

HUMBLE HEART, OPEN HANDS

A CALL FOR CHRIST-CENTERED
HOSPITALITY



Amy Peterson



introduction

Humble Heart, Open Hands

A Call for Christ-Centered Hospitality

Amy Peterson wonders if there may be “some hereditary reason for the fact that most of my dreams involve buses, trains, and backpacks.” From an early age much of her passion has focused on ways to see the world and make a difference in it. Having put reality to many of those dreams, she has learned that things are never quite what we expect.

Drawing from her varied overseas experiences, as well as her time living in an intentional

community with her husband, Jack, she's learned a bit about the vital, scriptural need for hospitality. Despite our fears, differences, and misgivings, we need to both extend and receive hospitality with humility, grace, and love. In *Humble Heart, Open Hands*, she doesn't *tell* us how to do this. Rather, she comes alongside us on the journey, for Amy Peterson is a fellow sojourner with us.

Our Daily Bread Ministries

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one

In a Stranger's Home

It was late spring, 2004, near the end of my first year teaching English in Southeast Asia. As I rode my electric motorbike away from the university campus where I worked, I hoped that a night at the seaside would refresh me for the end of the semester. Dusty gray streets soon gave way to rice fields, bright and young, lining the road to the coast, and as I picked up speed, the wind brought relief from unrelenting heat.

Another motorbike pulled up next to mine. The driver, like all women in the country where I lived, was wearing long sleeves, long pants, a hat, and a

scarf across her face to protect her from the sun. She pulled the scarf down, revealing a wide smile.

“Hello!” said the smiling woman.

“Hi,” I replied, trying to hide my annoyance. I was retreating, for crying out loud. I was trying to be alone. But in that part of the country, many locals had never seen a foreigner, and they always wanted to talk with me.

“My name’s Leigh!” she exclaimed. “You American?” I answered yes, hoping the conversation would end quickly. And after another line or two, it did.

“Oh! That my house,” she said, slowing to turn and pointing to a small wooden house on a cement slab in a sea of rice plants and palm trees. “I invite you to my home!” she said.

I thanked her but waved good-bye.

Checking into my hotel, I asked the proprietors to plug in my electric motorbike so that it would be fully charged for my drive home the next morning. Then I grabbed my books and journal and headed to the beach.

After a day and a night spent in quiet and prayer, I was ready to return to campus and finish the semester. But halfway home, my motorbike began



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to lose speed. Soon I was crawling along at no more than four kilometers per hour, and I realized that the hotel proprietors had not, in fact, left my motorbike plugged in all night. They had probably wanted to save money on their electric bill. My motorbike was out of power.

I looked around. There was not a person in sight, just a haze of green, green heat and the buzz of mosquitos. I was still nearly ten kilometers from town, and I was in trouble. Even if another person came by eventually, it's not like they could bring me a gallon of gas. I didn't need gas; I needed an outlet.

And then I realized something: at the very moment my motorbike was dying, I was driving past Leigh's house. The woman who had introduced herself to me the day before lived right where I was, in the middle of this very rice field. I turned down the dirt path toward the small home of the exuberant stranger.

Leigh was happy to see me, and happy to let me plug into an outlet on the side of her house. Now that I saw her off of her motorbike, I realized she was pregnant, nearly full-term, and probably only a few years



With our limited knowledge of each other's languages, we spent an hour in conversation, sharing our lives and stories.

older than I was. Leigh invited me to sit down, and pulled out a hairy coconut and a machete. Fascinated, and a little scared, I watched as this petite pregnant woman split the coconut in half and poured its juice into two glasses. She offered me one, and joined me at the table. With our limited knowledge of each other's languages, we spent an hour in conversation, sharing our lives and stories. She told me about attending university, marrying her high school "darling," and moving to his palm-tree farm. He was often away on business, leaving her alone and pregnant. She wrote letters to her classmates who had married foreigners and moved to Australia and England; she missed them. I told her about the family I'd left behind in America, and about my job teaching English at the university. Thanks to her generosity, I eventually made my way home.

In the twelve years since I ran out of power on a stretch of deserted rice field in Southeast Asia, I've often thought back to this moment as emblematic of the great hospitality that was consistently offered to me



I was unable to demonstrate my trustworthiness, unable to prove that I deserved help, and unable to offer compensation. Yet I was warmly welcomed and cared for.

there. I was a stranger in desperate need. I was unable to demonstrate my trustworthiness, unable to prove that I deserved help, and unable to offer compensation. Yet I was warmly welcomed and cared for.

The way that I was welcomed when I was a stranger in Southeast Asia sparked in me a desire to extend the same kind of hospitality when I returned to the States. But when I moved back, and started studying and practicing hospitality, I began to realize just how anemic my understanding of it was. When I studied hospitality in the Bible, I recognized how different it was from the way I had grown up understanding the word. Hospitality wasn't about having matching table settings and menus that met Martha Stewart's standards, or Pinterest-worthy decorations. Hospitality was not about perfectly planned parties in immaculate households with sumptuous snacks. Hospitality had little to do with having a clean house or being a sophisticated hostess. These were the kinds of things, culturally, that we thought of



Hospitality is a posture of the heart. Hospitality means being emotionally, physically, spiritually open to strangers—and being open for unexpected blessings in return.

when we talked about hospitality. We even talked about the “hospitality industry” of hotels and restaurants—which is perhaps, when you look at biblical hospitality, a bit of a contradiction in terms.

Biblically, hospitality is not about throwing parties for your friends or making money off of strangers. Instead, hospitality is a posture of the heart. Hospitality means being emotionally, physically, spiritually open to strangers—and being open for unexpected blessings in return.



two

Strangers Caring for Strangers

Abraham received one such unexpected blessing. Sitting at the entrance to his tent one day, resting in the shade of the great trees of Mamre, Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. He hurried toward these strangers and greeted them as honored guests. “Let a little water be brought,” he said, encouraging them to rest with him, “and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way” (GENESIS 18:4–5 NIV). Abraham asked his wife, Sarah, to bake bread for the strangers, and he personally selected

a tender calf from his herd for his servants to prepare for the guests to eat. As they enjoyed the special meal together, the strangers spoke. They brought a word from God: within the next year, they said, Sarah would bear a child, a son (GENESIS 18:1–15).

🔸 **Abraham's way of life** and his customs are not markedly different from Bedouins and nomads today. The same kind of hospitality is still extended lavishly to guests in most parts of the Middle East, whether the visitor is expected or not.

In welcoming strangers, Abraham learned something about God, and about God's plan for him. "This first formative story of the biblical tradition on hospitality is unambiguously positive about welcoming strangers," Christine Pohl writes in *Making Room*. "It connects hospitality with the presence of God, with promise, and with blessing." It also contributes to the overarching story of Israel as a people who were aliens and strangers chosen by God to be his people, his family.

Perhaps Abraham offered hospitality so willingly to strangers because he himself knew what it was to be a stranger. God had called him to leave his family and his homeland, and to settle in a foreign place. And Abraham knew that his descendants would need that same kind of hospitality, too. When God promised to make Abraham's descendants as innumerable as the stars in the sky, God had warned Abraham, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land

that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years” (GENESIS 15:13).

Generations later, that prophecy was realized. Famine had driven Abraham’s descendants to Egypt, and over time, the Egyptians had enslaved the Israelites, trapping them in servitude far from their home. After Moses led God’s people out of Egypt and slavery, he delivered God’s laws to them. God reminded his people that even as they enjoyed their freedom and their new home, they were to view themselves as sojourners. God owned the land, and they were to be its stewards, but they were still “strangers and sojourners” (LEVITICUS 25:23). Hospitality was fundamental to the way of life God planned for his people. “You shall not oppress a sojourner,” the law given to Moses commanded.

“You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (EXODUS 23:9). The Israelites’ experience of vulnerability was key to their welcome of others.

What did it mean to be a “sojourner”¹ in the Middle East 3,000 years ago? Nowadays we often think of sojourners or strangers simply as travelers, people who prefer to see the world rather than to plant



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roots. Perhaps we think of immigrants or refugees, those who whether by choice or circumstance leave their homes and settle elsewhere. But in a mostly agrarian society, to be a sojourner had a distinct meaning. Because access to land was essential to life, the landless sojourner's place was precarious; her safety and well-being depended on the willingness of a community to welcome her. Sojourners were among the most at-risk in an agrarian society, like the poor, the widow, and the orphan.

🔗 *It's instructive to see how various English translations render this word. The New International Version and New Living Translation say "**foreigner**"; the New American Standard and New King James versions translate it as "**stranger**." All three renditions connote the idea of one who is out of place—an **alien**.*

Hospitality to the stranger was recognized as a sacred duty based on shared humanity throughout the ancient eastern world, but for Israel it was also explicitly legislated. In fact, love for the stranger and love for the neighbor were for God's people commands on equal footing (LEVITICUS 19). Specific laws ensured that Israel would care for sojourners, paying them timely and equal wages (DEUTERONOMY 24:14–15) and even including them in religious life (DEUTERONOMY 29:10–15).

The book of Ruth offers us a clear picture of how some of these laws worked. Born a Moabitess, Ruth married into an Israelite family that was living in Moab to avoid famine in Bethlehem. When all the

men in the family died, Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi encouraged her to return to her hometown and find a new husband. Ruth refused. She wanted to stay with her mother-in-law, declaring, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (RUTH 1:16 NIV).

Trusting in the God of Israel, these women moved to Bethlehem. They were deeply vulnerable: both were widows, and although Naomi was an Israelite, Ruth was a foreigner—and a foreigner from a nation with a particularly bad reputation. In generations past, the Moabites had not welcomed the Israelites as they escaped slavery in Egypt, and immoral relations with Moabite women had led God's people to worship false gods (NUMBERS 25:1–2). In fact, God had declared that "No... Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation" (DEUTERONOMY 23:3–6 NIV).

So Ruth the Moabite and her mother-in-law Naomi must have returned to Bethlehem wondering how they would be greeted. Would they find welcome, a place to live, a way to support themselves? Perhaps Ruth knew that the God of Israel had made special provisions in the law for widows and foreigners like themselves, instructing his people:

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat

your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this. (DEUTERONOMY 24:19–22)

Since Ruth and Naomi did not have land of their own, Ruth said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor” (RUTH 2:2 NIV). As it turned out, the field in which she found work belonged to Boaz, who happened to be a close relative of Naomi’s (RUTH 2:3, 20). Boaz encouraged her to continue gleaning from the field, and showed her great kindness, even beyond what the law commanded, eventually marrying her. Their son Obed was the grandfather of David, the greatest King Israel had ever known. Boaz’s obedient hospitality folded a foreigner into the family of Israel, and God blessed Ruth’s faith and Boaz’s obedience, making Ruth the Moabitess part of the line that would eventually produce the Messiah, Jesus (MATTHEW 1:5–6).

God extended hospitality and care to the Israelites, who knew what it was to be strangers and aliens in need of welcome and a place to belong, and God expected his people to make that same kind of hospitality integral to their identity in the world.



three

The New Testament Call

In the New Testament, this robust understanding of hospitality remains important to the identity of God's people. Just as the Israelites were strangers who welcomed strangers, Christ himself was an outsider who welcomed outsiders. As a child, Jesus and his parents became refugees, fleeing for their lives from Bethlehem to Egypt. Doubtless their survival was dependent upon the kindness of many strangers. Later, as an adult, Jesus often appeared to people in the towns and villages of Palestine as a

homeless stranger. “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head,” he said, describing his own life (MATTHEW 8:20).

Though a sojourner himself, Christ welcomed others. He was willing to receive hospitality and willing to extend it, even to those who were widely despised or avoided: tax collectors, Samaritans, and women. Ultimately, even Jesus’s death was a gesture of hospitality. He gave his life so that his followers could be welcomed into God’s kingdom. His death linked hospitality, grace, and sacrifice, centering these virtues as integral to our faith. Paul urges Christians to follow Christ’s example:

“Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (ROMANS 15:7). The foundation for our hospitality is the hospitality Christ has shown us.

Hospitality is not optional for Christ-followers. One of the Greek words used for hospitality in the New Testament is *philoxenia*, which comes from *phileo*, a word that describes familial love, and *xenos*, the word for stranger. Over and over again, the writers of the New Testament call for



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Christians to demonstrate this stranger-love. “Seek to show hospitality,” Paul writes, and the author of 1 Peter agrees: “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling”

(ROMANS 12:13; 1 PETER 4:9).

The author of Hebrews reminds readers of Abraham’s experience: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (HEBREWS 13:2).

What did this kind of welcome look like? In the early church, hospitality took many forms. Historical documents show that Christians in the first five centuries after Christ became known for their willingness to welcome anyone and to provide practical care for the poor, the stranger, and the sick. Most churches met in households, so Christians were accustomed to opening their homes to each other for worship and shared meals. As Paul and other missionaries traveled, spreading the gospel, they relied upon the hospitality of locals in each place.



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Jesus's last recorded prayer for his disciples was a prayer for unity (JOHN 17), and his followers—members of different social groups and ethnicities themselves—would have understood that to achieve unity would require learning to welcome those who were different. Of course, the process was not always smooth.



four

Complications

The process of learning to practice hospitality has not always been smooth for me, either. A few years after we returned to the States from Southeast Asia, my husband Jack and I decided to move to Seattle. We didn't have jobs or a clear plan, but Jack's sister hosted us for the first few weeks, and then through the church we found a home.

We would live in a big old house in the university district, which was owned by a retired couple who wanted it to be used for ministry. Inspired by the hospitality we'd received as foreigners in another country, we wanted to extend a similar welcome to international students in the USA. As house

managers, we would live in one bedroom of the house, and rent out the other seven bedrooms to students from China, Taiwan, Korea, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, and Cameroon.

With our housemates, we practiced intentional community. We shared cooking and cleaning responsibilities, eating dinner together five nights a week, and meeting once a week for prayer. On Friday nights, we hosted “International Christian Fellowship,” a dinner and Bible study regularly attended by about thirty additional international students from the area.

It was a beautiful life, but sometimes—often, really—we failed to demonstrate the kind of true hospitality we’d hoped to practice. Some of our first housemates were Korean sisters who spoke very little English at all. They didn’t want to be in the States, but had been sent by their parents. After a few weeks, it became evident that one of them was bingeing and purging. She’d eat very little at family dinner, but overnight whole loaves of banana bread would disappear. And we heard the toilet flushing and flushing. We didn’t know how to help. We didn’t try very hard to figure it out. We were relieved when they left. A housemate from Nepal always left her dirty dishes on the stove. We didn’t want to confront her about it. A Chinese housemate and a Korean housemate disagreed about how to cook the rice and about how to clean the bathrooms. A housemate from Japan was so private we hardly got to know him; but did we really try?

The early church experienced conflict when people from different cultures came together to worship God, too. Their disagreements were not just theoretical but, like ours, quite practical. Some of the biggest conflicts recorded in the book of Acts centered on whether or not Christians needed to follow Jewish traditions. Did Christians need to keep kosher—to eat the ways that Jews had eaten for centuries, avoiding pork and shellfish? Should new Christians be circumcised? Was it okay to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols? As the early Christians wrestled with these questions, God used their wrestling to reveal himself. Through their cross-cultural relationships, they came to understand that the gospel of Christ was not just for the Jews, but for the Gentiles, and for anyone anywhere who fears God (ACTS CHS. 10 & 15). 📖

📖 **Acts 10** describes this centurion from “the Italian cohort” as “a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God” (VV. 1–2).

In **Acts 15**, some Jewish men were teaching the believers in Christ that the Jewish religious custom of circumcision was essential for salvation. Paul and Barnabas strongly disagreed with this heresy, and the argument eventually led to a much greater sense of unity among the Jewish and Gentile Christians (VV. 1–35).

The growth of the fledgling Christian movement depended upon women who were willing to extend hospitality to visiting missionaries and to emerging

churches. Women—widows in particular—were the people best equipped to receive visiting missionaries, teachers, and Christian travelers. Emerging churches met in the houses of women: Chloe, Priscilla, Nympha. On one missionary journey, the apostle Paul encountered a woman named Lydia who believed his message and invited him to her home. Her hospitality probably challenged him to confront some deeply ingrained cultural and socioeconomic biases.

Paul had entered Philippi in Macedonia. He had journeyed there because of a dream in which “a man of Macedonia was standing there” who begged Paul to come and help him (ACTS 16:9). But after several days in the city, the man from his dream still hadn’t shown up. Who in Philippi was ready to hear Paul’s message?

The text doesn’t tell us where Paul and his companions stayed those first few days. Philippi was an unevangelized city and may not have even had a Jewish synagogue (the place Paul would typically visit first in a city), because on the Sabbath, they did not go to a synagogue to worship. They went “outside the gate to the riverside” where they supposed they would find a place of prayer (ACTS 16:13). And they did. They found a regular religious community of women, including Lydia, “a worshiper of God”[■] who was from Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth (v. 14). (The phrase “worshiper of God” was often used to describe God-fearing Gentiles who worshiped God but had not yet heard the gospel of Jesus.) These women welcomed Paul, extending hospitality to him.

Lydia and her household listened to Paul preach, and they were baptized, and “prevailed upon” Paul to come stay with them (v. 15 NASB).

➤ Other scriptural examples of **Gentiles who feared God** include two Roman centurions. We meet one in Luke 7:2–10 as Jesus heals the military leader’s servant; the other is the centurion described Acts 10. Paul referred to such people when he addressed the audience in the synagogue at Antioch by saying, “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen” (ACTS 13:16).

Growing up, whenever I heard the story of Lydia, I heard that she was a wealthy businesswoman who extended hospitality to Paul. Research indicates that the story is actually quite different.

According to *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* by Arthur Sutherland, Lydia’s name is an *ethnicon*, a name given to a slave that describes origin, nationality, and ethnicity. Lydia was a freed slave from the city of Lydia in the region of Thyatira. She had likely been forced to migrate to Philippi upon receiving her freedom, because freed slaves could only work in the same locale as their past owners if their work would not cause economic injury to the former owner. Dyeing fabric was not the work of the upper classes: dye houses stank, as the process of dyeing wool involved large amounts of animal urine, and much of the work was done by hand, leaving the workers with stained hands and forearms, visible marks of a low social status.

Lydia and her household, then, were likely a group of immigrant women in a subsistent occupation.

They were poor, they were female, and they smelled like urine. When Paul and his companions agreed to accept her hospitality, it was a case of foreigners welcoming foreigners, and it was a case of a lower-class woman “prevailing” upon Paul to stay with her. The word that’s used—she *prevailed*—indicates force. It indicates that Paul needed to be convinced. It indicates that Lydia was saying, “If this gospel you preach is real, and you and I really are now brothers and sisters, co-heirs with Christ, then prove it by being willing to come stay at my home.” Her persistent appeals went beyond the accepted tradition that a woman should only be host to those with whom she was familiar. Christ has overthrown that: based on their shared union with Christ, Lydia has authority to greet, receive, and protect the stranger.

The story of Lydia shows us that hospitality is not grounded in the availability of physical possessions, but in being possessed by Christ. Hospitality can be offered from one stranger to another, it can break convention, it can be uncomfortable and blessed, all based on the identity we share in Christ.

I know from firsthand experience that there is nothing simple or straightforward about forming relationships with people who are different from me, about opening a home to strangers, about extending hospitality. But I also know that God reveals himself in these very relationships, using them to break down our prejudices and preconceptions, showing up in surprising ways.



five

The Dangerous Blessings of Hospitality

Despite our many failures in our shared home in Seattle, our relationships in that house blessed us. Our first daughter Rosie was born while we lived there, and after her birth, our housemate Kei called his mother in Korea, and got her recipe for soup for new mothers. He made it for me, thick and creamy with rice and chicken broth. Grace became Grace Ayi, or Aunt Grace, to our daughter. Anu brought a frilly princess dress from Nepal for Rosie to wear on her first birthday. They taught us all their cultural traditions, and Rosie was blessed in Chinese and Korean and Japanese and French.

And according to Scripture, when we practice hospitality, we can expect blessing.

In the biblical tradition, guests bring their hosts into connection with God. When Abraham welcomed strangers, he received a message and a promise from God (GENESIS 18). When the prophets Elijah and Elisha found themselves in need, they both found refuge in the homes of women. Both the prophets who received hospitality and the women who extended it were blessed by God as a result. Jesus taught that his true followers were those who welcomed strangers (MATTHEW 25), and the author of Hebrews warned that strangers could be angels in disguise (13:2).

The need for the church to extend hospitality to strangers is as great now as it was in biblical times. In our world today, loneliness and displacement are real problems that hospitality can at least begin to address. We live in a fragmented society. In the USA, fewer individuals are getting married, and fewer young people are committing to churches, leading to a higher sense of isolation for many. But even more importantly, there are now more refugees and displaced people in the world than ever before—65.3 million people have been forced from their homes, and 21.3 million of those are refugees. More than half of these refugees are under the age of 18. Nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day in our world as a result of conflict or persecution. Who will welcome these refugees with the love of Christ?

Perhaps the first step in extending hospitality is

learning to see those people who are in need. It's easy and natural for us to limit our circles of friendship to those who are like us, who we're comfortable with—but when we do that, we can easily overlook those who are in greatest need of welcome. Like Paul, we may have to go “outside the city gates” to find those people who look or smell different, who are waiting and hoping to hear from the God of love.

Hospitality can take a variety of forms. We can welcome immigrants and refugees to our towns and our homes, helping the recently arrived to navigate an unfamiliar world, helping them find furniture and fair leases, helping them learn the bus system or the English alphabet. We can adopt children who need families or we can welcome foster kids into our homes. We can look for the elderly in retirement homes who are lonely and isolated, and bring friendship to them. We can welcome single friends into our family lives. When we ask God to open our eyes to those who need hospitality, God will answer.

The danger of hospitality is that as we are blessed by it, we are also changed by it. As we build relationships with people who are not like us, we will find our perspectives widened, our empathies expanded, and our presuppositions challenged. God uses hospitality to change us just as it changed Peter and Paul. When our only relationships are with people who look like us, who come from the same socioeconomic background, or the same ethnic heritage, we have a limited perspective on who God is and how life works. Of course our

perspective on God is always limited on this side of heaven, but we see more of God when we see him through the eyes of those who are different from us.

In fact, hospitality can offer us a foretaste of heaven, when we will be with a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, praising God together (REVELATION 7:9).

Conclusions

Hospitality is a foundational virtue for followers of God. Jesus is the host who has offered us a welcome into God's kingdom, reminding us that we are strangers here on earth. He calls us, as strangers, to offer welcome to other strangers, welcome grounded in the truth that we are all humans created in the image of God, worthy of love and care.

Hospitality is a radical stance of faithfulness against fear. Hospitality says that because of God's great love, we can welcome strangers rather than fear them. Hospitality has little to do with the "industry" of tourism and entertainment, hotels and restaurants. If hospitality is transactional, it is transactional only in the way that recognizes that you are in need now, and one day I will be in need; we exist in a status of mutual dependence, not independence. Many of us don't really believe this. We believe in our autonomy. We are individualists who have lived independent and secure lives, and so we have forgotten how deeply vulnerable we actually are, the fact that we live and breathe at the mercy of God and our neighbors. If

we could remember that, wouldn't our hearts be more open to the vulnerable and marginalized? If we could remember that we are strangers, we would welcome strangers; but we have become so at home in this world that we have begun to believe that we are masters of our own fates. We take care of ourselves and expect others to do the same.

Hospitality is the remembrance that all we have now is on loan from God. God told the Israelites in Leviticus that the land he gave them was his, and that they were to reside in it as strangers and aliens. Peter echoed this thought in his letter to the elect, calling us “foreigners and exiles” in the world. Hospitality is at the heart of the Christian identity; it is an openness of heart, an openness of home, a stranger welcoming a stranger to a space where each person can be more fully who God has created her to be, can flourish, can come closer to a home that will endure, a kingdom that cannot be shaken. ☙

appendix

Ideas for Embracing Hospitality

Invite a friend or a family from church over for dinner.

Start simple. Order pizza! Paul writes in Galatians that we are to “do good to all people, especially

to those who belong to the family of believers” (GALATIANS 6:10 NIV). If welcoming strangers feels intimidating, start with people you know at church.

Volunteer to help refugee families in your area.

Locate your local refugee resettlement agency and ask how you can volunteer. Or contact a group like World Relief, Catholic Charities, or Lutheran Family Services.

Visit a local retirement community. Ask the staff if there are residents who don’t have family or friends in the area. Become their friend.

Find an interfaith gathering. If all of your friends are Christians, find an interfaith gathering where you can go to meet and interact with people of different beliefs. Make friends who are different from you, and welcome them into your home.

Start an Airbnb. Have an extra room in your house? List it inexpensively on Airbnb. When travelers stay with you for a night or two, welcome them warmly and generously. I’ve known people whose Airbnb guests have attended Bible study while staying with them.

Use your spare bedroom. If you have an empty room in your house, be on the lookout for someone who might need it—a local college student trying to cut costs, a high school exchange student coming to the States for a semester or a year, or a single person who would love to be folded in to your family life for a season.



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