Jairus, woman with issue of blood (brief summation)

It doesn't matter if it looks like your promise is dying or if your issue looks like it will never dry up... The Gospel assures us that there is equal access for all.

2. **Biblical Hospitality is spiritual warfare.**

- a. Hospitality that brings saved and unsaved people together places us dead center in the culture war. When we interact with the lives of our neighbors, we don't have to wonder what they think about us because if there is true hospitality at work there will be open communication and freedom of expression.
- b. Jesus' ministry was riddled with counterculture moments that propelled him to center of his own culture war. He ate with sinners regularly. He chose to invite people who did not know him into his circle which opened the door for them to choose to follow Him. Biblical hospitality is a willingness to invite people into fellowship with you, bringing their mess in tow, so that they can observe our life and eventually make a choice to follow Him.

3. **Biblical Hospitality is marked by intentional diversity.**

- a. There will be room for different kinds of hosts and guests.
 - i. Every Christian is called to practice hospitality, but not all will practice it in the same way.

- ii. Hospitality works on the same principle as tithing, you are either giving or receiving. You are either building up the body or you need the body to build you up.
- iii. The Lord is the Lord of all. There is no distinction in his Kingdom of class, race, tribe, nation, or age.

1. Romans 10:11-12, ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him." ESV

2. Revelation 7:9, After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

4. Hospitality requires unity in the church.

- a. We should model mutual respect through vulnerability, humility, and grace.

- i. Micah 6:8, He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you

but to do justice, and to love kindness,^[a]
and to walk humbly with your God? ESV

- b. Living real, authentic lives requires us to live open, without barriers.
 - i. Rosaria Butterfield was delivered out of a lesbian lifestyle and she made the following comment, “If the church felt the priority of our brotherhood and sisterhood over and against our fleshly identities, we too would make hospitality a priority. Christian unity would shift our focus from programs to relationships. We would see our lack of vibrant, regular, and distinctive hospitality as the dirty, rotten sin that it is.”
 - ii. A shared commitment of mutual trust and equity, while respecting the needs, values, beliefs, and voices of all, acknowledging we are members of one body, builds unity.
5. **Biblical Hospitality nurtures and grows the family of God.**
- a. Nourish the family of God and compel those outside of God’s favor to come to your table.

- b. A hospitable heart grieves over missed opportunities to show others the love of Christ. Chronic loneliness should be nonexistent in the Body of Christ.

Please turn your attention to the screens as we get ready to close. Play video

Biblical hospitality is one of the most misunderstood concepts in the church today. Hospitality simply is this: it is meeting the stranger and embracing that stranger as a neighbor, and meeting a neighbor, and by God's power, embracing that neighbor as someone who will be part of the family of God.

Church family, we have a responsibility to be a hospitable church. A church that is open, without barriers to those of all walks of life. All the hurting, lonely, wounded, disappointed, and skeptical who cross our threshold desperately need for us to embrace our Christian responsibility to embrace hospitality.

Do you remember the last time you went to a new church? Do you remember what it felt like to walk in the door and not be familiar with the building, the people, the expectations, or the protocol? Before we can ever ask people to commit their lives to Christ, we must commit ourselves to the pursuit of hospitality.

This means we take ownership of our individual responsibility as a Christian to be observant. To watch for those who are on the fringe and invite them into our circle in hopes of introducing them to Christ.