

Nurturing a Habit of Hospitality

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The Bible says: “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ¹¹ not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; ¹³ distributing to the needs of the saints, GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY.” —Romans 12:9-13

It’s a common trait of humanity (even redeemed humanity), to sit in judgment of God’s word. It all started in the Garden of Eden where our first parents wanted to decide what was and was not good for them. God has some pretty good suggestions, some of which we’re willing to follow, but in other matters we’re going to need to think about it a bit more. We do need to be pragmatic. God’s word might work out for a lot of people but sometimes my extenuating circumstances lead me to conclude that it’s not going to work for me. There are exceptions to the rules which can exempt me.

Now hospitality isn’t the only area where we’re tempted to think like this but it is one of the common topics where excuses for not following the clear and simple command of Scripture are frequent. Like Adam and Eve, we think we know better than God what is good for us. Below are several commonplace excuses as to why we can’t be “GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY.” I hope to challenge them all. —

1. I’m Not Good at It

We’re seldom good at the things we never do. Practice makes perfect. One of the reasons God wants us to be given to hospitality is so that we will get good at it. Less-than-perfect hospitality is still hospitality, and it is still obedience to God. Read a book (e.g., *Face to Face*, Steve Wilkins). Get some advice. Watch others who are good at it. Ask some questions. You can learn to do this. You can get better at it. But you can’t get better at it if you don’t do it. You know what to do (i.e., be “GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY”), now set out to learn how to do it. If needed, get some help doing it. If you do these things the only reason left for not doing it is, “I don’t want to do it.” That would be a sin.

2. My House is Too Small

Your house can’t be that small. It might be crowded but I’m pretty sure that many saints from the past, who were GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY, had houses smaller than yours. If you’re an American, your house is probably bigger than the houses of most of the Christians in the world. Moreover, you don’t even have to have a house to be hospitable; have a picnic!

3. My House is Too Dirty

If your house is dirty then there are two options: 1) clean your house; 2) swallow your pride and have people over to your dirty house. The command to be GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY is not a conditional command. God doesn't say, "Be GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY if your house is clean." Cleaning your house is an option; showing hospitality is not an option.

4. My Stuff Will Be Messed With

It's not your stuff; it's God's stuff, and He's ok with His stuff getting messed with. Things are important but not as important as people. Some things will get broken. Spills will happen. You will recover. If there are things that are valuable, then put them away. You can get them back out later. Part of being GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY is that you think it through, plan for contingencies, and adjust your attitude toward things. This is one of the reasons God wants us to be GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY.

5. I Can't Cook

Yes you can. Perhaps you don't cook as well as others, but people are better at all kinds of things. Here's a tip for those who are intimidated about their cooking. Invite folks over for dinner at 6:00. Put out a bag of chips and some tea. About 7:30 boil a package of weenies. Set out some buns, mustard and mayo. Open another bag of chips and invite folks to grab a paper plate. Pray, giving thanks to God for simple meals. At this point everyone is enjoying the hospitality. They're also very hungry and these will be the best hotdogs they ever had. They might even ask, "What did you do to these weenies? They're soooo good!" Now if it's your culinary pride that's standing in the way, then repent. People don't really care whether you're a good cook or not. They do care whether you love them or not, and God cares whether you're GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY or not.

6. I Can't Afford It

Now if you can't afford a package of weenies, buns and chips, then here are some other options: 1) a private potluck dinner works; 2) beans and rice are cheap; 3) put more water in the soup; 4) have folks over for dessert; 5) have them over after dinner (that's free). These are some options but being GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY is not an option.

7. I'm Too Busy

You are right. If you're too busy to be GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY, then you're too busy. It's time to reprioritize your life. Quit something that's not necessary and put something that is necessary in its place, like hospitality. God doesn't exempt all the busy people from obeying His command. Lots of busy people are hospitable; that's one of the many things they're busy doing.

8. I Stress Out

I'm guessing that hospitality isn't the only thing you're stressed out about. Let me give you a couple of verses to memorize that (when obeyed), will provide some real stress management. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7). "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isa. 26:3). One of the reasons God requires you to be GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY is to teach you to trust Him.

9. I Get My Fellowship at Church

It's good to get fellowship at church. It's one of the many reasons you go to church every Lord's Day (and I'm presuming you do go EVERY Lord's Day). Fellowship is also one of the things you get when you show hospitality, but it's not the only thing you and others get. There are some things received from being GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY. Here are a few that come to mind: 1) self-sacrificing service to others; 2) the pleasure of showing love to God and neighbor; 3) humility; 4) instruction and experience; 5) encouragement; 6) friendship; 7) generosity; 8) more intimate knowledge of others; 9) positive impact on your children; 10) you might unwittingly entertain angels (Heb. 13:2).

10. I'm Special

You are and you're not special. You are special in that Jesus died for you, the Father adopted you into His family, and the Holy Spirit indwells you. All the benefits of the gospel are yours because you're special. You're NOT special when it comes to the command to be GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY. God is hospitable toward us and we, as His children are to reflect His work: "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. ² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:1-2). By showing hospitality we show the love of God to our friends, neighbors and strangers. This is a priority: "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.' ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

—1 Peter 4:8-10