

# Hospitality

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5-31-09

## Introduction.

- A. Anybody who has ever owned or even been around a dog very much knows what the expression “hangdog” means. It’s that sad, slinking-around, tail-between-legs look that dogs get when they know they’ve done something wrong. Sometimes, we haven’t even seen the evidence of the misdeed yet, but we know after just one look at the dog that something is wrong somewhere. His behavior shows more than he knows.
- B. Likewise, the choices that we make often reveal much more about us than we are aware. Let me give you one example. Lauren and I live in a house built in the 1970’s. Like most houses from that era, it has a lot of space in the living and dining rooms, but smaller bedrooms. Most similarly sized houses built today, though, don’t have that kind of space arrangement. Most of them have done away with formal living and dining rooms altogether. Instead, what they have is gigantic master bedroom suites with their own bathrooms.
- C. Here’s what that tells me. It tells me that people don’t want the formal living and dining rooms, which are primarily spaces in which to entertain guests, because they don’t actually have any guests to entertain. Instead, what they do as soon as they come home is retreat to the sanctuary of the master bedroom suite, turn on the TV, and shut out the world. In other words, we have stopped being a hospitable people.
- D. This is a cultural problem on a number of levels, but the biggest of those problems is that being inhospitable is contrary to God’s word. We see hospitality specifically mentioned and practiced by God’s people all the way from Genesis through 3 John, and it is surely included in the generic good works commanded in Revelation. God expects us to be hospitable, regardless of the cultural climate, and as always with His expectations, the what, how, and why are spelled out in Scripture. Let’s look at these as we study Biblical hospitality.

## I. What Is Hospitality?

- A. I suspect that by now, most of you are able to predict the way I approach a Biblical topic. If I’m going to be discussing something, I want to nail down just what it is that we’re discussing first. As a result, we first have to ask, “What is hospitality?” There are a couple of senses in which the Bible uses the word. Strictly speaking, the Greek word for “hospitality” means, “A warm affection for strangers.” Thus, whenever we feel and act kindly toward someone we don’t know, we are practicing hospitality in this strict sense. However, the Scripture also tells us repeatedly to be hospitable toward one another, even in cases where we already know whom we’re dealing with. We need to put this broader sort of hospitality into practice as well.
- B. A good example of hospitality appears in Acts 16:33-34. This, of course, is part of the story of the conversion of the Philippian jailer, and it comes after he has been persuaded by the earthquake that Paul and Silas are from God. He brings the two evangelists into his home, serves them food, and takes care of their needs. This, in a nutshell, is what our spiritual duty of hospitality requires of us. For many people today, home is a fortress with a barred gate, into which they allow none but their families. That’s not the way our homes should be. We recognize that our material possessions are gifts from God; as we have freely received, so we should freely give. Our homes aren’t for us only; they’re for others too, as sanctuaries and as places of joy and peace. For thousands of years, hospitality has meant sharing a meal with those who are invited in, and when we offer food to our guests, we are partakers of that tradition. Finally, hospitality means caring for the needs of those who have come. Often, those needs aren’t as obvious as when Paul and Silas staggered into the jailer’s house, their backs still bloody from the rods of the magistrates. Sometimes, they’re as subtle as a need for friendship or compassion. Whatever the case, those who leave us should leave not just full, but also fulfilled.

## II. How Should We Practice It?

- A. This tells us what we should do, but it doesn’t tell us what our attitude should be. Let’s look, then, at two Scriptural thoughts about how we should practice hospitality. First, we should do so **PERSEVERINGLY**. I know, I know, this idea keeps coming up in my sermons, but it keeps coming up because the Bible is filled with the idea. Look at Romans 12:13. The sense of the phrase “given to hospitality” here is that hospitality shouldn’t just be a one-time thing for us. Instead, it should be a constant, habitual, almost unconscious practice, something that we do simply because we relish the opportunity to interact with and serve others. As the days stretch into months and years, our practice of hospitality should be a hallmark of our lives.
- B. Likewise, our hospitality should be **WITHOUT GRUMBLING**. Peter really couldn’t say this any more plainly than in 1 Peter 4:9. For some of us, who are perhaps more naturally warm-hearted than others, this is not a problem. For others of us, this is a problem, and to be quite honest, brethren, as soon as I came across this verse when I was researching the sermon, I knew I was in trouble. I am blessed with a wife who is a marvelously hospitable woman, but sadly, my own hospitality is not always grumble-free. I want to know why in the world we’re having our childbirth instructor, her husband, and her three kids over for Sunday dinner—

today, actually. I want to know why we're feeding our guests all of this expensive, budget-busting food when there's a perfectly good 50-pound sack of rice over at Sam's Club. The answer, of course, is that it's because my wife is a better Christian than I am, and I need an attitude adjustment, and I am working on it. I suspect, though, that I'm not the only Christian in the congregation who has grumbled similar grumbles. Let's consider our own words and thoughts and offer hospitality that is not outward only but is genuine and from the heart.

### III. Why Should We Practice It?

- A. Obviously, this is going to be a lot of work. I'm here to tell you, folks: it's not easy to have a constant succession of guests. It's expensive and exhausting. However, there are some extremely important reasons why we should be hospitable anyway. The first is that we should do it **TO WELCOME OTHERS**. Consider the Hebrews writer's thoughts on this in Hebrews 13:2. Now, the Bible is silent on the subject of whether angelic visitations have ceased. I suspect that they belong to the past with other miraculous occurrences. However, I don't think the writer's main point is that we should be hospitable just in case the dude on the doorstep is an angel. I think his real point is that we should be hospitable because of how important it might be.
- B. The thing about hospitality is that there is real magic in sharing a meal with somebody else. It brings you closer in a way that a hundred quickie conversations after church services never will. Spiritually speaking, there are two main ways that this binding effect is important. First, when we are hospitable, it brings us together as Christians, and that's something that the Joliet church badly needs right now. Just to point to the most obvious example, there are two families here, 10 people all told, who belong to this congregation who didn't belong at the beginning of this year. There are plenty more on the way, too; three months from now, that number may be 20 instead of 10. Friends, if we want to do right by these unfamiliar brothers and sisters, we will be doing everything we can to have them in our homes and get to know them as quickly as possible.
- C. Second, hospitality is important to our interaction with those outside the church because it is an invaluable aid to evangelism. People in the Chicago area are not naturally open and trusting. If we try to get some stranger here to study the word with us, he's going to bounce us off without a second thought. However, the flip side of the coin is that friendships go deeper here, so somebody we've made friends with is going to be much more receptive to the gospel than the typical acquaintance in the South. If we want to save lost people, we have to make friends with them first, and there's no quicker way to do that than opening our homes and our lives. We need to be sharing meals with our neighbors, our co-workers, and our children's friends' parents. If we do that, at worst, we've forged a connection and pleased God. At best, we've opened a door for the gospel.
- D. Hospitality is also important because it's a way **TO SHARE IN OTHERS' WORKS**. John discusses this in 3 John 5-8. I never realized it before, but this is almost certainly where the tradition of housing visiting preachers or having them over for dinner comes from. The idea here is very similar to the idea that when we financially support a preacher, we share in the spiritual blessing that results from his work. Likewise, when we have a worker for the Lord over for just a meal, even that small connection with him connects us to his work as well. The Lord counts us as sharers in all the good he does, and we benefit spiritually by our hospitality.
- E. We should also be careful to engage in hospitality in order **TO EQUIP OURSELVES** for service. Much of the time, I think we don't realize the consequences of the spiritual decisions that we make. Whenever we sin, that sin corrupts us in a thousand tiny ways, and the result may well be that we become eternally lost. Similarly, whenever we do what is right, that sanctifies us in ways equally far-reaching and subtle. It moves us a small but significant distance toward Jesus. One of the good works that purifies and ennobles us in this way is hospitality. Notice how it appears in the qualifications of the elder in 1 Timothy 3:2. Remember, folks: this isn't a checklist; it's a set of benchmarks. The man who has the kind of character that fits him to be an elder will also inevitably be hospitable. In fact, it may well be that he is equipped to be an elder because his years of practicing hospitality have equipped him. This means that all men who desire leadership in the church have to learn to be hospitable first. The same thing is true for women. Consider the benchmarks for the widow who is to be put on the list in 1 Timothy 5:9-10. Now, this obviously doesn't mean that every Christian woman should aspire to widowhood, but it does mean that every Christian woman should aspire to the character of this godly woman. Once again, women can't be useful tools for God unless they learn hospitality first.
- F. Finally, though, we should pursue hospitality **TO PLEASE JESUS**. We can find this in one of the most meaningful passages in all of Scripture: Matthew 25:34-40. We often talk about the plan of salvation and the things that we must do to be saved, and all of those things are necessary and true. However, even if we have believed, repented, confessed, and been baptized, this is the kind of life that we must lead if we want to go to heaven. Remember how we described hospitality as inviting others into our homes, feeding them, and filling needs? Folks, that's four out of five things on the Lord's list! I think the message is clear. If we are not hospitable people here and now, we can't expect the Father to welcome us into His eternal home either. That's the long-term perspective, but when we get bogged down in the details of being constantly hospitable, we need to remember how great and noble a thing we're actually doing. When we see to the needs of a brother or sister, in the Lord's eyes, it's just like we did that good work personally for Him.

**Conclusion.** If you're worried about your destination on the day of judgment, repent and return to God.